

How voting can be beneficial for your health

By Teddi Nicolaus

When you think of actions that influence your health, voting may not come to mind.

You probably know that eating well, exercising regularly and getting routine checkups can help keep you healthy. But the choices you make at the ballot box can also affect your health — and the health of your family and community.

The people you elect make decisions about the things that shape your life, from the safety of the air you breathe and water you drink to the quality of schools and neighborhoods. They also help decide how money is spent on healthcare, parks and emergency services.

That means voting is more than choosing who holds office. It gives you a voice in improving your community. It helps build a better quality of life for yourself and your family.



At first glance, some of the biggest things that affect your health may not sound like health issues at all. Employment, housing, education and the environment all influence the health of people and communities. Elected officials help shape those issues at every level of government, making choices that affect where you live, work and raise a family.

So even when the word “health” is not on the ballot, yours may still be affected.

It can be easy to think: What difference can my one vote make? But close elections show that single votes do matter, and your influence may not end with your ballot.

“Talk with your family and friends about why



>> For more information on voting, visit [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) and [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org)

voting matters,” says Boris Lushniak, MD, MPH, dean of the University of Maryland School of Public Health. “Encourage others to participate. Your one vote then becomes multiplied. That one vote in the hands of people who are really active in their communities becomes ultimately multiple votes, and those are game changers.”



That does not mean telling other people how to vote. It’s about getting them to use their voice, too.

Get in the game

When it comes to voting, you’re not standing on the sidelines at a soccer game. You have a role to play. Not participating means the important decisions that shape your health and the health of your community will be in the hands of others who may not represent your interests. Don’t drop the ball.

Think about what is important in your life. Maybe you worry about healthcare costs, dangerous traffic, pollution, housing costs or school funding. Find out what the candidates say about those issues and make decisions based on which of the candidates best match what matters to you, your family and your community.

Do your homework

Don’t wait until you’re standing in the voting booth to begin thinking about your choices. Before Election Day, get ready.

Familiarize yourself with the candidates and the issues that will be on the ballot. Find out where they stand on issues you care about. The people elected will make decisions that affect you, your family and your community.

Try not to choose a candidate based on their personality. Instead of casting your vote on the way they talk or dress, for example, find out what they really believe and stand for. You can look up decisions they have made

in the past and whether they have experience on an issue. You don’t want to vote for someone based on their smile just to find out their stances on health are opposite to yours.

“Read about the candidates, read about their issues,” Lushniak says. “Becoming an informed voter takes a little bit of work but it is worth the effort. Preparing to vote is an important part of the voting process, so let’s go in and let’s be smart.”

It’s also important to be careful where you get your information. Social media can be useful, but don’t assume every post, video or meme you see is true. False or misleading information can spread quickly, so put on your detective hat. Look at where the information came from. Ask who is making the claim and whether the source is one you trust.

“Nobody likes to be fooled,” Lushniak says. “Figuring out whether information is trustworthy may take a little extra work. Don’t just read the information.

Go one step further and try to figure out where that information is coming from.”



Ready, set, vote

If you need help registering to vote or want to verify your registration, visit the U.S. government’s [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) website.

Then make a plan. Decide when you will vote and how you will get there. Check with your state or local election office for voting locations and keep in mind that most states offer options like mail-in and early voting.

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