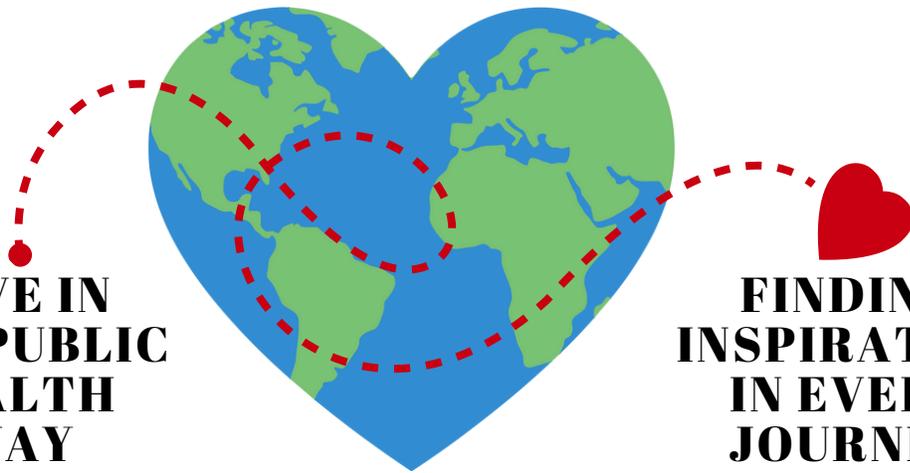




# PUBLIC HEALTH NEWSLETTER

BASTROP COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT



## LOVE IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH WAY

*By: Donna Nichols, Executive Director,  
BCPHD*

What sparks the fire within you? From whom do you draw the strength to keep moving forward?

We are often surrounded by teachers, though many never stand at the front of a classroom. They are the quiet mentors of our daily lives—people like my four-foot, ten-inch grandmother, the resilient Holocaust survivor I met in my veterinarian's waiting room, or my three-year-old nephew, whose innocent wisdom bridges worlds we often forget to see.

### **Pull Up a Chair: The Gift of Inclusion**

There is a common thread in these stories, even if the dots don't seem to connect at first. My grandmother always lived by a simple, profound rule: *"There is always room for one more at the table."* In my youth, I thought she just meant the dining table—the place where she served the best home-cooked meals I'll ever know.

## FINDING INSPIRATION IN EVERY JOURNEY

As I grew, I realized her table was infinite. It was an open door to anyone and everyone. To her, "pulling up a chair" was an act of radical belonging. Public health, at its heart, is that same open table—a commitment to ensuring no one is left behind and everyone has a place to thrive.

### **The Resilience of the Human Spirit**

I remember the Holocaust survivor who shared her story while we sat in a veterinarian's office. She showed me the number etched on the inside of her arm—a mark of unimaginable loss. Yet, in the same breath she used to mourn a family lost to war, she spoke of the deep love she had for her dog and the immense gratitude she felt just to be alive.

Her spirit reminds us that even in the face of the greatest challenges, hope is a powerful anchor. In public health, we honor that resilience by working to protect the lives of every individual, celebrating the vibrancy of the human spirit even in difficult times.

## LOVE IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH WAY (CONT.)

### A Legacy That Lives On

Then there is my three-year-old nephew. In the South, we tell stories of those who have passed as if they are still standing right next to us. My brother-in-law was a larger-than-life figure, a community leader everyone turned to in times of trouble. When my nephew said he saw his grandfather taking pictures of him so "everyone in heaven would know who he is," he reminded us that we are never truly alone.

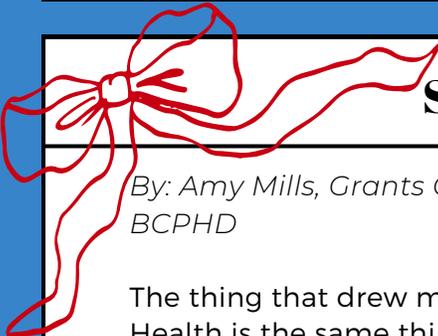
We are part of a long, beautiful lineage. This young boy, wise beyond his years, is a gift—a reminder of the love that connects generations.

### The Heart of Our Work

These stories share a single, enduring inspiration: **love for our neighbor, love for being alive, and love for being remembered.**

At the Bastrop County Public Health Department, we call this "Love in the Public Health Way." Our mission—to **Prevent, Promote, and Protect**—is fueled by the legacy of the servant leaders who blazed the trail before us.

We hope you find inspiration in the teachers who have joined your own journey. Happy Valentine's Day from our family to yours.



## SMALL TOWN, BIG HEART

*By: Amy Mills, Grants Coordinator,  
BCPHD*

The thing that drew me towards Public Health is the same thing that drew me to living in a smaller town: community. The bonds we share with our neighbors are a source of joy, strength, and even, yes, health. It's that love for community – and love for our neighbors – that is at the heart of two important grant projects we lead here at the Bastrop County Public Health Department: the Bastrop County Collaborative for Housing and Health, and the Healthcare Workforce Collaborative.

### Home Is Where the Heart Is

The Bastrop County Collaborative for Housing and Health is a multi-agency collaborative formed to address a national crisis that has come to Bastrop: the shortage of affordable and attainable housing. Already, too many of our neighbors don't have access to

safe and affordable homes, or fear losing their homes due to rising costs. This contributes to poor mental and physical health. BCCHH exists to engage Bastrop County residents in designing solutions and policies to encourage the development of more safe, affordable, and attainable housing as a pathway to a healthier county for all. BCCHH is taking action to design solutions and policies for the future to ensure our youth, seniors, veterans, working families, and essential workers have the housing they need to support their health and well-being.

### Crafting a Community of Care

The Bastrop County Healthcare Workforce Collaborative was formed to address a different challenge: the shortage of healthcare professionals we need to meet the healthcare needs of everyone in Bastrop County. The County is a "healthcare professional shortage area" which creates barriers to care for all of us. At the same time, Bastrop County is home to thousands of talented, compassionate,

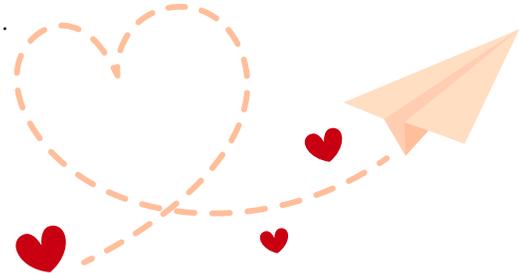
## SMALL TOWN, BIG HEART (CONT.)

and hard-working people who are eager to enter the healthcare field, but need some support to get there. That's where the Healthcare Workforce Collaborative comes in. Through our partners at Career Tracks and six other partner nonprofits, we provide scholarships to local students to enter the healthcare field, while working on longer term strategies to build our local pipeline of healthcare talent.

### All You Need Is Love

There is no better way to show love for our neighbors, and to welcome new ones, than to make sure all of us have a place to call home, have access to good jobs, and can get the care we need, when we need it.

We love our community, and it's such an honor to work on projects like this that make such a tangible impact on the lives of our neighbors here in the county we all love. We must also say how grateful we are that both of these projects were funded by the St. David's Foundation in Austin, a foundation that continues to show their love for the people of Bastrop through grant funding and other support in so many ways. We're honored to partner with them.



## HEART-Y AND HEALTHY EATING ON A BUDGET

*By: Debra Seamans, Clinical Services Administrator, BCPHD*

It's February and the focus all around us is on "LOVE." Greeting cards, flowers, fancy dinners, chocolate...all the ways we traditionally show love for family and friends.

### Lead With Your Heart

What if 2026 was the start of something different? What if we prepared and shared a delicious meal for our loved ones which was (shh!...secretly) heart-healthy and did this on a budget?

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) offer resources to create meals which are nutritious, heart-healthy and can be prepared without expensive or "fancy" ingredients. These recipes are part of the "Million Hearts®" program, a national project to prevent 1 million

heart attacks and strokes within 5 years.

Here is a **sample menu** for a great Valentine's Day (and any day) celebration which can be made from the recipe in the online websites:

- Rainbow Fruit Salad
- Honey Lemon Chicken
- Herbed Vegetables
- Brown Rice Pilaf
- Chocolate Chip Yogurt Cookies

These and many other lower-cost Heart-Healthy recipes may be found at <https://bit.ly/3ZrjOf7>. This includes "Healthy Eating Recipes" (NHLBI <https://bit.ly/4qrgOiB>) and the "Healthy Eating on a Budget Cookbook" (USDA <https://bit.ly/4rlhdhF>).

Happy Heart-Healthy Day!



# FEBRUARY: AMERICAN HEART MONTH



By: Aniyah Zaman, Epidemiology Intern, BCPHD

February is American Heart Month, a nationwide observance dedicated to raising awareness about cardiovascular disease and the importance of heart health. First proclaimed in 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, American Heart Month serves as a long-standing call to action for individuals and communities to take charge of their heart health—a mission that remains critically important today.

## Heart Disease in Bastrop County

In Bastrop County, heart disease continues to be a leading cause of

death. In 2023, there were 201 heart disease-related deaths among a population of 110,778 residents. The majority of these deaths occurred among adults aged 65 years and older, with the highest burden observed among non-Hispanic White residents.

## Get Your Heart Rate Up

For more ideas on how to stay active throughout the month, see the infographic below, and check out the American Heart Association’s heart-healthy activity calendar at <https://bit.ly/4qrYTIv>.



## MAKE MOVEMENT A HABIT.

Tips to get active – and stay active.

### Choose the right kind of movement.

Make it something you enjoy and can repeat easily. Lots of physical activities are good for you!



### Start small: Stepping stones, not boulders.

Don't set yourself up for failure. Instead of a two-hour hike, start with a 20-minute walk.



### Choose a cue. We all need a reminder.

A cue is anything that helps you remember your movement habit. Put your sneakers by the door or your hand weights near your computer – that's a cue.



### Reinforce the habit. Make it rewarding.

Have fun while you move. Invite a friend, listen to music or treat yourself to a healthy snack after!



### Get tips from your very own "Habit Coach."

Check out these six short "Habit Coach" videos. These science-based habit hacks will help you keep those healthy habits!

## LOVE YOUR HEART ❤️: WHY CONNECTION MATTERS FOR HEART HEALTH

*Submitted By: Bastrop County Human Resources Department*

**February is Heart Health Month**, a time when many of us focus on caring for our hearts through physical activity and nutrition. While those habits are very important, another key part of heart health that is often overlooked is emotional and social well-being.

### The Heart-Connection Link

Research shows that chronic stress and loneliness can increase inflammation in the body and raise blood pressure—both of which increase the risk of heart disease. Feeling disconnected over long periods of time can take a real toll on physical health.

On the other hand, meaningful social connections help lower stress levels, support healthier blood pressure, and protect the heart. *Strong social connections don't just feel good — they help protect heart health.*

### Why Social Wellness Matters

This is where social wellness comes in. Social wellness refers to how we relate to others and the quality of our relationships. Humans are wired for

connection, and healthy relationships can act as a buffer against stress. Whether it's with family members, friends, coworkers, or loved ones, being intentional about trust, empathy, and appreciation can make a meaningful difference.

### Small Actions, Stronger Hearts

Supporting heart health doesn't have to be complicated. Small, intentional actions can go a long way:

- Checking in on someone you care about
- Sending a message of appreciation
- Making time to connect or do something you both enjoy

These moments of connection benefit emotional well-being, and they support heart health for both you and the people around you.

This February, consider showing your heart some love by prioritizing connection.

Caring for emotional well-being isn't just good for the mind — it's good public health and good for the heart.



## WHAT IS A LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE (LEPC)

*Submitted by: Bastrop County Office of Emergency Management*

Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) are community-based organizations that come together to prevent, prepare for, and respond to hazardous material (HAZMAT) incidents like leaks and spills.

Community partners who serve on LEPCs include local government, first responders, citizen / community group representatives, commercial businesses, and industry partners such as transportation carriers.



## WHAT IS A LEPC (CONT.)

Join the Bastrop County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) to help our community and first responders prevent, prepare for, and respond to hazardous material (HAZMAT) incidents like leaks and spills.

Our local LEPC keeps our community safe and informed by:

- **Identifying and evaluating** potential chemical hazards stored or transported through Bastrop County
- **Coordinating** training for first responders
- **Applying** for grants to purchase safety equipment and training for first responders
- **Updating and maintaining** comprehensive emergency response plans
- **Informing** citizens about potential chemical hazards, emergency procedures, and how to prepare their families for emergencies

We invite you to attend a meeting to learn more about the Bastrop County LEPC. **The 2026 Quarterly Meeting Schedule is as follows:**

- Thursday, February 12
- Thursday, May 14
- Thursday, August 13
- Thursday, November 12

Meetings are scheduled for **9:00 AM to 10:00 AM** at the **Mike Fisher Building**, 1501 Business Park Drive, Bastrop.

For more information you can also visit our website:

<https://www.co.bastrop.tx.us/page/em.lepc>

**LEPC – KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY SAFE AND INFORMED.**



**WHAT is a**

**L**ocal  
**E**mergency  
**P**lanning  
**C**ommittee

*Keeping Our Community Safe and Informed*

[www.co.bastrop.tx.us/page/em.home](http://www.co.bastrop.tx.us/page/em.home)



## CONTACT US

The Bastrop County Public Health Department is here to provide support in all aspects of Public Health. As a newly established health department, we are not yet functioning at full capacity. Please allow us some time to respond to any comments, questions, or feedback. While you are welcomed and encouraged to share this newsletter with your networks (with credit to the BCPHD), we ask that you seek permission to distribute or reproduce this work in other formats. Thank you!

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