



## 2020 State of the County Health Report





## About this report

The Alexander County Health Department (ACHD) is pleased to present the 2020 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 2018 Community Health Assessment and builds on progress made in the 2019 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 the 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, is made available to the public on our website: [www.alexanderhealth.org](http://www.alexanderhealth.org).

Sincerely,

Leeanne Whisnant, MS, RN

**Leeanne Whisnant, MS, RN**

Health & Human Services Director, Alexander County

### 2018 CHA HEALTH PRIORITIES

1. HEALTHY LIFESTYLES
2. MENTAL HEALTH
3. SUBSTANCE ABUSE



Photo collage of some of the animal and plant life at Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area courtesy of [rockyfacepark.com](http://rockyfacepark.com).

# 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, that produces 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 is hiking or rock climbing at Rocky Face Mountain

Recreational Area, gem mining, swimming,

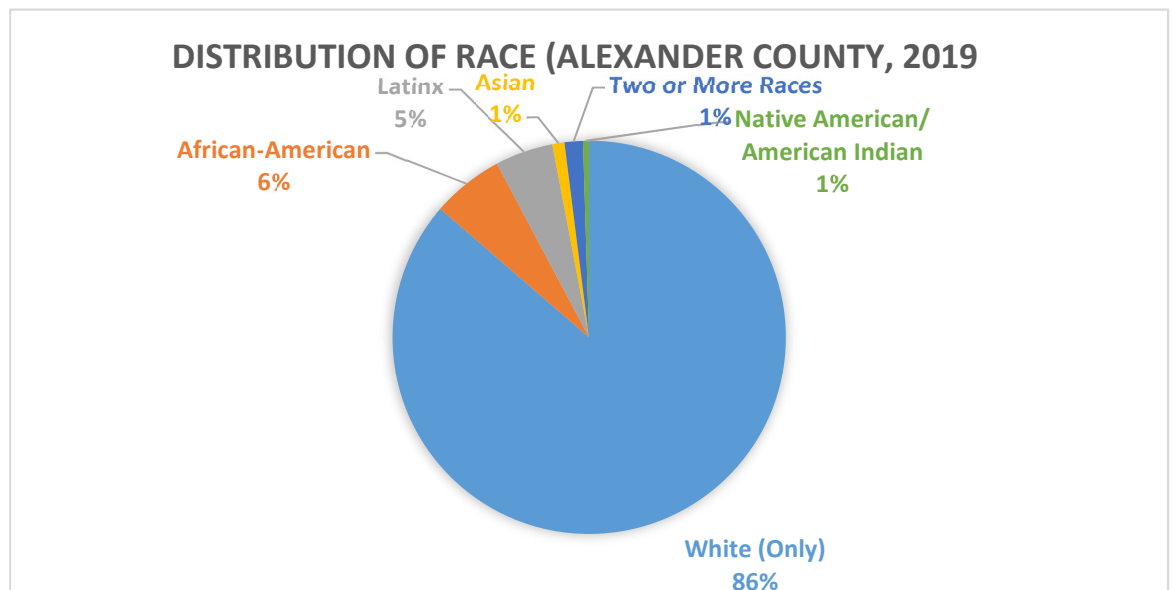
running in one of the county's numerous road race events, boating or fishing on Lake Hickory, or riding your ATV at one of the county's all-terrain parks. Alexander County strives to offer its citizens and visitors numerous opportunities to remain active and fit.



## Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the final total estimated population for Alexander County in 2019 was 37,497, which is a slight increase from the recorded population of 37,198 in the 2010 Census.<sup>1</sup>

Alexander County is a predominantly white community with a median age of 43.7 and a median household income of \$44,756.<sup>1</sup>



## Educational Obtainment

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates show that in Alexander County, 82.4% of the population has obtained a high school diploma or equivalent and 14.2% holds a bachelor's degree or higher<sup>1</sup>. The first figure increased slightly since the 2019 SOTCH, both remain lower than the state average of 87.8% and 31.8% respectively<sup>1</sup>.

The high school dropout rate continues to be higher than the state average at 18% compared to 12%<sup>2</sup>.

## Poverty & Unemployment

In 2019, 11.7% of people in Alexander County reported incomes below the United States poverty level. North Carolina’s poverty level is slightly higher at 13.6%.<sup>1</sup>The unemployment rate reported in the 2018 Alexander County CHA was 3.9% where it settled once again in May 2021 following an overall rate for 2020 of 7.4%.<sup>3</sup>

## Access to Care

Alexander County is a medically underserved community. There exists a severe shortage of medical care providers in all medical areas. The ratio of health care providers to citizens in Alexander County compared to the state average is listed to the right.<sup>4</sup>

2019 Health Professionals per 10,000 Population		
	Alexander County	North Carolina
Primary Care Physicians	2.3	7.1
Physician Assistants	1.8	6.6
Nurse Practitioners	3.1	8.3
Dentists	1.3	5.2
Pharmacists	4.9	11.3
Registered Nurses	36.1	98.9
Psychologists	0	2.2
Optometrists	.26	1.2
Physical Therapy	1.8	6.8
Occupational Therapists	2.1	3.6

## Leading Causes of Death

2019 Causes of Death	
1	Diseases of the heart
2	Cancer
3	Alzheimer’s disease
4	Chronic lower respiratory diseases
5	Cerebrovascular diseases
6	All other unintentional injuries
7	Diabetes mellitus
8	Assault (homicide)
	Chronic liver disease and (cirrhosis)
	Motor vehicle injuries
	Parkinson’s disease
Source: N.C. State Center for Health Statistics	

In the most recent data from N.C. Center for Health Statistics, diseases of the heart was the leading cause of death in Alexander County<sup>5</sup>. Diseases of the heart was closely followed by cancer.<sup>5</sup> Alzheimer’s disease ranked as the third most prevalent cause of death in 2019.<sup>5</sup> Noted in the 2014 CHA, the deaths associated with Alzheimer’s disease has shown an upward trend since 2010.

High blood pressure, obesity/overweight, poor nutrition, limited physical activity, high cholesterol, tobacco use and substance use disorder are the most prevalent risk factors that can increase the chance of developing a chronic disease.

The chart (left) shows the leading causes of death in Alexander County for 2019. *Data for 2020 will not be available until the fall of 2021.* Cancer became Alexander County’s leading cause

of death in 2011 and has retained one of the top ranking causes since that time. The Alexander County Health Department and community partners continue to work to address this issue along with diseases of the heart.



# 2020 Areas of Focus and the Pandemic

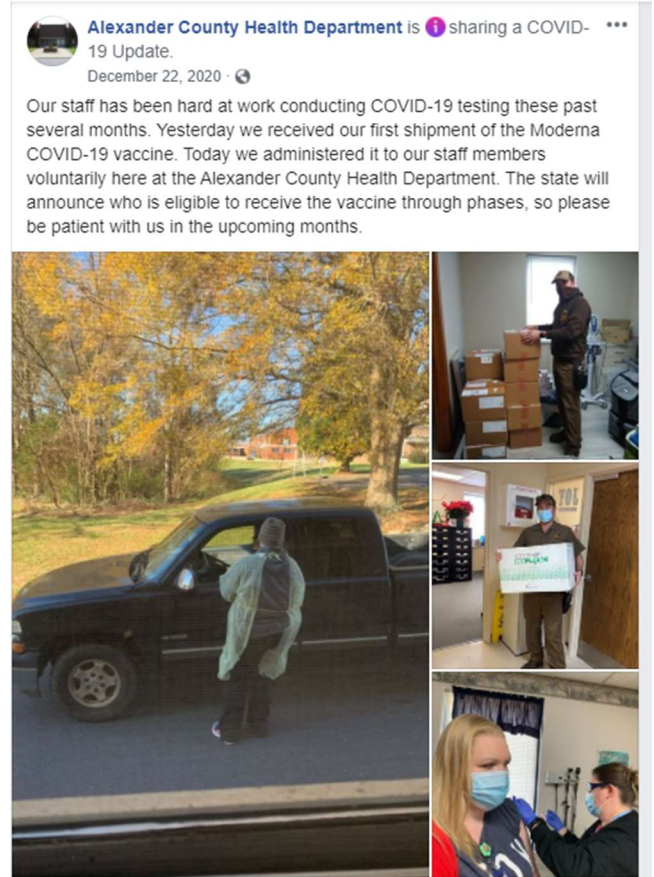
## Covid-19

Based on the 2018 CHA and 2019 SOTCH, Alexander County's Community Health Improvement Plan focus areas for 2020 remained as Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder and Healthy Lifestyles until the Covid-19 pandemic occurred. The pandemic called for its own set of focus areas including communicating factual messages to help stop the spread of Covid-19 disease, providing diagnostic testing and, when it became available, providing vaccine doses according to North Carolina's phased rollout of vaccinations.

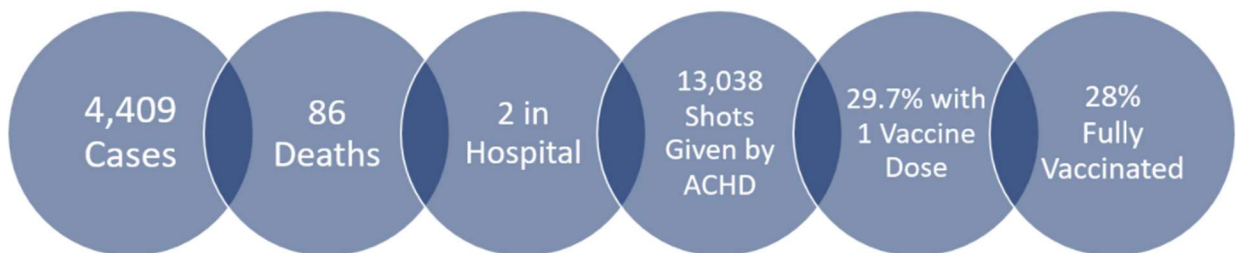
Throughout this process, Alexander County Public Health has been gathering and reporting data to the State in order to help inform decisions related to social distancing and vaccine provision. Hospitalization and mortality data have been particularly difficult to obtain on a routine schedule as Alexander County has no hospital of its own and therefore must rely on data from the four healthcare systems across its borders as the data relates to Alexander County citizens. For this reason, those two metrics generally vary slightly from the State's dashboard data.

## Morbidity and Mortality Changes since 2019 SOTCH

In Alexander County, as in most areas of North Carolina, the United States and the world, the most significant change in morbidity and mortality came as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As of May 26, 2021, the number of cases of Covid-19 in Alexander County was 4,409, or a rate of 11,758.3 per 100,000 residents. To that date, 86 Alexander County citizens had lost their lives to Covid-19. This represented a case fatality rate of 229.4 per 100,000 residents.<sup>6</sup>



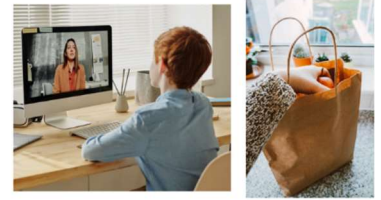
A Facebook post from December 2019 illustrates communication regarding Covid-19 and announces the arrival of the first vaccine doses.



The County's Covid-19 Dashboard for May 26, 2021<sup>6</sup>

## Emerging Issues as a Result of the Covid-19 Pandemic

When the virus SARS-CoV-2 infected our population and caused Covid-19 disease, it naturally affected health outcomes by infecting approximately 12% of Alexander County citizens and causing a range of illness states from asymptomatic to severe and long-haulers. It further complicated population health by temporarily or permanently closing places of employment, thereby leading to joblessness; causing a moratorium on evictions that is slated to end in North Carolina by July 1, 2021, placing both tenants and landlords at risk of losing designated housing properties; disrupting the supply chain and thereby leading to food insecurity for individuals and families; and requiring the development of a hybrid school model that increased children and families' anxieties and limited access to regular meals for some children. Lower income populations, rural populations, migrant worker and local populations of color were disproportionately affected as they had less access to high-speed internet and online devices for food, medical and disinfectant supplies ordering/delivery, school programs and online education and for entertainment during stay-at-home orders.



## New, Paused, Discontinued Initiatives since 2018 CHA

In order to help stop the spread of Covid-19, Alexander County Public Health has provided Covid-19 vaccines according to the phased rollout of vaccine availability for North Carolina. As of May 26, 2021, the health department itself had given 13,038 Covid-19 vaccine injections and, along with our community partner agencies including Iredell Family Care Center in Taylorsville; Peoples Drug, Town & Country Drug, and Office Practice of Pharmacy; had assured that 29.7 % of our population was vaccinated with at least one dose while 28% had been fully vaccinated.

## Looking Ahead to 2021-2022

Despite the all-hands-on-deck requirement for responding to the global pandemic, Alexander County Public Health did provide the community with messaging to support good mental health, promote Lock Your Meds and give away medication lockboxes at approved outdoor events and individually by request, as well as provide messaging about tobacco/vaping cessation and chronic disease screenings through its Facebook page @alexandercountyhealth and through traditional media such as WBTV and *Taylorsville Times*. Most partner relationships including those with Vaya Health, Alexander County Senior Center, Alexander County Department of Social Services, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, and North Carolina Emergency Management were maintained through telecommunications and web-based programs such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Additionally, staff trained in Results-Based Accountability (RBA) in 2021 and, as a result, Alexander County Public Health has begun making plans to utilize RBA for its 2021 State of the County Report and 2022 Community Health Assessment, as well as its Healthy Communities grant activities. This moves Alexander County's community health initiatives to web-based documents that are easily understood and utilized by our stakeholders and audiences, simplifying work with partner agencies and helping to better track the results of implemented programs. The priorities and programs are linked with the Healthy North Carolinians 2030 Scorecard for better transparency and to provide our citizens clearer understanding of population accountability. Focus areas remain Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder and Healthy Lifestyles for 2021.

# 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 the information provided in the report, services, or comments on how to better serve the community, please contact the Health Department at 828-632-9704.

The 2020 SOTCH report is available to the public at the Alexander County Health Department located at 338 1st Avenue South West in Taylorsville. This report will also be available at all Alexander County Library Main Branch, Stony Point Branch, and Bethlehem. In addition, at the Alexander County Administration Office located at 621 Liledoun Road in Taylorsville, and on the website at AlexanderHealth.org.

## 2020 Board of Health Membership

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Macy Jones  
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Jeff Peal, PhD  
Thomas Rider, DDS  
Phillip Sprinkle, PharmD  
Scott Westmoreland, PE  
Richard Williams, OD  
Hazel Yoder

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Ronnie Reese (Vice-Chairman)  
Marty Pennell  
Ryan Mayberry  
Larry Yoder

## State of the County Health Report Planning Team

Leeanne Whisnant, MS, RN – Health & Human Services Director  
Billie Walker, MSN, RN- Assistant Health Director  
Kimberly Edmisten- Health Educator

## References

- <sup>1</sup>“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Alexander County, North Carolina.” Census Bureau QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/alexandercountynorthcarolina/PST045219](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/alexandercountynorthcarolina/PST045219).
- <sup>2</sup>“Alexander County NC Education Data.” Towncharts Education Data, Towncharts, [www.towncharts.com/North-Carolina/Education/Alexander-County-NC-Education-data.html](http://www.towncharts.com/North-Carolina/Education/Alexander-County-NC-Education-data.html).
- <sup>3</sup>“Access NC: County Profile- Alexander County (NC).” Access NC, NC Department of Commerce, Feb. 2020, County Profile Alexander County (NC). PDF. <https://accessnc.nccommerce.com/DemoGraphicsReports/pdfs/countyProfile/NC/37003.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup>“North Carolina Health Professional Supply Data.” Sheps Health Workforce NC, UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, [nhealthworkforce.unc.edu/supply/](http://nhealthworkforce.unc.edu/supply/).
- <sup>5</sup>“Leading Causes of Death in North Carolina 2018- Alexander.” N.C. State Center for Health Statistics, NCDHHS, <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/interactive/query/lcd/getleadcauses.cfm>.
- <sup>6</sup> “NC Department of Health and Human Services Covid-19 Dashboard.” <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard>

