



Public Health

CATAWBA COUNTY 2010 STATE OF THE COUNTY HEALTH REPORT

Introduction

The purpose of the State of the County Health Report (SOTCH) is to heighten awareness of the health issues affecting the citizens of Catawba County by compiling and summarizing important health indicators related to illness, death, and high-risk behaviors for that particular year. The SOTCH can be used in establishing priorities, leveraging current resources and/or developing additional resources, such as grants and partnerships, to address health needs in Catawba County.

The 2010 SOTCH serves as a supplement to the 2007 Catawba County Community Health Assessment (CHA) by providing updated health indicator data. The 2007 comprehensive Community Health Assessment can be found at the Catawba County Health Partners web site under “Community Health Assessment” at <http://www.catawbacountyhealthpartners.org>. The next Catawba County Community Health Assessment is due in 2011.

In this report, data are presented for the most current year or time period available for Catawba County compared with averaged data for North Carolina. The year or period of time is noted on the report card along with the data. The health indicators were chosen not only by importance, but also by the availability, consistency and validity of data. The SOTCH also compares the data to the Healthy Carolinians 2010 objectives when possible; these objectives serve as ten-year health goals for the state to reach by 2010.

Current and Emerging Issues

Data within the SOTCH indicates that Catawba County has health risks associated with the following indicators:

- Minority populations are at a greater risk for disease and death
- Percent pregnant women who smoke is notably higher than state average
- Neonatal mortality, infant mortality and low birth weight rates are significantly higher among minority populations
- Stroke death rates are significantly higher among minority populations
- Childhood combined overweight/obesity rates exceed state averages in total population and in the 2-4 and 12-18 age groups
- Pneumonia/flu death rates are significantly higher than state rates for ages 65-84 and 85+
- Diabetes deaths for white and minority populations exceed state averages
- Diabetes death rates for minority populations are significantly higher than white population
- Colon, rectum, and anus cancer deaths for white and minority populations are notably higher than state averages
- Prostate cancer death rates for minority populations are significantly higher than those of the white population (data must be interpreted with caution due to its small sample size)
- Adult tobacco use by men is significantly higher than state averages

- Death rates for trachea, bronchus and lung cancer are notably higher than state rates for men and the white population
- COPD is ranked higher than state rankings for leading causes of death

Notable Changes in Catawba County

A long economic downturn in the manufacturing industry has affected Catawba County's economy, population and employment for more than a decade. More recent economic woes – what some are calling “The Great Recession” – have amplified unemployment and poverty throughout the area and have consistently ranked Catawba County among counties with the highest unemployment rates in the nation. Economic challenges have also resulted in significant budgetary shortfalls for government agencies, nonprofits and businesses in the county's public and private sectors.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Catawba County reached a peak unemployment rate of 15.3% in June 2009. It experienced a slight dip but climbed back up to 15.2% in January 2010. Since then, the county's unemployment rate dropped steadily to 11.3% by September (most recent data available). This compares to 9.7% for North Carolina and 9.6% nationwide as of September 2010.

In addition, House Bill 2 (Session Law 2009-27, commonly known as the NC Smoke-free Restaurants and Bars Law) went into effect January 2, 2010. Prior to House Bill 2's passage, Catawba County Public Health's youth advocacy groups (made possible by an NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund grant) had been educating restaurants and other establishments about the benefits of going smoke-free. With the passage of the bill, these groups used established relationships to assist more than 450 restaurants in Catawba County with going smoke-free. While the health effects of this ordinance may not yet be directly measurable, it is certain to have an impact on health and overall quality of life for smokers and non-smokers in Catawba County.

Addressing Priority Health Issues: Catawba County Health Partners

In response to the county's 2004 and 2007 Community Health Assessments, community-driven coalitions were established to implement action plans for Catawba County's top health priorities (as identified by the community): access to health care (2004), obesity (2004), substance abuse (2004), and cancer (2007). Catawba County Health Partners (CCHP), a certified Healthy Carolinians partnership, was formed in November 2004 to oversee and guide these committees toward sustainable policy, systems and environmental change in our community. CCHP was certified by the Governor's Task Force for Healthy Carolinians in 2005 and was recertified in 2008. CCHP received 501(c)(3) nonprofit status in August 2006.

Progress on Priorities, 2008-2012

The following progress has been made in Catawba County's four health priority areas – access to care, obesity, substance abuse and cancer – since the most recent Catawba County Community Health Assessment (2007):

Access to Healthcare

It is estimated that more than 20,000 Catawba County adults lack health insurance, without which the ability to access healthcare is fundamentally jeopardized. Identified in 2004 as a community health priority, substantial progress has been made toward increasing the number of primary care visits for adults at free/reduced fee clinics. Continued efforts are directed at improving service delivery and access for the uninsured in Catawba County.

Accomplishments to date include the following:

- Expanding hours of operation for Greater Hickory Cooperative Christian Ministry Health Care Center (CCM), which provides medical, dental and pharmaceutical care to County residents that do not have access to those services
- Implementing Medical Access to Catawba County (MACC), a commitment by area doctors to volunteer as primary care physicians to members of the underserved community who suffer from chronic diseases, which is now fully operational at CCM
- Developing and disseminating a brochure of free or reduced-cost primary care services
- Offering a medical interpreter class each year to improve communication and enhance cultural competence of service providers that work with populations with limited English-language skills

Childhood Obesity

Because overweight and obesity are primary risk factors for the leading causes of death and disability, the topic continues to be a priority health concern in Catawba County. In Catawba County, the number of children with a Body Mass Index considered “overweight” – more than one-third of 2-to-18-year-olds in the county – exceeds both the North Carolina measures and NC 2010 targets. Since 2004, Eat Smart, Move More (ESMM) has focused on decreasing the number of overweight and obese children in Catawba County by implementing school-based and community-based programs.

Accomplishments to date include the following:

- Developing and adopting wellness policies in all three school systems and Community Schools after school program
- Developing and implementing a “Healthy Schools Recognition Program” to initiate nutrition/physical activity policy changes within the county’s schools; ten schools (including one entire school system) are currently signed up for the 2010-11 school year
- Developing and disseminating an ESMM resource guide for children ages 2-18 throughout the community
- Participating in several local health fairs to disseminate ESMM information
- Organizing Family Day, an annual event to raise awareness of the benefits of eating together as a family (2006, 2007, 2008)
- Implementing Take 10, a curriculum-based program for classroom teachers to address overweight, in 15 elementary schools
- Implementing Generation Fit, an innovative curriculum designed by the American Cancer Society to infuse physical activity into the school day, at two area high schools
- Implementing grant-funded after school program (SPARK) to 30 schools (23 elementary and 7 middle and high schools)
- Implementing the Families Fit for Life program in collaboration with the YMCA
- Implementing the America on the Moves “September” initiative to encourage families to eat smart and move more during the month of September
- Providing a childhood obesity workshop for over 60 healthcare providers

Substance Abuse

With nearly 8% of the population having addiction issues and another 39% affected by them, the community agreed in 2004 that substance abuse continues to present a challenge in Catawba County. To reduce underage drinking in Catawba County, the Alcohol & Substance Abuse Prevention (A.S.A.P.) Coalition is collaborating with community partners to implement a comprehensive plan aimed at impacting the causes of the problem: easy availability of alcohol to minors and permissive community attitudes toward youth alcohol use. Due to the lack of available local youth data on this topic, A.S.A.P. conducted primary data collection regarding youth drinking in Catawba County and will revisit the data when it evaluates its programs. A.S.A.P. continues to engage the various sectors of the community to address this issue.

Accomplishments to date include the following:

- Conducting surveys throughout all three school systems to assess the utilization and accessibility of illegal substances for 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th graders
- Conducting alcohol purchase surveys to determine merchant compliance with laws banning underage alcohol sales
- Implementing the Not Here Initiative, a broad-based program to change the environment that enables underage drinking by targeting root causes within specific sectors of the community – Not In This School, Not In This Store, Not In This Neighborhood, Not In This Home, Not In This County
- Producing events at area high schools and colleges to heighten awareness about the dangers of underage drinking in conjunction with the Keys to Life program
- Producing a media/community awareness campaign targeted toward parents for the Talk It Up, Lock It Up initiative

Cancer

Data gathered for recent community health assessments has shown that cancer is a critical issue in Catawba County. Cancer has long been the leading cause of death in the county, and deaths from colorectal, lung, breast and prostate continue to exceed state measures. Minority population death rates for prostate cancer (as compared to death rates for the white population) and total population death rates for colorectal cancer (as compared to state rates) continue to be significantly high in the county. The Cancer Task Force was formed in late 2007 to address this priority health issue by reducing prostate cancer among minority men over 40 and colorectal cancer for all populations over 50. Continued efforts are directed at early detection and education.

Accomplishments to date include the following:

- Implementing the American Cancer Society's "Get Your Tests!" program in local medical practices to encourage patients to be proactive about annual cancer screenings
- Conducting a media awareness campaign for Colon Cancer Awareness month
- Promoting Prostate Cancer screenings throughout the community, particularly among minority church congregations and at men's health events
- Hosting community education and awareness events such as the Man to Man Prostate Health Breakfast and Screening and the Prostate Cancer Survivor's Dinner
- Developing a survivors network to support outreach efforts

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