

# Alexander County Public Health

WWW.ALEXANDERHEALTH.ORG



## 2012 State of the County Health Report

The Alexander County Health Department is pleased to present the 2012 State of the County Health Report. This document provides updated information on key indicators for Alexander County for the purpose of comparing local and state health data about our community's health and well-being.

This report includes information on the identified priority areas: Substance Abuse/Mental Health, Access to Health Care and Healthy Families.

This information is designed to educate and update community members, community leaders, agencies, organizations and others on progress in addressing certain health issues. This update is also intended to influence the development of new policies that affect the health of the community, guide the planning of health programs and recruit interested community members to participate in future activities.

The Alexander County Health Department seeks to “promote, protect and improve the health of our community” by focusing on long-term health priorities identified in the 2010 Community Health Assessment. Our mission is to improve the health of all residents of Alexander County.

If you would like more information on the services and programs offered by the Alexander County Health Department, or if you would like to be involved in community health programming, please visit our website at [www.AlexanderHealth.org](http://www.AlexanderHealth.org) or call us at 828-632-9704. For additional information about Alexander County please visit the county's website at [www.alexandercountync.gov](http://www.alexandercountync.gov).

Sincerely,

*Leeanne Whisnant*

Leeanne Whisnant, MS, BSN, RN  
Health Director  
Alexander County Health Department



# Alexander County, North Carolina

Alexander County is located in the foothills of North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains. The County covers 263 square miles, and Taylorsville is the county seat and the largest city. Other townships include Bethlehem, Ellendale, Wittenburg, Stony Point, Hiddenite, Sugar Loaf, and Vashti. Two-thirds of Alexander County's 263 square miles are devoted to Agribusiness, producing commodities such as poultry, dairy, tobacco, apples, forestry products, grain crops, and beef cattle. Alexander County also has a long tradition of manufacturing. In fact, with some 30 percent of the workforce holding manufacturing jobs, the county has one of the highest manufacturing workforce percentages in the state. With such a high percentage of the county's employment based in the manufacturing field, the area has experienced significant job losses in the recent economic downturn. In fact, nonfarm private employment in the County decreased nearly 24 percent in the ten year period between 2000 and 2010 compared to a statewide average decrease of only 4.5 percent.



Overlooking Taylorsville, NC

Economic recovery in Alexander County continues to be slow with the unemployment rate at the end of 2012 at 10.1%. This represents only a one percent decrease from the end of 2011. Our manufacturing focused community continues to struggle economically which in turn can affect the health of our residents. Local leaders continue to work diligently to bring more jobs to our community to address this concern.

Alexander County's 37,087 residents represent a diverse economic structure. While the County's median household income is only slightly below the State average, fifteen percent of persons residing in the county live below the poverty level. This, along with a lack of local medical resources, make ensuring the health of our county's population a challenge.

The only hospital in the county closed in 2007 leaving our community without a local facility to serve their emergency medical needs. While there are seven medical centers in the directly surrounding counties, providing non-emergency transportation to these facilities can be challenging. The County also houses no urgent care center or after hours medical care facility. After approximately 6:00pm and on weekends and holidays generally there is no medical facility open to serve the medical needs of our residents.

The Alexander County Health Department offers our residents a variety of services to help address the health needs of our community. Along with the required elements, we also offer an adolescent Dental Clinic which served 1,672 children last year alone. This service was started in 2005 to address an identified need in the community and has been very successful. We also house an internal Home Health agency. The agency currently offers care to approximately 325 residents yearly. Our Home Health agency provides skilled nursing services, infusing nursing, pediatric nursing, medical social work services, and physical, occupational, and speech therapy. The 2010 Community Health Assessment identified the following three health priorities in the community: Healthy Families, Mental Health/Substance Abuse, and Health Care Access.

Our agency has, and will continue, to work diligently to meet our mission of achieving a healthy community by protecting and promoting public health through education, training, and provision of health services and advocacy.

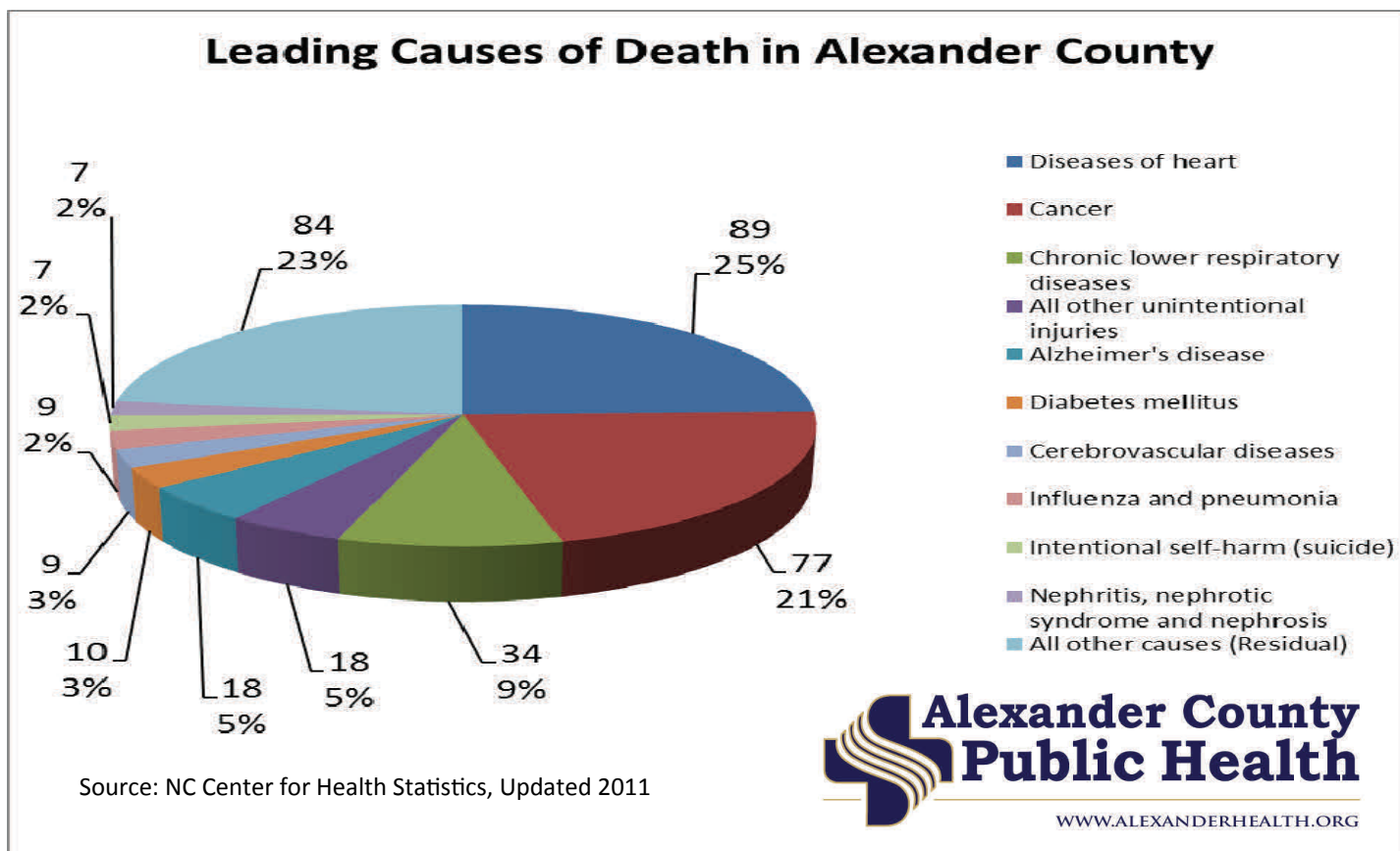
# Alexander County CHA and SOTCH Process

The State of the County Health Report (SOTCH) is a yearly snapshot of the health status of our county. The report provides an overview of the progress toward improving the priority areas identified in our Community Health Assessment (CHA). The CHA contains both quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (survey and focus group) data in order to provide a multidimensional picture of the health of Alexander County. Quantitative data is supplied by the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, and provides Alexander County's ranking across a wide range of health issues across the state. Qualitative data offers citizens of Alexander County an opportunity to give their input about what is important to them, and what should be included in their health report. In order to maintain accuracy, the surveyors and focus groups used in this assessment included individuals who matched our county's demographics.

The countywide needs assessment contained within the CHA was conducted in Alexander County from March 2009 through September 2010. The public was notified about the CHA survey and how to access it from Healthy Alexandrians Coalition members along with Alexander County Health Department staff. Announcements were made at various community meetings and at display booths during health fairs throughout Alexander County. The community health surveys were available in paper form or online through the Alexander County Health Department webpage and Facebook page.

The three health priorities identified in our Community Health Assessment are:

1. Healthy Families
2. Mental Health/Substance Abuse
3. Health Care Access



# Emerging Local Issues—Changes Guiding Priority Selection

The Alexander County Health Department tracks changes in the local health status to guide us in the selection of issues to focus our attention each year. This data is analyzed to determine which issues receive priority status locally. A continuing emerging issue is the health status of our community. Obesity in adults and children continues to be an issue in our community. The overexposure of unhealthy foods, combined with the relative expense and lack of availability of health alternatives, leads children and adults to make unhealthy meal and snack choices. To address this emerging issue, the Health Department has partnered with several local agencies including the Alexander County Partnership for Children and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension to educate local residents about the local Farmer's Market and local recreational opportunities.



Another emerging issue locally continues to be substance abuse. While substance abuse has been identified as a priority of several years, our focus has shifted from alcohol abuse to prescription drug abuse. Alexander County has seen a dramatic increase in prescription drug abuse in children and adult populations. Fatal drug overdoses are now the primary cause of death due to



unintentional injury in the United States. Prescription drugs are the second most abused drug among young people ages 12-17. According to the National Center on Addiction and Drug Use at Columbia University, nearly nine million U.S. teens report that they can get prescription drugs illicitly within one day and 5 million

say that they can get them within one hour. The Health Department has identified this as a priority issue locally and has begun work with local physicians, pharmacists, and local law enforcement to address the concern. This coalition has provided Prescription Drug Drop Off events to allow residents an avenue to safely dispose of their unwanted or expired medications to keep them out of the hands of children or others who may abuse the medication. Work will continue to address this quickly expanding issue.

Access to health care is an ongoing and emerging priority issue affecting our community. With no local hospital or urgent care facility the Health Department continues to work with local partners to address this concern. Our agency has applied for several grants to locate an urgent care type facility in our community that would be available to address citizens needs after hours and on weekends or holidays. We have not yet been successful in these grant opportunities, however we are constantly exploring opportunities that would allow the Health Department to provide more services to our residents. Currently many of our residents must go outside of the County to receive the medical services that they need. In many cases this burden is compounded by the fact that these residents many not have access to transportation resources to make to trip. The Health Department and other community agencies will continue to address this emerging issue.

# Healthy Families

This year the Alexander County Health Department continued work on improving the level of health in our community. Efforts were focused on increasing the physical activity level of our citizens and improving nutritional habits. Obesity, both childhood and adult, continues to affect our community. With our partner organizations we are utilizing the following programs to address the needs of our citizens:

**“123 Go Play AC”:** As a member of the Alexander County Physical Activity Nutrition Coalition, the Health Department worked with the Alexander County Partnership for Children to launch the 123 Go Play AC campaign using a grant received from Shape NC. According to the North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System, currently 17.5% of Alexander County children ages 2 to 4 are overweight and 16.2% are obese. The 123 Go Play AC campaign works to combat this. The campaign will help educate Alexander County children and families about the importance of physical activity and healthy eating from an early age and will also help promote a lifetime of healthy behaviors for our children. The slogan and logo for the 123 Go Play AC campaign were chosen to encourage parents to follow the suggested nutrition and physical activity guidelines for their children: 1 hour of screen time a day, 2 hours of play, and 3 fruits and vegetables a day. For more information visit [123goplayac.org](http://123goplayac.org).



**“Community Gardens”:** The Health Department also worked with the Alexander County Partnership for Children to assist the community in developing several community gardens throughout the County using Shape NC grant funds. Lulu’s Child Enrichment Center at Mitchell Gold+Bob Williams used the gardens to educate their children on developing healthy nutritional habits. The fruits and herbs they grew were used in the cafe at the facility for meals served facility-wide. Bethlehem Baptist Church developed a community garden using it as an educational opportunity for members and donated the fruits grown to underprivileged community members.

**“Community Transformation”:** Alexander County, in partnership with Cabarrus Health Alliance, received a regional Community Transformation Grant from the NC Division of Public Health in 2012. These funds were utilized locally to help expand our Farmer’s Market, enhance nutritional cooking education classes offered by our local Cooperative Extension office, and increase physical activity offerings locally. The Farmer’s Market, now in its 16th year of operation, provides residents with easy access to locally grown nutritional choices all season long. The Agency also used these grant funds to assist Third Creek Baptist Church in the development of a walking trail for the Stony Point community.



**“Rocky Face Mountain”:** Alexander County’s Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area opened to the public this year providing yet another recreational choice for local residents. The park covers 318 acres and is the County’s first passive recreation park. Visitors are offered access to walking trails, rock climbing, and geocaching. Trails have markers depicting some of the rare plants and animals which are located in the park. Local schools and community groups have utilized the area for physical activity and educational purposes. Plans are currently under way to expand the existing trail system which currently totals approximately five miles in length.



# Mental Health/Substance Abuse

In 2012 the Alexander County Health Department expanded our substance abuse prevention program to include prevention work on prescription drug abuse. Our first drug take back event was held in March of 2012. Over fifty pounds of medications were received in this initial event. The event included drop off venues at two locations in the county; the Alexander County Health Department in Taylorsville and the Lowe's Food shopping center in the Bethlehem Community. Prescription drug take back opportunities were also offered at the Alexander County Agriculture Fair, the Hiddenite Celebration of the Arts, the Bethlehem Community Day, and during the Taylorsville Apple Festival. In early 2013, a new permanent drop box will be installed at the new Alexander County Sheriff's Office facility giving citizens a continuous opportunity to safely dispose of unused, unwanted, or expired prescription medications.



March 2012 Take Back event

Our campaign includes educating our citizens and medical providers in the proper use, storage, and disposal of prescription medications. The local Substance Abuse Task Force, consisting of medical providers, pharmacists, veterinarians, public health, law enforcement, and other community officials, continued its partnership with the nonprofit organization Project Lazarus. Project Lazarus enables overdose prevention by providing technical assistance to create and maintain community coalitions, and help them create locally tailored drug overdose prevention programs, and connect them to state and national resources.

## Access to Health Care



ACHD's new ultrasound machine

Alexander County continues to struggle with this area of need. We continuously explore grant opportunities to improve access to health care locally. Several grants we have applied for in the past years to help in this area have gone unfunded, including an application to house a Federally Qualified Rural Health Care (FQHC) facility.

However in 2012 we were fortunate to receive grant funds from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation to assist in the purchase of a new ultrasound machine that will serve the clients of the Maternal Health Clinic at the Health Department.

This new ultrasound machine will allow the Health Department, the only prenatal clinic in the County, to continue to offer quality prenatal care to our clients and reduce the need for travel out-of-county to receive prenatal care. With the county's lack of transportation resources this equipment will be a great resource to our most vulnerable populations.