



2024 State of the County Health Report





About this report

The Alexander County Health Department (ACHD) is pleased to present the 2024 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, child care & parenting, 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

Billie Walker, MSN, BSN, RN

Health Director, Alexander County

2024 CHA Priorities

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



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



Overview of Alexander County

Community Overview

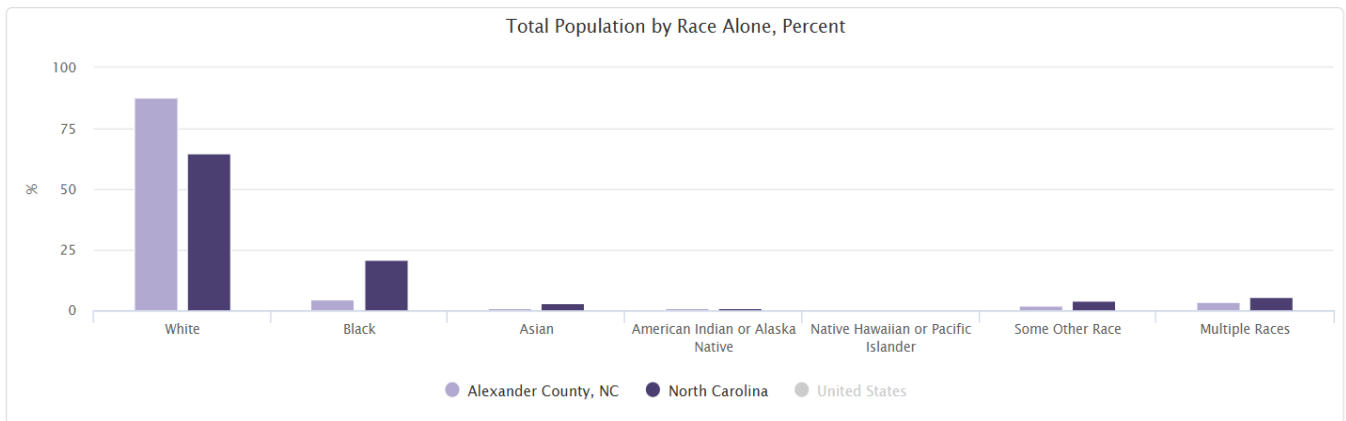
Located in the foothills region of western North Carolina, Alexander County is comprised of 263 square miles. Two-thirds of the county is farmland, with an average farm size of 90 acres that produces commodities such as poultry, dairy, tobacco, apples, forestry products, grain crops and beef cattle.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



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 2024 update, the final total estimated population for Alexander County in 2024 was 36,505, which is a slight increase from the recorded population of 36,444 in the 2022 CHA¹. Alexander County is a predominantly white community with a majority of the population between the ages of 18-64 and a per capita income of \$32,565 in 2023. 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 15% holds a bachelor’s degree or higher. ¹ These figures have changed since the 2023 SOTCH and continue to remain lower than the state averages of 89% and 34% respectively. ¹

Poverty & Unemployment

The unemployment rate reported in 2021 was 5.8%. That number decreased to 4.3% for 2023 following the conclusion of the pandemic.²⁷ ACS 5-year unemployment rate for Alexander County was 5.58%, slightly higher than the state at 5.08%. In 2021, 13.8% of people in Alexander County reported incomes below the United States poverty level. North Carolina’s poverty level is 12.8%.

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 per 10,000 citizens as of 2023.⁴

	Alexander County	North Carolina
Primary Care Physicians	1.9	7.5
Physician Assistants	4.9	8.0
Nurse Practitioners	4.7	11.7
Dentists	1.9	5.6
Pharmacists	6.3	11.1
Registered Nurses	35.8	106
Psychologists	0.3	2.2
Optometrists	0.3	1.2
Physical Therapy	2.5	6.7
Occupational Therapists	3.6	4.3

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.



2024 Areas of Focus

Progress on Key Priorities since 2023 SOTCH

Mental Health:



- Offering and hosting Suicide Prevention Training, the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), for FREE to Alexander County employees and the general population
- Offering and hosting both Youth Mental Health First Aid as well as Adult Mental Health First Aid courses through Vaya Health at the Alexander County Health Department at no cost to participants

Substance Use Disorder:

- Distributing medication lock boxes to community members through a grant partnership with RHA Prevention Resource Center. A total of 38 medication lock boxes were given out for free at community outreach events and by pickup at the Health Department Clinic
- Development and implementation of a substance use prevention project, Detect & Reflect. This is a simulated student room that educates parents on the various paraphernalia that may be found within a child's bedroom
- Partnering with AC EMS Community Paramedic to distribute overdose prevention kits which include Narcan, drug test strips, information on rehabilitation services, and local resources
- Providing Risky Behaviors education to Alexander Central & CVCC Alexander Campus Health Students. This includes an interactive presentation on vape, alcohol, and drug prevention



Healthy Living:

- Promoting nutrient-dense foods, physical activity and tobacco cessation messaging and opportunities via our website and social media
- 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 utilizing the Alexander County Health Department Spanish Interpreter. The Med Instead of Meds course was offered in a fully Bilingual platform and reached over 20 Hispanic community members



ACHD Staff Working Nutrition Event

Child Care:

- Partnering with the Child Collaborative to utilize Systems of Care Grant funds for childcare and wellbeing programs
- Partnered with the Local Interagency Coordinating Coalition who organized a fully Spanish 'Parents Rights in Education' Presentation at the Partnership for Children
- A Crisis Response Team was formed under the Child Collaborative & meets on a monthly basis



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 EMS/PORT, Alexander County Sheriff's Office, The Bridge Community, Cabarrus Health Alliance, CATCH Global Foundation, 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, Alexander Branch of Cooperative Extension, 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.

2026 Accreditation & 2025 Community Health Assessment

The Alexander County Health Department is up for reaccreditation in Fall of 2026, as well as submission of the 2025 CHA in March of 2026. The Alexander County Health Department initially partnered with the Central Carolina Community Collaborative (CCCC) for the CHA process, thereby moving the timeline from the 2026 cycle to the 2025 cycle. In late 2024 ACHD decided to step back from CCCC, but will continue with the 2025 CHA 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 has continued to be available to us, and our Health Educator completed the *Results-Based Accountability* course in 2024.

Morbidity and Mortality Changes since 2023 SOTCH

From 2023 to 2024 Alexander County saw no significant changes in morbidity or mortality, and no newer data from State partners on leading causes of death have been made available since 2019. Local and State data represents that in 2024 diseases of the heart was the leading cause of death, closely followed by cancer.⁵ The leading causes of injury were motor vehicle accidents and accidental falls.

Emerging Issues since 2023 SOTCH

The suicide rate in Alexander County has continued to rise, while the availability of mental health counseling services remains limited. The Alexander County Health Department provides Behavioral Health services, but success cannot be calculated for the program long-term due to staff turnover. While the North Carolina State rate for suicide has remained around 13-14 since 2020, Alexander County has steadily increased and remained above the State.⁶ Alexander County saw a suicide rate of 19 in 2020, in 2021 this increased to 22, in 2022 the rate slightly decreased to 20.6, and in 2023 went back up to a rate of 22.⁶

Paused or Discontinued Initiatives since 2023 SOTCH

Elder Care was recognized as a key priority selected from the 2022 CHA at Alexander County. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year the Healthy Alexandrians task force elected to shift focus away from Elder Care to allow staff time to focus on the four other priorities. Programs in place under Elder Care were not considered to be as feasible nor as pertinent as Mental Health, Substance Use, Healthy Living, or Child Care and Parenting. The Health Educator continues to engage with the Alexander Senior Center, and Health Alexandrians maintains representatives of this priority population.

Looking to 2025 & 2026, Continuations & New Initiatives



ACHD Covered Entrance

We recently used state funds to enhance the entrance to our main building. Our building had no covered entrance during the COVID pandemic and the mass vaccination process. In 2019, we realized we only had small area in our lobby with poor ventilation and minimal capacity to screen/test/vaccinate clients, especially if needed in an outdoor space prior to entering the building. We recognized a covered entrance would allow an increased capacity to serve a greater number of individuals, and it would allow ACHD to offer protection from the weather for our clients waiting for services. The covered entrance was completed in May of 2024.

In 2019, the federal minimum legal sales age of all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, was increased from 18 to 21. While a majority of states have increased their minimum tobacco sales age to 21 to match federal law, North Carolina’s minimum sales age remains at 18.⁷ Initiated by ACHD, the Alexander County BOCC signed a letter of support in raising the minimum age of tobacco sale from 18 to 21 in North Carolina. This letter of support, along with several more from other local boards and organizations, was sent to the Region IV Tobacco Prevention & Control Coordinator of the Western Region for NC to be utilized in NC’s legislative efforts. The Alexander County Health Department will continue to campaign for T-21 in North Carolina.

The Alexander County Health Department obtained the ‘CDC Enhancing Seasonal Influence Vaccine Effort for Farmworkers Grant’ in 2024. Farmworkers are now able to get the seasonal flu vaccine for free using a state supply of immunizations. A team within the Health Department worked on this Farmworker Flu Grant to mail over 200 letters with brochures to local farmworkers who work in close contact with livestock to inform them of this opportunity. Grant funds are being utilized to advertise and incentivize influenza vaccination within the county for those who work closely with cattle, poultry, and pigs. The team launched a media campaign that includes website, e-sign, Facebook, newspaper, and radio messaging.



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 2024 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 the 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).



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Robbie Sheffield, DDS
Jennifer Hull, DVM
Betty Long

Macy Jones
Doug Howes
Chris Howes
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Marty Pennell
Larry Yoder
Kent Herman

State of the County Health Report Planning Team

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

References

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- ⁶“NCDHHS Data Portal. *Community Health Assessment Suicide Rate* (2024). Retrieved January 8, 2025, from <https://cares.page.link/XTEF>
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