

2013 State of the County Health Report



 **Alexander County
Public Health**



About this report

The Alexander County Health Department is pleased to present the 2013 State of the County Health (SOTCH) Report. As part of the North Carolina’s local health department accreditation process and consolidated contract, the Alexander County Health Department is required to submit a Community Health Assessment (CHA) every four years. During the years between health assessments, a State of the County Health Report is issued. The SOTCH Report is an abbreviated version of the larger health assessment and is intended to provide a quick overview of the health of Alexander County. Demographic information precedes the health data and information in the report is used to provide background information on the Alexander County region.

This report includes updated information on health priorities that were identified in 2012. These areas include healthy families, prescription drug abuse, mental health, and access to health care. In addition, emerging issues and new initiatives are discussed.

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 reports are made available to the public on our website: www.alexanderhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Leeanne Whisnant

Leeanne Whisnant, MS, BSN, RN

Health Director

Alexander County Health Department

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The Alexander County Health Department offers 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 1,517 children last year alone. We also house an internal Home Health agency providing skilled nursing services, infusing nursing, pediatric nursing, medical social work services, and physical, occupational, and speech therapy.

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.

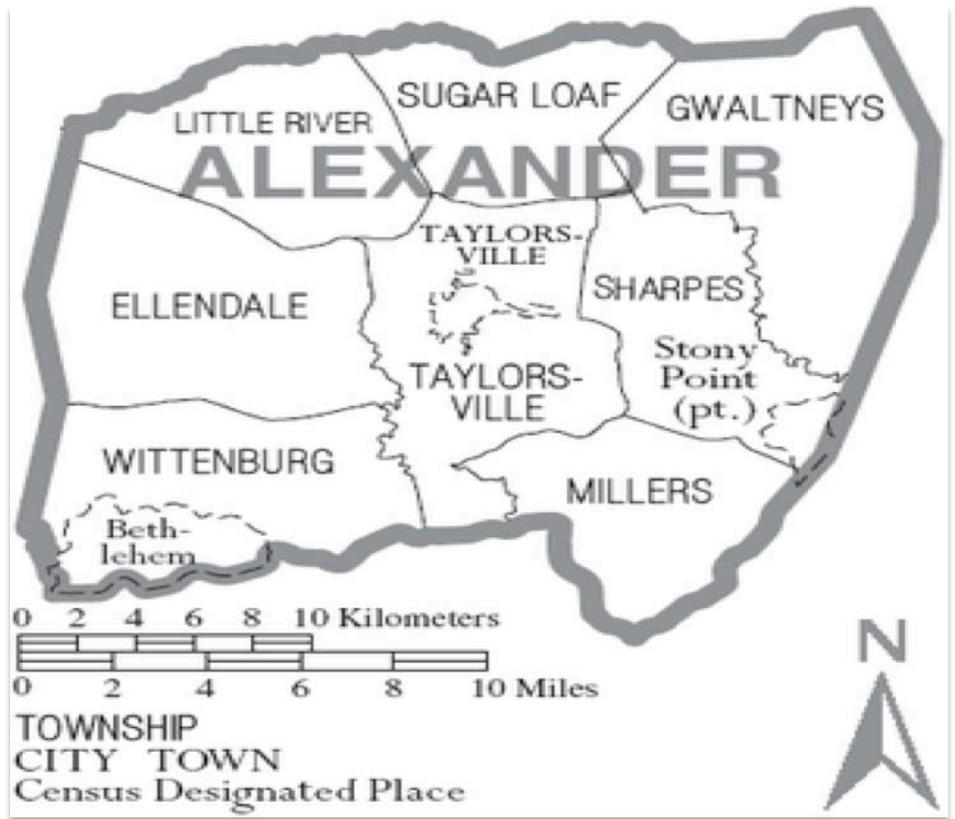


Overview of Alexander County

Population

The total estimated population for Alexander County for 2012 is 36,853, which is a slight decrease from the recorded 37,198 in 2010 Census data.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Education Obtainment

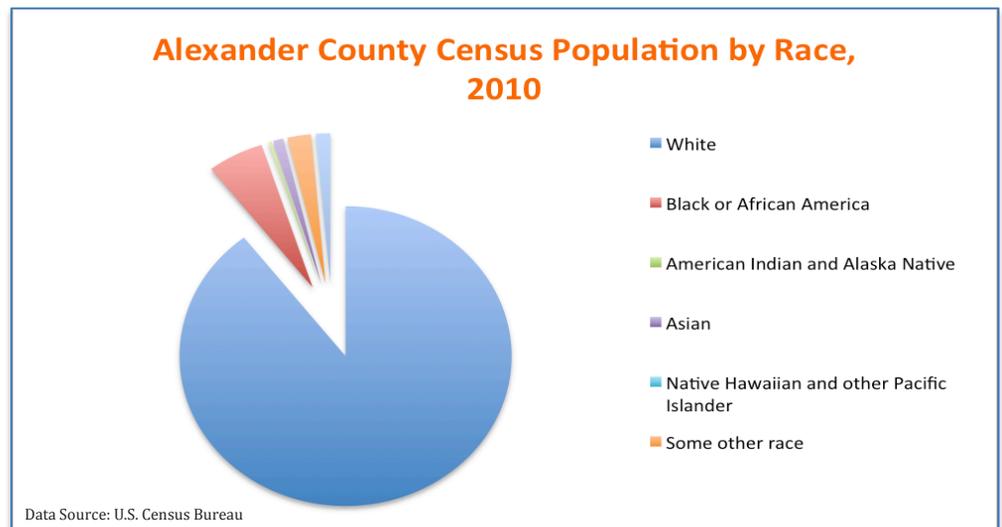
In Alexander County, 78% of the population has obtained a high school diploma or equivalent. This is significantly lower than the state average, 84.5%, and the national average, 85.7%.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Demographics

Race	Percentage
White	89.60%
Black or African America	5.50%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.30%
Asian	1.00%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0%
Some other race	2.30%
Two or more races	1.40%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Access to Health Care

Alexander County suffers from a severe shortage of medical care providers. The ratio of health care providers to people is much smaller compared to the state average.

2011 Health Professionals per 10,000 Populations		
	Alexander County	State Average
Primary Care Physicians	3.2	7.8
Dentists	1.9	4.3
Pharmacists	5.3	9.5
Registered Nurses	30.6	98.6
Physicians Assistants	2.4	4.0
Occupational Therapists	0.5	2.8
Optometrists	0.3	1.1
Podiatrists	0.0	0.3
Psychologists	0.5	2.1
Physical Therapists	0.8	5.4



Maternal Health Highlights

Snapshot of Live Births in Alexander County, 2012		
	Number	Percent
Total Live births	386	100%
By Race		
White Non-Hispanic	333	86%
Af. Am. Non-Hispanic	17	4%
White Non-Hispanic	7	2%
Hispanic/Latino	29	8%
Age of Mother		
35+	40	10.4%
18-34	336	87.0%
Teens under 18	10	2.6%
Prenatal Care and Outcomes		
Prenatal Care in First Trimester	296	76.7%
Mother Smoked During Pregnancy	76	19.7%
C-Section Delivery	140	36.3%
Low Birth Wight (1,501-2500g)	34	6.2%
Very Low Birth Weight (less than 1500g)	10	2.6%

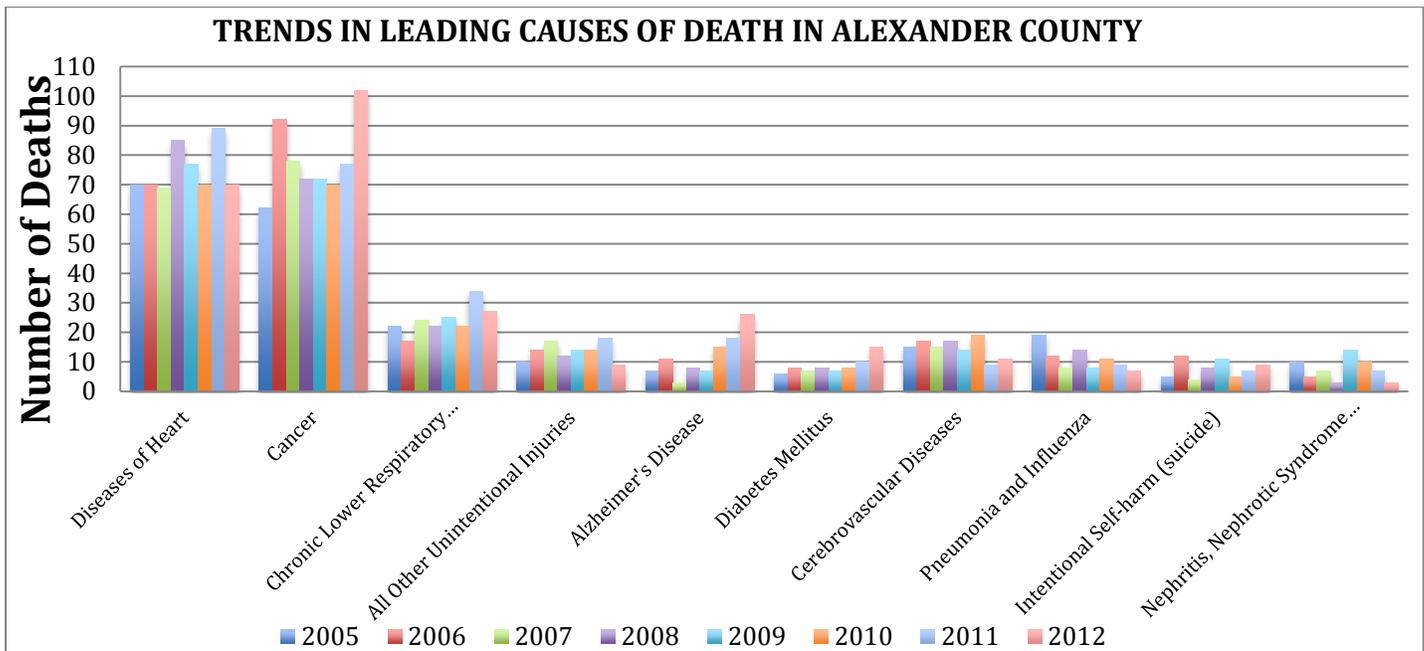
Data Source: Source: NC Center for Health Statistics

Locally our births to teen mothers under 18 accounts for 2.6% of all pregnancy compared to a 2.5% average statewide. The 19.7% of mothers who reported that they smoked during pregnancy is significantly higher than the state average of 10.6%. Finally, the local C-section delivery rate of 36.3% is slightly higher than the state average of 30.6%. The Alexander County Health Department continually works to address these issues to help provide healthy outcomes for our maternal health patients.



Leading Causes of Death

Number of Deaths by Type in Alexander County, 2008-2012								
Type	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Diseases of heart	70	70	69	85	77	70	89	70
Cancer	62	92	78	72	72	70	77	102
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	22	17	24	22	25	22	34	27
All Other Unintentional Injuries	10	14	17	12	14	14	18	9
Alzheimer's Disease	7	11	2	8	7	15	18	26
Diabetes Mellitus	6	8	7	8	7	8	10	15
Cerebrovascular Diseases	15	17	15	17	14	19	9	11
Influenza and Pneumonia	19	12	8	14	8	11	9	7
Intentional Self-Harm (Suicide)	5	12	4	8	11	5	7	9
Nephritis, Nephrosis	10	5	7	3	14	10	7	3
All other causes (Residual)	89	77	88	84	84	93	84	72
Total number of deaths	305	335	320	333	333	337	362	351



The above graph was used to identify trends in leading causes of death locally. Currently, cancer is the leading cause of death in Alexander County, followed by diseases of the heart. For the first time, the number of deaths caused by cancer, which has consistently ranked as one of the leading causes, reached over 100 people.

Data Source: Source: NC Center for Health Statistics



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 three health priorities identified in our Community Health Assessment are:

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





2012 Health Priorities Ongoing Issues



Healthy Families

Healthy Families is an ongoing objective for the Alexander County Health Department. In Alexander County, 17.5% of children ages 2-4 were classified as overweight and 16.25% were classified as obese in the NC NPASS System. Obesity is not limited to young children. According to County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 28% of adults in Alexander County are obese. As a result, the main focus for improving the health of families is increasing the physical activity level and improving the nutritional habits of citizens in the community. As a member of the Alexander County Physical Activity Nutrition Coalition, the Health Department partnered with the Alexander County Partnership for Children to launch "123 Go Play AC" using a grant received from SHAPE NC: Healthy Starts for Young Children grant from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of NC. Several strategies were implemented this past year.

Date	Strategy	Target Population	Intended Outcome	Resources	Results
Ongoing	Explore available community resources for children's fitness and develop community awareness campaign	Children and adults in Alexander County	Increased awareness of the importance of physical activity and nutrition in young children and their families. Community is engaged in nutrition and fitness, awareness	Web developer, communication experts, funding for website and brochures	Website and Facebook sites developed 123 Go Play AC promotional video created 123 Go Play AC float in 2013 local Christmas Parade and 2013 County Fair exhibit
April 2013	Coordinate Healthy Living for a Lifetime event to assist in identifying risk factors for obesity and other health concerns	Adults in Alexander County	Identify health issues and provide increased awareness of the importance of healthy living to community members and their families. Provided referrals for health issues identified in the screening process.	Farm Bureau Health Living for a Lifetime Mobile Unit, community partners, local volunteers	April 23, 2013 Provided health screenings for 145 Alexander County residents. \$5,000 grant received for additional health education initiatives
April 2013	Coordinate a physical activity program with child care providers	Children and adults in Alexander County	Childcare providers will increase physical activity and serve as active role models for children they care for.	Pedometers and program educational material	73 child care providers participated and walked over 35 million steps within a period of 6 months. \$5,000 Get Up and Get Moving campaign, which was funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation
October 2013	Work with Childcare centers to incorporate Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) into Childcare centers	Children, childcare staff	Incorporate more nutritious meals prepared and served in child care centers. Children are educated to make nutritious choices in eating.	Alexander County Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)-Farmer's Daughter Program	Three childcare centers participating in the CSA program from May until October 2013 reaching over 150 children with fresh fruits and vegetables during mealtime and snacks.

Prescription Drug Abuse



In the Community

While substance abuse has been identified as a priority for 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. Throughout 2012 and 2013, the Health Department has collaborated with local physicians, pharmacists, veterinarians, and the law enforcement community to address the growing concern. To build community awareness, the first

countywide take-back event was held in 2012, as well as education material on the dangers of prescription drug abuse were published in the local newspaper. This year the Health Department partnered with the local Sheriff's Office to install a permanent prescription drug drop-off box for expired, unwanted, or unused prescriptions drugs. Physicians in the community were trained on the use of the North Carolina Controlled Substances Reporting System, a portal allowing providers to see the prescription history of patients across the entire state. Approximately 70% of our local medical providers have signed up to use the portal.

Youth Prevention

A goal during 2013 was to build additional awareness throughout the teenage population of the community by bringing the prescription drug awareness campaign to schools. In October 2013, the Alexander County Health Department sponsored the Prescription Drug Abuse Awareness Campaign at Alexander Central High School. Although schools throughout the county hold Red Ribbon Week activities annually to raise awareness, not all aspects of drug and alcohol abuse are specifically

covered during these events. Posters were placed around the school prior to the start of the campaign to build awareness among students. During the week of October 21, 2013, the Health Department sponsored a weeklong Red Ribbon week event, in addition to a prescription drug abuse awareness campaign. During each day, students were given the opportunity to sign a pledge to be "Drug and Alcohol Free" after reading an educational postcard on the dangers of prescription drug abuse. After

signing the pledge, students were given a variety of free giveaways, each with a different message about remaining "Drug and Alcohol Free." As a result of the success of the awareness campaign at Alexander Central High School, the Health Department is planning to continue the operation next year at the High School, as well as expanding it to the middle schools in the county. Funding for educational material was provided through a recent grant from Project Lazarus.

Youth Advocacy and Peer Education



Students taking the Pledge



The Student Council at Alexander Central High School was encouraged to reach out to all classmates and share information about prescription drug abuse prevention. Student Council members were each to share their message with other students and teachers.



Ongoing Issues



Access to Health Care

Alexander County continues to struggle with improving access to quality health care for our citizens. We continuously explore grant opportunities to improve access to health care locally. However our grant applications in this area have not been met with success.

In October 2013, Urgent Care of Mountain View announced plans to open an urgent care facility in Taylorsville in 2014. This marks the first after hours care facility to operate in Alexander County since the Frye Regional Medical Center – Alexander Campus closed in 2007. While there have been

limited after hours care options available, currently there are no facilities open on Sundays or on holidays. Additionally all emergency medical patients must currently be transported to hospitals in neighboring counties, which is very time consuming for our emergency medical service resources.

Mental Health

Mental health services are a major issue in Alexander County. Due to the limited number of licensed mental health care professionals in the community, the Department of Social Services, as well as Alexander County Public Schools' social workers and counselors deal with many cases.

Mental well-being has been linked to lifestyle choices, including physical activity, nutrition, and use of tobacco, alcohol, or other controlled substances. According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, over one-third of alcohol abusers and over one-half of people who abuse drugs also suffer from mental illness. Much work remains to be done to meet the needs of our citizens in the arena of mental health.



Emerging Issues of 2014

Significant Health Issue - Cancer

Cancer continues to rank as a leading cause of death in the county. Although the NC State Center for Health Statistics projects in 2013 the number of deaths due to cancer will be 89, projections will likely fall short of the actual number. In 2012 the Center projected 87 deaths, which was significantly lower than the actual number of deaths, 102.

2013 Projected Cancer Cases for Alexander County and North Carolina		
	Alexander County	North Carolina
Lung/Bronchus	39	8,559
Colon/Rectum	21	4,852
Female Breast	29	9,339
Prostrate	29	8,316
Pancreas	6	1,312
All Cancers	248	56,164

Generally, the majority of cancers are related to lifestyle choices and environmental factors. These factors, including smoking and diet, can be adjusted to prevent development of cancer. Early detection can save lives, as well as prevention. As a result of the limited access to health care in the county, the Alexander County Health Department is focused on preventative measures.

Tobacco Use

Smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco are responsible for a large number of cases in cancers of the lung, trachea, bronchus, pharynx, oral cavity, and esophagus. Alexander County was the first county in the Community Transformation Region Four to implement a countywide tobacco free policy on County owned or operated property. The health department has recently partnered with two community rental housing facilities to expand smoke-free environments in the county, by January 2014.

Nutrition and Physical Activity

Maintaining a healthy and balanced diet and staying active can lower the risk of developing some cancers. The healthy family initiative promotes eating a variety of healthy foods and physical activity in the community. The Health Department continues to work to promote our local farmer's market and increase access to locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.



Economics

Economic Tier Designations

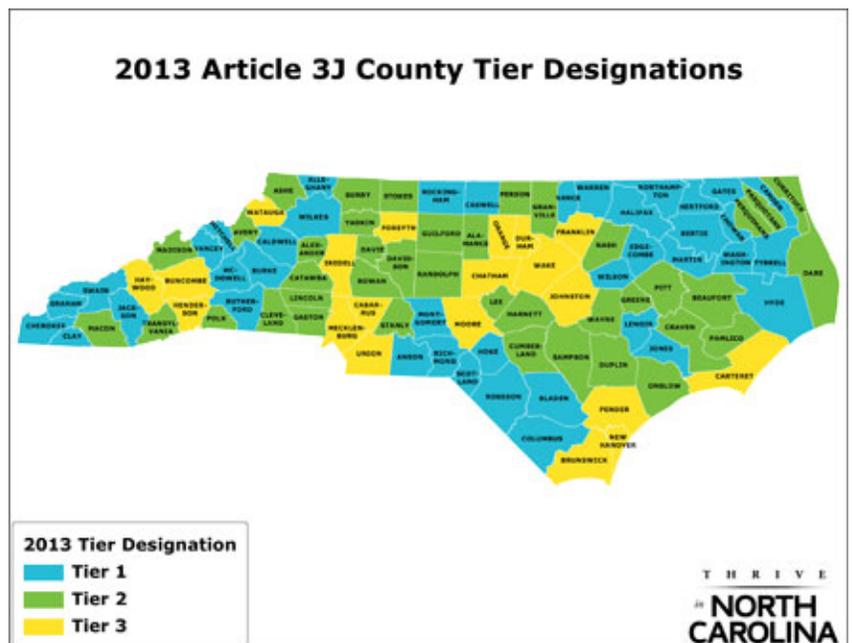
The poverty rate of Alexander County is affected by many factors, including slow economic development, guarded consumer spending, and the limited number of jobs that provide an adequate living wage. The North Carolina Department of Commerce assesses the economic well-being of each county and ranks it based as Tier 1, most economically distressed, Tier 2, or Tier 3, which is least economically distressed. Since 2012, Alexander County has consistently been designated as Tier 2 by the NC Department of Commerce. The Tier ranking of a county has significant impacts on items ranging from economic activity to the availability of some grants. The Tier system is incorporated into state programs including the Article 3J Tax Credits. The designation of Alexander County as Tier 2 has affected its eligibility for some State programs. The Tier 2 designation also had a direct impact on the health department's ability to obtain grant funds. In addition, state funding for many health related areas have decreased including a 9% cut in Family Planning and a 14% cut in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The limited state funding coupled with difficulty in obtaining grants has made it difficult for the health department to expand its services.

Source: NC Department of Commerce

Rocky Face Mountain



Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area opened in 2012 providing another recreational resource to the citizens of Alexander and supporting economic growth in the areas. A PARTF grant awarded this year along with county funds will complete a \$450,212 expansion beginning in 2014.



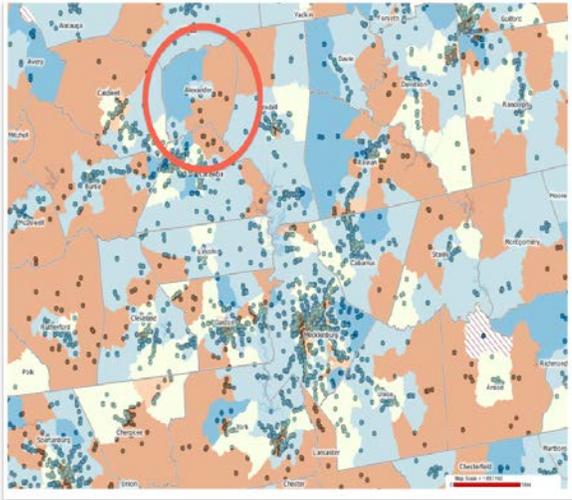


Community Transformation Project

Alexander County, in partnership with Cabarrus Health Alliance, is participating in the regional Community Transformation Grant from the NC Division of Public Health in 2012. The Community Transformation Grant Project is a five-year initiative with three core objectives:

Tobacco-Free Living - Active Living - Healthy Eating

The Community Transformation Grant is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to improve the health of all individuals living in North Carolina. Alexander County is a partner with nine other counties making up Region Four of this State-Wide initiative.



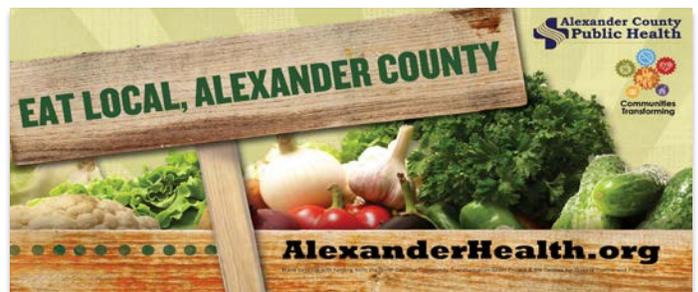
- 2010 County Boundaries
- Retail Food Environment Index Scores by Census Tract**
- ▨ No Retail Food Outlets Present (Food Desert)
- No Healthy Retail Food Outlet (No Access)
- Index Score 0.01 - 5.0 (Poor Access)
- Index Score 5.0 - 10 (Fair Access)
- Index Score 10 - 25 (Good Access)
- Index Score Greater Than 25 (High Access)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Retailers (2012, USDA)

Public Awareness Campaign

Educational material on healthy eating was purchased using the Community Transformation Grant and distributed at childcare centers to help parents understand the purpose of developing community gardens. Healthy eating education material was also posted to the health department website and distributed at large community events, including the Christmas Parade. In addition, a promotional campaign was used to build public awareness. Healthy eating was promoted through the use of billboards and direct mail, which encouraged individuals to establish a nutritious diet and support local farmers by purchasing produce at the local Farmer's Market.

CSA-Farmers Daughter

Limited access to healthy foods is a concern that influences one's health and well-being. Providing everyone in the community with access to healthy foods such as fresh produce can improve quality of life and decrease the prevalence of many chronic illnesses. Part of the Community Transformation Grant was used to fund a CSA, which was used in conjunction with SHAPE NC grant to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to children in daycare centers.



Billboard in Alexander County



Alexander County Farmer's Market

Raised Bed Garden

In 2012, the Health Department worked in conjunction with the Alexander County Partnership for Children to assist the community in developing community gardens using the SHAPE NC grant. Lulu's Child Enrichment Center at Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, used the gardens to educate children on developing healthy nutritional habits. The fruits and herbs they grew were used in the café at the facility. Additionally, a community garden was developed at Bethlehem Baptist Church. It was used as an educational opportunity for members of the congregation and the produce grown was donated to underprivileged individuals and families in the Bethlehem community.

The Alexander County Health Department used a portion of the Community Transformation Grant to expand community gardening county-wide. Aside from its alignment with the Healthy Families priority, it is an excellent opportunity to educate people in the community about making nutrition tangible by starting a garden. In 2013, raised bed gardens were developed at three additional childcare facilities in the community, as well as the Catawba Valley Community College – Alexander Center for Education.



CVCC Alexander County Community Gardens

Social Media

Social Media continues to be a dominant communication method, continually expanding beyond the young adult generation. In rural communities such as Alexander County, geographical limitations are a major problem in building community awareness on health issues. The Alexander County Health Department is taking advantage of social networking sites, specifically Facebook, to reach more people in our county. Through these sites, the organization is able to reach more people in the community when publicizing information on different health services, including flu vaccines.

Completed updates to the Alexander County Public Health website provide information and education to our citizens on a variety of topics and health services available locally.

Partnerships

- YMCA of Alexander County
- Alexander County Department of Social Services
- Alexander County Partnership for Children
- Alexander County Cooperative Extension
- Alexander County's Sheriff's Office
- Taylorsville Police Department
- Healthy Alexandrians Taskforce
- Substance Abuse Taskforce
- Alexander County School System



New Grants

- Project Lazarus – Prescription Drug Abuse: \$8,500 to assist in community education on prescription drug abuse dangers and the safe and secure disposal of unused, unwanted, or expired medications.
- NC Farm Bureau – Healthy Living for a Lifetime: Free medical screenings and \$5,000 to assist in medical care and education for the uninsured and underinsured population of Alexander County.



Conclusion

During 2013, the Alexander County Health Department focused on maximizing efforts to tackle the three priority issues of healthy families, mental health and substance abuse, and access to health care, which were based upon the 2010 Community Health Assessment and Alexander County Board of Health priorities. Additionally, Alexander County Public Health conducted a review and analysis of major morbidity data released from the NC Center for Health Statistics to determine any trends in leading causes of death within the county. It was discovered that the number of deaths due to cancer reached a peak in 2012. Alexander County Public Health will continue to work and build key partnerships to maximize resources in the community. These resources will be used to promote the use of established evidence based interventions of ongoing and emerging health issues in the community.



Distribution Plan

The 2013 Alexander County SOTCH Report shall be distributed to the public within thirty days of NC DHHS approval. The report will be distributed via the following methods:

- The Health Department shall submit a written letter to the Board of Commissioners providing an update on the SOTCH report in the month following approval from the State.
- The Report shall be posted on the Alexander County Health Department website
- Printed copies of the report will be made available at the two public library branches, the County Administration Building, and the Department of Social Services.

**Prepared by Alexander County
Department of Public Health**

