

## Stepping Up in the Crater Health District to Help Lower Hypertension Rates

The [Robert Wood Johnson \(RWJ\) Foundation](#) recently released its national [county health rankings](#) report. While some improvements have been made, cities like Petersburg—where low income and poor education plague the city—continue to fall behind national averages. In fact, Petersburg has once again been listed at the worst area in Virginia for health outcomes. And this makes the work VHQC is doing through its Step Up initiative that much more important.

Started in late summer of 2013, [Step Up](#) is a special innovation project funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. This project focuses on reducing the rate of high blood pressure in the Crater Health District (CHD), which includes Petersburg. Identified as a medically underserved area, CHD includes other areas that also rank very low in the RWJ report.



Through Step Up, Medicare beneficiaries and their families have access to a plethora of free resources that help reduce high blood pressure through activity, better food choices, and smoking cessation. These resources can be found on the Step Up microsite and at local libraries, free clinics, physicians' offices, pharmacies, churches, and community events such as health fairs. Wide dissemination makes it easier for beneficiaries to have easy access to what they need.

VHQC has partnered with several national and local organizations to ensure the needs of the community are being met with regard to hypertension. For example, Step Up cosponsors a 16-week Zumba class with the [American Heart Association](#) for beneficiaries and other community members who commit to getting active and having their blood pressure checked regularly.

"Gym memberships can be expensive. Therefore, our work with Step Up has been instrumental in providing affordable access to fitness classes," said Dionne Henderson, community and multicultural health director for the [American Heart Association](#) in Central Virginia. "Exercise and diet are paramount for individuals to lower their blood pressure. Through this class, we are helping to eliminate barriers and provide education to help them reach their goals."

Individuals have the opportunity to get their blood pressure checked at each class and are encouraged to enter their numbers into [Heart360®](#), an online health vault. This



information can be linked to their medical home resulting in better access to care, an often missing link in this underserved community. In addition, licensed nurses are available at each class to talk to participants about their numbers, provide assistance, and answer questions as needed. And to help participants stay focused on improving their health outside of class, VHQC also provides printed materials on lowering sodium intake, reading nutrition labels correctly, understanding blood pressure numbers, and more based on participant feedback.

VHQC knows that making a change—even a small one— isn't always easy. Therefore, we are committed to helping beneficiaries find the support and resources they need to make a change for the better through the [Step Up](#) project.

**Do you know how your area ranks in RWJ's report? Find out [here](#) and let VHQC help you improve health outcomes in your community.**