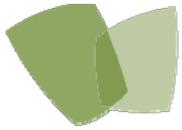




2016 State of the County Health Report





About this report

The Alexander County Health Department is pleased to present the 2016 State of the County Health (SOTCH) Report. As part of North Carolina's local health department accreditation process and consolidated contract, the Alexander County Health Department is required to submit a comprehensive 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.

The CHA is a community-driven report that reflects health concerns affecting the longevity and quality of life for Alexander County's residents. It also identifies overarching themes in the local data. Community health priorities emerge from this report, and the Alexander County Health Department works to improve the overall health of county residents by addressing these health priorities. These areas include substance abuse, mental health, and healthy families.

The SOTCH serves as a way to ensure that progress is being made toward addressing these priorities, identifies emerging issues and discusses new initiatives. This report includes updated information on health priorities that were identified in the 2014 Community Health Assessment and builds on progress made in the 2015 SOTCH report.

Because socioeconomic factors often affect our health, demographic and other baseline information precedes the health data. It is used to provide background information and context on the county and its residents.

The information contained in this SOTCH report 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.

This report, along with previous SOTCH and CHA reports, are made available to the public on our website: www.alexanderhealth.org.

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



The Hiddenite Festival Road Race, one of several road races held in Alexander County, offers residents and visitors the opportunity to compete in runs of 5K, 10K, or half marathon distances.

Overview of Alexander County

Community Overview

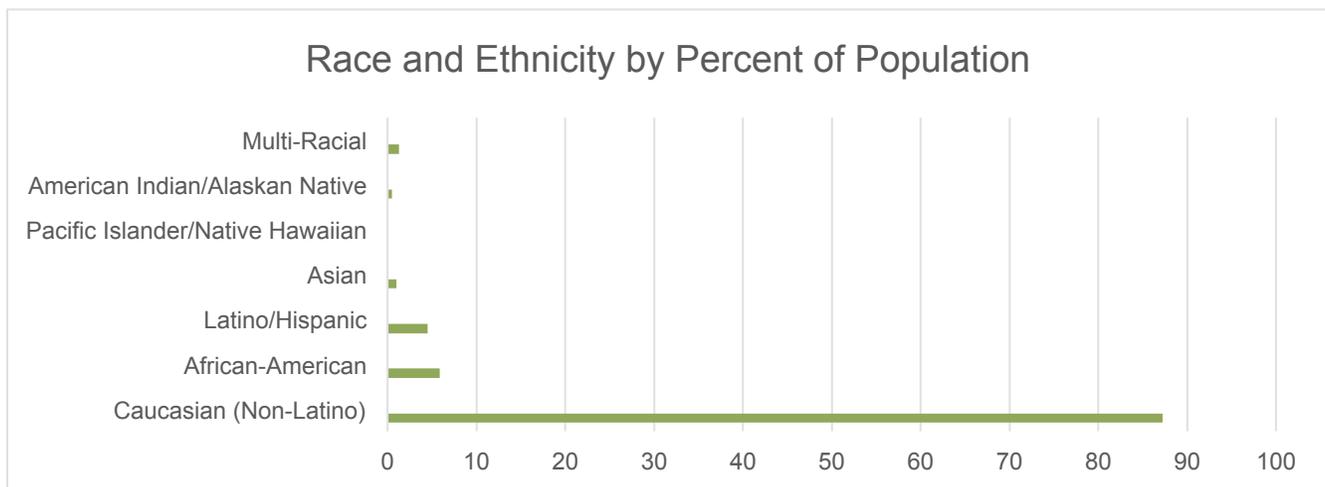
Located in the foothills region of western North Carolina, Alexander County is comprised of 263 square miles. Two-thirds of the county is farmland, with an average farm size of 90 acres, and producing commodities such as poultry, dairy, tobacco, apples, forestry products, grain crops, and beef cattle. Other primary industries include furniture, textiles, education, health services, professional, business services, trade, transportation and utilities.

Alexander County offers a variety of outdoor attractions for citizens and visitors to enjoy, whether it's hiking or rock climbing at Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area, gem mining, swimming, running in one of the county's numerous road race events, boating or fishing on Lake Hickory, or riding your ATV at one of the county's all terrain parks. Alexander County strives to offer its citizens and visitors with numerous opportunities to remain active and fit.



Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the total estimated population for Alexander County in 2015 was 37,325, which is a slight increase from the recorded population of 37,193 in the 2010 Census.



Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Educational Obtainment

U.S. Census Bureau estimates show that in Alexander County, 79.3% of the population has obtained a high school diploma or equivalent, and 11.7% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Both figures are lower than the state average of 84.9%, and 27.3% respectively.

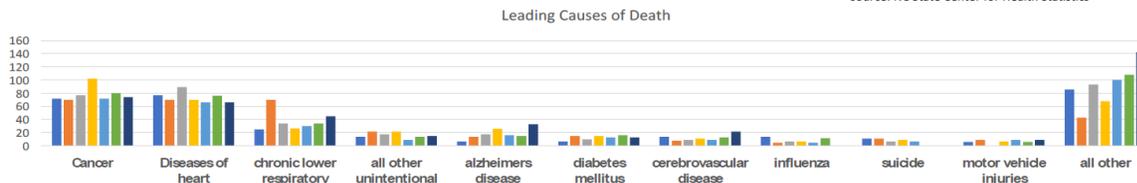
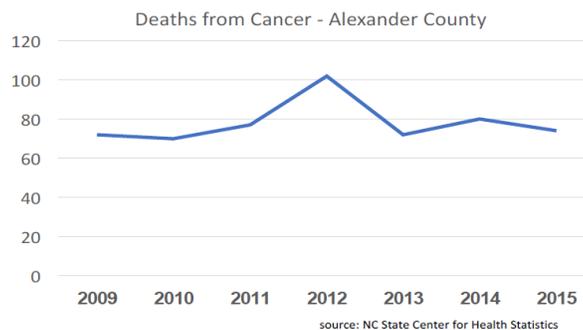
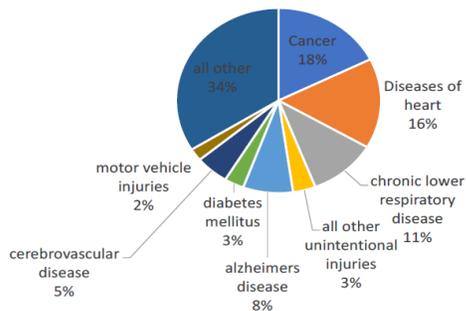
Leading Causes of Death

Cancer once again was the leading cause of death in Alexander County for 2016, closely followed by diseases of the heart. Chronic lower respiratory diseases ranked as the third most prevalent cause of death in 2016. These diseases and illnesses also made up the top three causes of death in 2015, with all three slightly increasing in frequency from the previous year.

The chart (right) shows the leading causes of death in Alexander County for the past 10 years. Cancer became the leading cause of death in 2011 and has retained the top ranking continually since then. The Alexander County Health Department and community partners continue to work to address this issue. In 2015, the incidence of cancer, heart disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, Diabetes Mellitus, cerebrovascular diseases, influenza and pneumonia increased, while Alzheimer's Disease decreased slightly.

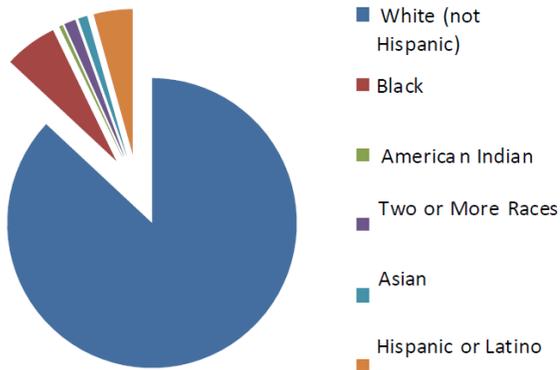
1	Cancer - All Sites
2	Diseases of the heart
3	Chronic lower respiratory diseases
4	Alzheimer's disease
5	Other Unintentional injuries
6	Diabetes mellitus
7	Cerebrovascular disease
8	Pneumonia & influenza
9	Motor vehicle injuries
10	Suicide

Source: N.C. State Center for Health Statistics



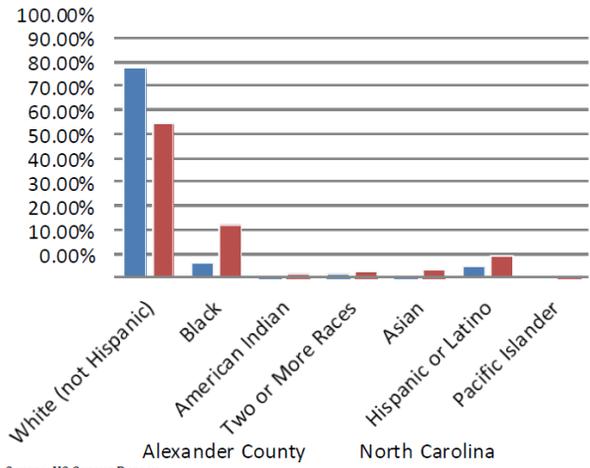
Demographics

**Distribution of Race
Alexander County**



Source: US Census Bureau

Distribution of Race



Source: US Census Bureau

Progress toward Priorities

Healthy Families—Nutrition

The Alexander County Health Department continues its work with the Alexander County Partnership for Children and local childcare facilities to increase nutritional learning opportunities and access to fresh fruits and vegetables to young children within our community. Lulu's Child Enrichment Center at



Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, a Shape NC Demonstration Site, continues its use of raised bed gardens at the facility. The gardens allow children to learn the benefits of eating healthy, and excess produce from the garden is utilized in the manufacturing facility's café to provide healthy lunch options for staff.

Half of the childcare facilities located within Alexander County now have raised bed vegetable gardens at their centers. Additionally, nearly half of the facilities are also



participating in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program with The Farmer's Daughter to source locally grown fruits and vegetables for consumption by the children at their

child care center. In a CSA, consumers buy shares of a farm's harvest in advance by paying an agreed amount at the beginning of the growing season in exchange for a portion of the freshly picked vegetables every week throughout the growing season.

- The Health Department will continue to work with the local Nutrition Coalition and Physical Activity Committee to promote participation in these programs to enhance the eating habits of our young residents.
- The Alexander County Health department also has continued its partnership with the Alexander County Cooperative Extension, the Alexander County Partnership for Children, and N.C. A&T State University to present Speedway to Healthy to preschool and elementary students in 2016. Speedway to Healthy is a walk-through exhibit representing the human body and serves to combat childhood obesity and poor health among children in Alexander County.
- The Alexander County Farmer's Market continues to thrive in its location at the old Alexander County Hospital on Highway 16 South in Taylorsville. The market is a partnership between the Alexander County Health Department and the Alexander County Cooperative Extension and increases access to healthy fruits and vegetables.

Mental Health

Mental Health continues to be a complex and difficult issue to address in Alexander County. A Comprehensive Care Center, RHA, is located in Taylorsville and provides mental health services by appointment. Additionally, Alexander County residents in need of mental health, substance use, or intellectual/developmental disability services may also contact Smoky Mountain LME/MCO at 1-800-849-6127.



Alexander County Schools implemented an anti-bullying campaign in 2016, and the county's high school and two middle schools began offering students access to social workers.

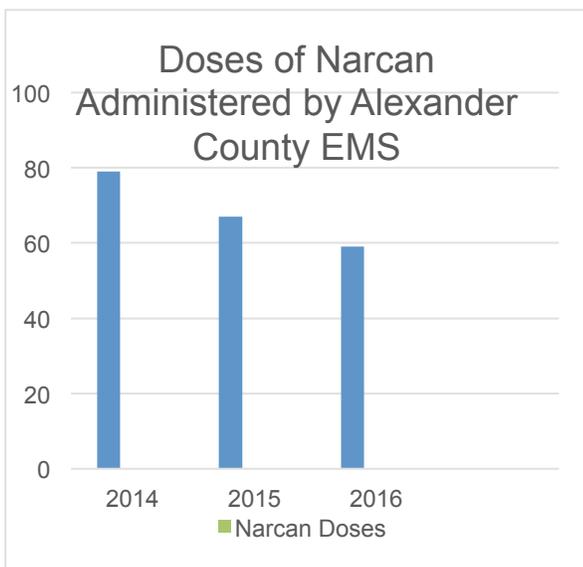
The Alexander County Health Department is also partnering with RHA to provide mental health services from within the health department building twice a month. All these efforts are intended to increase access to care for the county's residents.

Substance Abuse

Narcan Program and Prescription Drug Take Back

In 2014, data from the North Carolina Injury and Violence Prevention Branch showed that 25 opiate overdoses resulted in emergency department visits, 17 of which required hospitalizations in Alexander County. Only one was due to a non-prescription opiate overdose. In 2015, there were six prescription opiate overdose deaths in Alexander County.

In conjunction with Alexander County EMS, the Alexander County Sheriff's Office, and Project Lazarus, the Health Department continues to take steps to address the elevated prescription drug overdose rate in our community. In 2015, each



first response agency in the County was given the opportunity to participate in a Narcan (Naloxone

Hydrochloride) program designed to increase survival rates for individuals suffering from opioid overdoses. Seven local fire departments accepted the invitation to participate and were trained and supplied with this life saving drug designed to block or reverse the effects of opioid medication.



Example of an intranasal Naloxone kit provided for first

Narcan was administered 59 times by Alexander County EMS in 2016.

The permanent prescription drug take-box located inside the Alexander County Law Enforcement Center continues to be an effective tool to safely dispose of unused, unwanted, or expired medications from homes throughout our community. In 2016, approximately 500 pounds of medications were collected in the box and destroyed in a safe and secure manner. Local agencies offered several take-back events throughout the community, and agencies will continue to promote use of the program in 2017 in an effort to reduce incidences of opioid overdose in Alexander County.

Other efforts include:

- The Alexander County Health Department will continue to educate the community on the safe storage and disposal of prescription medications, with a special emphasis on prescription opiates.
- Plans are under way to add a second permanent drug take-back box outside the Alexander County Health Department sometime in 2017.
- Substance abuse classes were also added to the 9th-grade curriculum at Alexander Central

High School in 2016. The class is being offered again in 2017.

- Alexander County Sheriff's Office patrol vehicles are being outfitted with 50 doses of Narcan, courtesy of the North Carolina Harm Reduction Council. Officers will be trained in its use in 2017.

The North Carolina Harm Reduction Council, in response to changes in legislation and state policy, has begun working with Olive Branch Ministry, which is a syringe exchange program operating in neighboring Catawba and Caldwell counties. Although there is not an official syringe exchange operating in Alexander County, residents can access the service at locations within a 20-minute drive or ride by public transportation buses.

Emerging Issues

Teenage Pregnancy

Teen pregnancy is a public health issue that affects not only the mother and child, but the community as a whole. The teenage pregnancy rate in Alexander County surpassed the state average in 2012 and continued its upward trend in 2013.

In an attempt to reduce this rate locally, Alexander County Health Department staff and students from Lenoir-Rhyne University's Master's in Public Health program developed the "What Will You Carry" campaign in 2016 to bring awareness to this emerging issue. Additionally, the Health Department conducted an informational campaign with partners at the School Health Advisory Council, Caring Hearts Pregnancy Center, and the Community Collaborative, participated in a social media campaign, and created a program in which teens could anonymously call or text a dedicated telephone number to ask questions and get advice from trained public health staff.

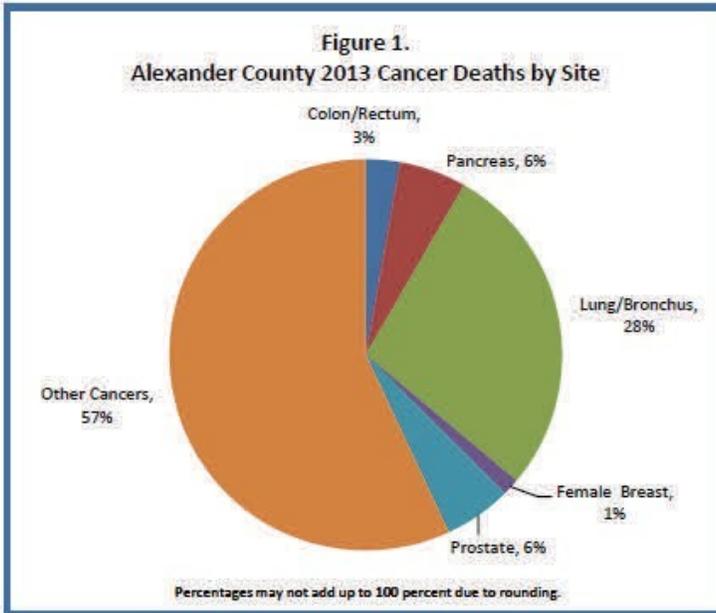
Additionally, the Alexander County Health Department began offering a Risky Behaviors class for 9th-graders in 2016 that focuses on alcohol and drug abuse, dangerous driving habits, HIV, STIs and unintentional pregnancy. The program is being offered again in 2017.

Data for 2015 shows a reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate for Alexander County, and we expect this downward trend to continue.

Staff will continue to work with partner organizations in 2017 to provide educational resources to continue this reduction in future years.

Cancer

Cancer was once again the leading cause of death in both North Carolina and Alexander County in 2014, according to the state office for health statistics. Cancer is a group of more than 100 different diseases, all of which are characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Cancer risk increases with age, and varies by gender and race. As the average age of the population increases, cancer incidence is predicted to increase as well. In 2014, cancer was the leading cause of death statewide in North Carolina and Alexander County.



Source: North Carolina Central Cancer Registry

The majority of cancer deaths occur at five sites: colon/rectum, pancreas, lung/bronchus, female breast and prostate.

In Alexander County, cancer was responsible for 405 deaths, amounting in 6,548 years of potential life lost and cutting an average of 16 years off the predicted life span for these patients, according to data analyzed from the N.C. State Center for Health Statistics.

The North Carolina Central Cancer Registry predicted 257 newly diagnosed cases of cancer in Alexander County for 2016 and 92 deaths. Counts of actual cases have not yet been released.

Alexander County is making progress toward reducing the cancer incidence rate, as well as the mortality rate by working to reduce cancer risk factors through the Healthy Families initiative. This work includes the prevention of tobacco use, promotion of physical activity programs such as 123 GO Play AC.

Physical Activity

Because increasing physical activity has been shown to reduce morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and cancer, efforts to get residents more active include area recreation facilities. In 2016, Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area started what has now become a viral success – the Vertical Mile Challenge. The recreation area set up the challenge on park trails and requires participants to complete a pre-determined number of loops on the trail. In 2016, 615 people completed the 1-mile



Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area is the site of the viral



challenge, 103 finished the 5-mile, 19 finished the 10-mile, and 11 people completed the 100-mile challenge.

Additional opportunities for physical activity from April to November include races and fun runs, which are posted on a new county web site, <http://alexandercountync.gov/events/>. The site has information on each event, as well as a platform for residents to challenge themselves and others.

Acknowledgements

The Alexander County Health Department's mission is to achieve a healthy community by protecting and promoting Public Health through education, training and promotion of health services and advocacy. If you have questions regarding information provided in the report, our services, or comments on how we can better serve our community, please contact us at 828-632-9704.

This report is available to the public at the Alexander County Health Department located at 338 1st Avenue South West in Taylorsville, at the Alexander County Administration Office located at 621 Liledoun Road in Taylorsville, and on our website at AlexanderHealth.org.

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