



2023 State of the County Health Report





About this report

The Alexander County Health Department (ACHD) is pleased to present the 2023 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/healthy lifestyles.

The SOTCH serves 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 2022 Community Health Assessment.

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.

Sincerely,
Billie Walker, MSN, BSN, RN

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Public Health Director, Alexander County

2023 CHA HEALTH PRIORITIES

1. Mental Health
2. Substance Use Disorder
3. Healthy Living
4. Child Care & Parenting
5. Elder Care



One of the expansive views from [Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area](#)

Overview of Alexander County

Community Overview

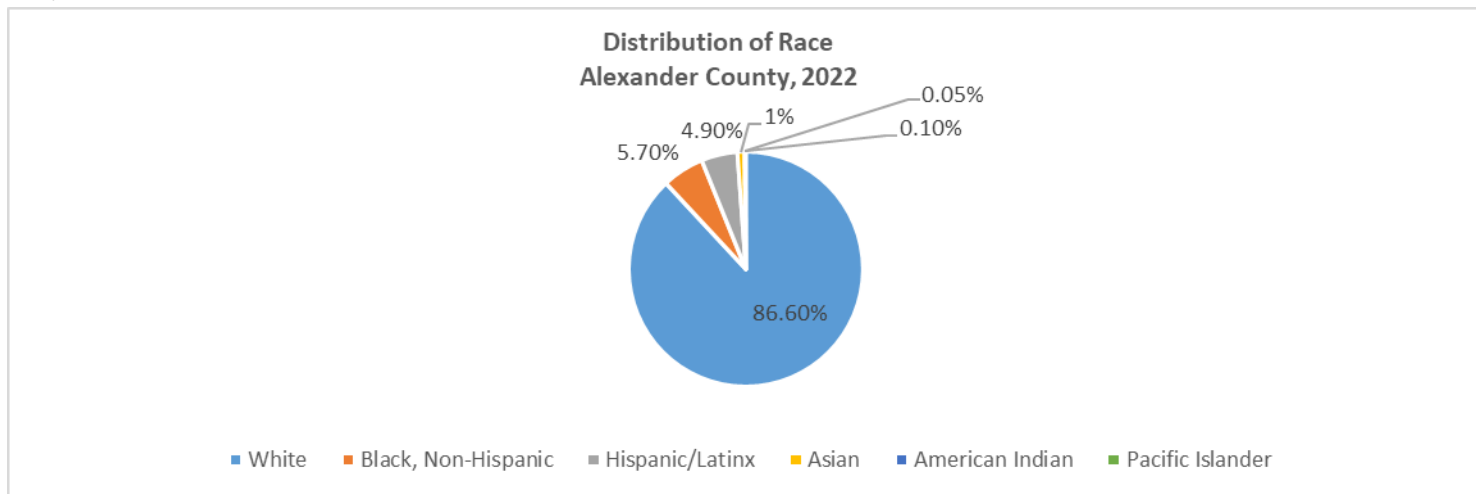
Located in the foothills region of western North Carolina, Alexander County is comprised of 263 square miles. Two-thirds of the county is farmland, with an average farm size of 90 acres that produces commodities such as poultry, dairy, tobacco, apples, forestry products, grain crops and beef cattle. 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 including hiking, rock climbing and geocaching 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, and 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’s 2022 update, the final total estimated population for Alexander County in 2022 was 36,512, which is a slight increase (0.2%) from the recorded population of 36,444 in the 2020 Census¹. Alexander County is a predominantly white community with a median age of 44³ and a median household income of \$55,041.¹



Educational Obtainment

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates show that in Alexander County, 85% of the population has obtained a high school diploma or equivalent and 14% holds a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹ These figures have changed since the 2022 CHA and continue to remain lower than the state averages of 89% and 33% respectively.¹

The Alexander County high school dropout rate of 15% continues to be higher than the state average at 11%.²

Poverty & Unemployment

In 2019, 12.6% of people in Alexander County reported incomes below the United States poverty level. North Carolina’s poverty level is slightly higher at 13.4%.¹ The unemployment rate reported in the 2018 Alexander County CHA was 3.9%, slightly higher than the May 2022 period rate of 3.1%, but significantly less than the 2021 annual rate of 7.4%.³

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.⁴

2021 Health Professionals per 10,000 Population		
	Alexander County	North Carolina
Primary Care Physicians	2.0	8.1
Physician Assistants	4.9	7.5
Nurse Practitioners	2.9	9.7
Dentists	1.0	5.4
Pharmacists	7.0	11.0
Registered Nurses	32.9	99.3
Psychologists	0.3	2.2
Optometrists	0.26	1.2
Physical Therapy	2.1	6.8
Occupational Therapists	3.63	3.9

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)
9	Chronic liver disease and (cirrhosis)
10	Motor vehicle injuries
	Other Causes
Source: N.C. State Center for Health Statistics	

In the most recent data from N.C. Center for Health Statistics, diseases of the heart were the leading cause of death in Alexander County.⁵ Diseases of the heart was closely followed by cancer.⁵ Alzheimer’s disease ranked as the third most prevalent cause of death in 2019.⁵ Noted in the 2014 CHA, the deaths associated with Alzheimer’s disease had 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, the most recent published data period at the time of this publication. Cancer became Alexander County’s leading cause of death in 2011 and has retained one of the top-ranking causes since that time. Through its commitment to healthy lifestyles education, the Alexander County Health Department and community partners continue to work to address this issue along with diseases of the heart.

2023 Areas of Focus & Pandemic Progress

Progress on Key Priorities from 2022 CHA

- Mental Health needs by:
 - hiring a Licensed Clinical Social Worker to serve as a full time Behavioral Health Specialist at the Alexander County Health Department
 - applying for the Rural Health Grant to assist with the provision of primary health care to low-income patients
- Substance Use Disorder needs by:
 - distributing 152 medication lock boxes to community members through a grant partnership with RHA Prevention Resource Center, and 20 medication lock boxes at community outreach events and free pickup at the Health Department Clinic
 - development and implementation of substance use disorder prevention materials to three local churches, Alexander Central High School health classes, and the Alexander County Senior Center
 - partnering with AC EMS Community Paramedic to distribute overdose kits which include Narcan, test strips, information on overdose and rehabilitation services, and local resources
 - training in *Catch My Breath* program to Alexander Central High School, West Alexander Middle School, and East Alexander Middle School teachers to implement to all student body
 - promoting the campaign which includes, in part, recognition of overdose signs and symptoms, introduction to NC Good Samaritan and Naloxone Access Laws, and resources for additional information, alongside *Lock Your Meds & #naloxonesaveslives* in our social media, on our website, and Health Department electronic sign
- Healthy Living needs by:
 - promoting nutrient-dense foods, physical activity and tobacco cessation messaging and opportunities via our website and social media
 - certifying our health educator as a trainer for *CATCH® My Breath* and training nine new community leaders in the program
 - improved access to care by providing drive-thru flu vaccinations at the Health Department every Friday the month of October
 - collaborating with Cooperative Extension to promote and provide wellness and nutrition classes to the underserved population of the county
- Child Care needs by:
 - partnering with the Child Collaborative to utilize Systems of Care Grant funds for childcare and wellbeing programs
 - promoted local child care services and partnered with Early Head Start to campaign for parents' education and rights through social media and promoting an in-person class for the Spanish community



Example of intranasal Narcan for first responder and public use



- Elder Care needs by:
 - developing and implementing health education presentations to be displayed at the senior center during Monthly Birthday Lunches

Key Partnerships

Key partner relationships including Alexander County Department of Social Services, Alexander County Schools, Alexander County Safe Kids Coalition, Alexander County Senior Center, Alexander County PORT, The Bridge Community, Cabarrus Health Alliance, CATCH Global Foundation/CATCH® My Breath, NC Area Health Education Centers, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina Emergency Management, NC MedAssist, North Carolina Region 4 Tobacco-Free Alliance, RHA Prevention Resource Center, Shai Ministries, Shelter Home of Caldwell & Alexander Counties, UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, and Vaya Health were largely maintained through in-person collaborations, telecommunications and web-based programs such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

2022 Accreditation & Community Health Assessment

Reaccreditation with honors occurred in Fall of 2022, as well as approval of the 2022 CHA in June of 2023. In order to further greater transparency, more active involvement by our citizens, and a deeper understanding of population accountability, our accreditation process, as well as our 2022 CHA, and our Healthy Communities grant activities are managed using the *Results-Based Accountability (RBA)* process. Through collaboration with North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina Area Health Education Centers and Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation, *RBA* was made available to us and our health educator will be able to complete the *Results-Based Accountability* professional certification course in November 2024.

Morbidity and Mortality Changes since 2021 SOTCH

In 2023 in Alexander County, the most significant change in morbidity and mortality shifted from the results of the COVID-19 pandemic back to chronic diseases. In 2023 diseases of the heart was the leading cause of death, closely followed by cancer.⁵ Compared to updated data reflecting the number of positive tests and deaths per week for 2021 and 2022, 2023 showed a significant decline in deaths from coronavirus. The Alexander County Health Department stopped tracking coronavirus apart from deaths in May of 2023 as the Federal government ended the state of emergency.

Emerging Issues since 2022 CHA

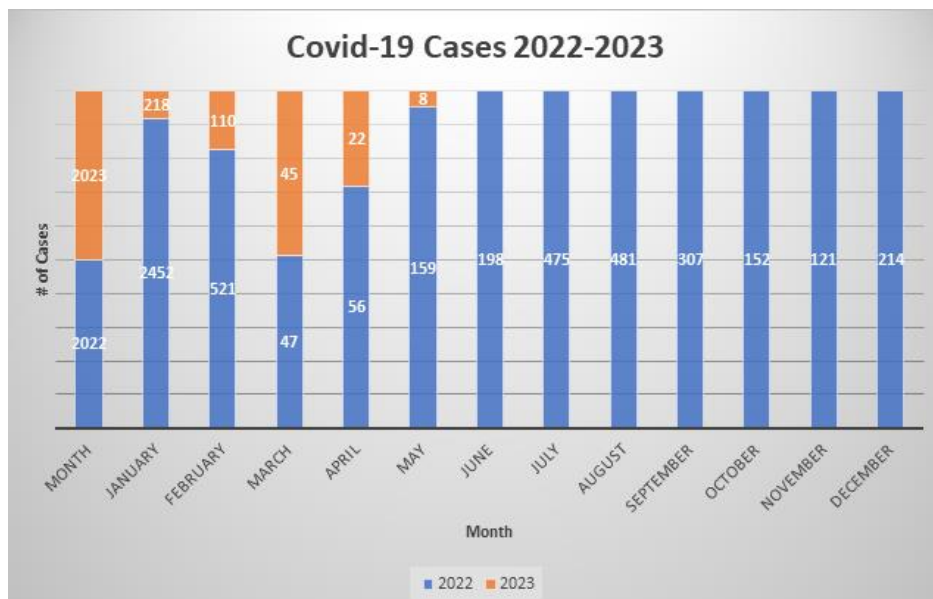
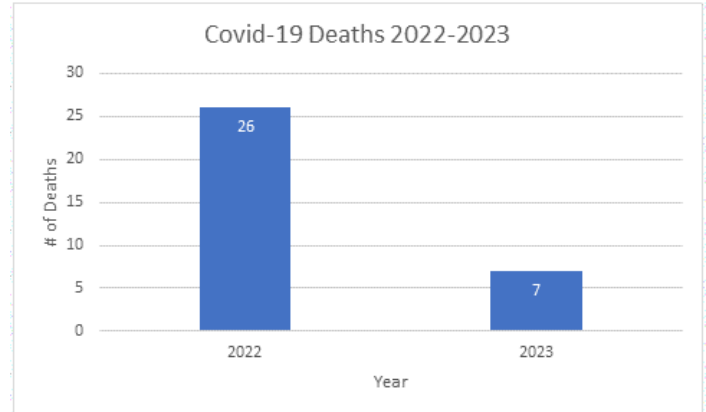
The impact of climate change on health, specifically vector-borne infectious disease has presented itself as a major issue with pathogens being spread to people from insects like ticks and mosquitos. The warming planet is expanding the range of mosquitos which carry dangerous pathogens like dengue, chikungunya, Zika, and yellow fever.

Mental Health and substance use/abuse issues continue to rise across the nation, and with this the rates of vaping and e-cigarettes in the youth population have drastically increased. The long-term health consequences of e-cigarette usage is still unknown.

In 2023 there was a significant rise in syphilis cases, especially congenital syphilis in North Carolina with a shortage of the antibiotic recommended for treatment.

Paused or Discontinued Initiatives since 2022 CHA

The State of Emergency for coronavirus ended on May 11, 2023. In May of 2023 the Alexander County Health Department discontinued the tracking of COVID-19 numbers apart from deaths. The calendar year of 2022 saw 26 deaths in Alexander County from COVID-19, and calendar year 2023 saw a total of 7 deaths from the respiratory virus. COVID-19 positive cases listed in the chart run from January of 2022-May of 2023.



Looking Ahead to 2024-2025, Continuations & New Initiatives

The Health Department continues to provide Covid-19 vaccinations for all eligible populations, expanding provision to include newly eligible age groups and additional doses as authorized or approved by NCDHHS, the CDC and the FDA.

As part of our total commitment to improve mental health, the Alexander County Health Department will begin offering the *Mental Health First Aide Adult and Youth (MHFA)* courses in 2024 to all Health Department Employees, Alexander County staff, community partners, and community members for free in collaboration with Vaya Health. MHFA is an evidenced-based training program that teaches the skills to recognize and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges as well as to provide initial support before contacting appropriate professional help. This course is sufficient for both trained professionals as well as the general population.

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 2021 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 Branch, as well as the Alexander County Administration Office located at 621 Liledoun Road in Taylorsville, and on the website [AlexanderHealth.org](https://www.AlexanderHealth.org).

2019-2023 Consolidated Human Services Advisory Committee Membership

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Vickie Rogers, RN
Lauren Kiziah, PharmD
Robbie Sheffield, DDS
Jennifer Hull, DVM
Betty Long

Macy Jones
Doug Howes
Chris Howes
Jonathan Goodnight, MD
Engineer/Vacant
Ophthalmologist/Vacant

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Ronnie Reese
Larry Yoder
Kent Herman

State of the County Health Report Planning Team

Billie Walker, MSN, RN- Health Director
Kaitlyn Graves, BSCH - Health Educator

References

¹“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Alexander County, North Carolina.” Census Bureau QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/alexandercountynorthcarolina/PST045219.

²“Alexander County NC Education Data.” US Census Bureau Education Data, Towncharts, https://data.census.gov/profile/Alexander_County,_North_Carolina?g=050XX00US37003

³“Access NC: County Profile- Alexander County (NC).” Access NC, NC Department of Commerce, August. 2021, County Profile Alexander County (NC). PDF. <https://accessnc.nccommerce.com/DemoGraphicsReports/pdfs/countyProfile/NC/37003.pdf>

⁴“North Carolina Health Professional Supply Data.” Sheps Health Workforce NC, UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, <https://nhealthworkforce.unc.edu/interactive/supply/>

⁵“2019 Leading Causes of Death in Alexander County, N.C. State Center for Health Statistics, NCDHHS, <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/interactive/query/lcd/getleadcauses.cfm>.

