

# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

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## HEALTH DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

### ADDRESSING CHANGING COMMUNITY NEEDS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Catawba County Public Health continued to evolve in fiscal year 2024-25 to best address our community's changing needs. Our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and Strategic Plan serve as guiding stars for our work, with both plans



**Jennifer McCracken,**  
**RN, BSN, MPA**  
**Catawba County**  
**Public Health Director**

recognizing the importance of addressing the cross-cutting health priorities of Access to Healthy Foods; Brain Health; and access to Safe, Engaging and Active Spaces, coupled with a focus on operational excellence and continued improvement.

This year brought challenges through the impact of Hurricane Helene on western North

Carolina, but also opportunities to address current community needs surrounding Social Drivers of Health and enhancing our services through a continued commitment to data-driven decision-making and enhanced local partnerships. We also looked to the future of public health by focusing on developing a strong workforce and laying the groundwork to address future needs in our community.

All of these things have demonstrated our ongoing commitment to providing the highest-quality, groundbreaking service our community deserves.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS & ACCOLADES

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RECOGNIZED

The Association of North Carolina Boards of Health (ANCBH) recognized Catawba County Public Health's Environmental Health Team with the 2024 Carl Durham Award. The award recognizes the



team's contribution to public health through last year's WanaBana lead investigation. We are proud that our hard work and diligence played a large role in this product being taken off store shelves before it could cause lead poisoning in more children. This same group was also recognized as the Catawba County Team of the Year in

October 2024. This is a true example of how Public Health makes a difference and protects the health of the community.

### LIFESAVING MEASURES

One Catawba County Public Health School Nurse's quick actions helped save the life of a staff member at her school who was pulse-less. Rejohnnda Tucker, a School Nurse assigned to Catawba County Schools, was able to initiate lifesaving measures and used an Automated External Defibrillator (AED), a medical device that is designed to shock the person's heart and bring it back into a normal rhythm. Use of CPR and the AED were successful and the staff member regained consciousness before being taken to the hospital.

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## CATAWBA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

**THANK YOU TO THE BOARD MEMBERS WHO SERVED EITHER ALL OR PART OF THE 2024-25 FISCAL YEAR.**

Susan Knowles, Dr. Bruce Carlton, Dr. Steven Sanderson, William Pitts, Dr. Hannah Glenn, Austin Allran, Dr. Dana Greene, Dr. Eugene Modlin, Shad Walters, Vidal Sipe, Rebecca McLeod, Gina Powers and Janice Walker.

Another nurse's quick actions saved a child who was choking on a bottle cap. Kristen Killian, a School Nurse assigned to Catawba County Schools, was able to successfully perform the Heimlich Maneuver on a child at her school. Using this maneuver, she was able to expel the bottle cap from the child's windpipe, allowing them to breathe normally again.

Both of these lifesaving actions are a true testament to the value our School Nurses have in protecting the health of our County.

## VITAL RECORDS

The state recognized us as one of the top 25 counties for timely registration of births. This record points to the longstanding positive relationship we have built with local hospitals and our level of operational excellence.

## SAFETY

We were recognized with the 5-Year Gold Award from the NC Department of Labor based on our low injury rates. We have received this top honor from the DOL for our safety record for the past five years in a row. We are committed to providing a safe working environment for all staff and engage staff and leadership alike in continuously improving our staff's safety.

## FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

After making gradual facility improvements over the past few years, we have a much more modern work environment. This year's efforts resulted in the replacement of our building's aging roof, additional improvements made to the Mountain Creek meeting room, plus an updated WIC office. WIC was one of the last areas of the Public Health building that had not been



previously renovated. The WIC office had the original cubicles that were installed in the early '90s, when our building was constructed. WIC is public-facing and is our busiest clinic, so our goals were to make this area both functional and appealing to clients.

## EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Karely Chavez-Callejas was selected as our 2024 Employee of the Year. Her nomination highlighted her taking on the role of Farmers Market Manager for the 2024 season. Her work helped make our market an ongoing success.

## SERVICE AREAS

» **BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCER CONTROL PROGRAM (BCCCP):** Provides cancer prevention services to adult women

» **CARE MANAGEMENT FOR AT RISK CHILDREN (CMARC):** Supports healthy development of children ages birth to 5

» **CARE MANAGEMENT FOR HIGH RISK PREGNANCY (CMHRP):** Connects pregnant women with resources during pregnancy and after childbirth to help ensure healthy outcomes

» **COMMUNICABLE DISEASE:** Monitors disease reporting and provides management and treatment of communicable diseases

» **COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS:** Connect clients with community resources to address underlying determinants of health

» **EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT TEAM:** Provides health services to children, staff, and families of children at child care centers

» **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH:** Provides inspection and plan review services to ensure clean water, sanitary septic services, and works with facilities and restaurants to encourage the use of procedures that protect the public from illness

» **FAMILY PLANNING:** Provides services related to family planning and birth control

» **IMMUNIZATIONS:** Offers immunizations for children, adults, and international travelers

» **SCHOOL HEALTH:** Ensures children in grades K-12 have access to health care services

» **SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE:** Confidential services to prevent the spread of common sexually transmitted diseases

» **WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC):** Nutrition program that serves children from birth to age 5 and women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or who have recently delivered

## ASSURANCE PARTNERSHIPS

» **CATAWBA VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER - MATERNITY SERVICES:** Prenatal care for women, including those with high-risk medical conditions

» **KINTEGRA FAMILY DENTISTRY - HICKORY:** Family dental services for children and adults who qualify

» **CATAWBA PEDIATRIC ASSOCIATES, PA:** Comprehensive medical care and immunizations for children

## 2024-25 FINANCE

### REVENUES

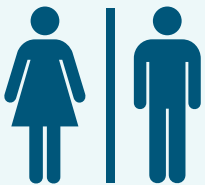
State Grants.....	\$1,838,159.05
Private Grants/Donations:.....	\$260,040.12
Outside Funding (School Health) .....	\$1,146,454.00
Fee Revenue .....	\$738,077.99
Medicaid Revenue.....	\$1,972,409.88
Other Revenue .....	\$5,924,725.47
Total.....	\$11,879,866.51

### EXPENDITURES

Administration .....	\$12,448,737.75
Care Management .....	\$1,007,853.95
Environmental Health .....	\$2,064,315.21
School Health.....	\$2,806,444.50
Clinical Programs and Services.....	\$4,839,068.40
Total.....	\$23,166,419.81

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### CLINICAL PROGRAMS

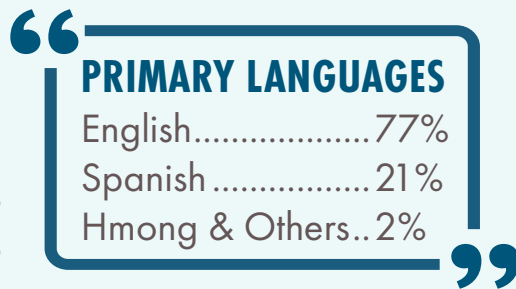


**FEMALE:** 71%

**MALE:** 29%

### AGES

0-19 .....	19%
20-39 ...	48%
40-59 ...	25%
60+ .....	8%



### WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)

### AGES

Infants .....	20%
Children 1-5.....	50%
Women .....	30%



## HURRICANE HELENE

### RESPONSE FOCUSED ON HELPING IMPACTED WESTERN COUNTIES

Hurricane Helene ripped through Western North Carolina in September 2024, bringing with it rain and winds that resulted in catastrophic damage and loss of life in our neighboring counties.

Catawba County Public Health supported affected counties as part of a months-long response.

» Our nurses provided 24/7 support for several days in a state shelter.



Shelter operations is one of the things our staff regularly train for, as Public Health can be called upon to help open and staff a shelter for a variety of emergencies.

» Our Environmental

Health team checked on homeowners in areas that flooded around Lake Lookout.

» Our Laboratory provided test handling for not only our county, but also supported a surge in well-water testing needs in western counties. Our lab is unique, in that it is certified for this type of testing.

» Held laboratory samples for UNC-Blue Ridge (Grace Hospital) and handled vaccines for a pediatrics practice in Buncombe County that was operational, but could not receive needed deliveries.

» Provided tetanus shots to first responders and evacuees.

» Our Care Management team partnered with CVMC Maternity Services to support pregnant mothers from the mountain counties who were displaced or who could not deliver in hospitals near their homes.

» WIC and Adult Health served individuals who could not receive services at their home health departments or who were displaced.

» Community Health Workers assisted individuals and businesses who needed to file FEMA claims.

» Supported Social Services as they implemented special disaster nutrition services.

» Several of our nurses deployed to shelters and our Environmental Health Specialists also volunteered for deployments to relieve staff in mountain counties who were overwhelmed and also who had to care for their own families.



# COMMUNITY IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



## ADULT HEALTH CLINIC

### Sexually Transmitted Infections

(STI): 944 clients and 1,362 visits

**Family Planning:** 813 clients and 1,476 visits

**Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (BCCCP):** 115 clients

**Other:** 17 clients and 200 visits

## CARE MANAGEMENT

### Care Management for At-Risk

Children (CMARC): 781 clients

touched and 533 managed

**Babies referred to or on safe plan of care:** 87

### Care Management for High Risk

Pregnancies (CMHRP): 1,149 clients

touched and 689 managed



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Community involvement:** 44 events

attended with 12,181 people

**Media releases and inquiries:** 29

## EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT TEAM

**Childcare center staff trained:** 735

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

A fire at a local apartment complex for seniors left a dozen people with nowhere to stay for several nights until more permanent lodging could be found. Our nurses helped staff a shelter, which was opened by Catawba County Emergency Management and operated by the Red Cross for several days. Our Community Health Workers also assisted these displaced persons with replacement of medicines, locating clothing and other resources and providing support and guidance. Public Health's role in shelters is to provide primarily nursing staff; however, all public health staff receive some shelter training, as anyone could be called in to help during a large-scale event. We also practice drills to ensure that people are available



## EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

**Epi (Epidemiology) Team meetings/responses:** 10

**Days staffing shelters:** 26

and following protocols so that we are prepared for an actual shelter opening.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

We were able to **hire an additional Environmental Health Specialist** at mid-year. With an increase in on-site well and septic applications, especially for challenging lots that take extra staff time, and planning for upcoming retirements, adding this position is one way we can better address both current and future needs.

Most of our Environmental Health applications for food, lodging and institutions, as well as septic systems and wells moved to a **digital application process** that works with other county planning and permitting areas to provide a more seamless process for the public.



## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

**Food, lodging, public pool, tattoo and institutional inspections:** 2,195

**Food complaint investigations:** 74

**Well applications processed:** 317

**Septic applications processed:** 1,284

# COMMUNITY IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



## IMMUNIZATIONS

**Number of children vaccinated: 1,629**  
**County vaccination rate for 2-year-olds: 80%**  
**People receiving vaccines for international travel: 300**

## POSTPARTUM HOME VISITING

**Families served: 10**



## SCHOOL HEALTH

**Visits to school nurses: 26,131**  
**Children returned to class after school nurse visit: 93%**  
**Nurse to Student Ratio: 1 to 783**  
**Health education sessions: 317**

## PARTNERSHIPS

**CATAWBA VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER — MATERNITY SERVICES**  
**Women served: 333**

## KINTEGRA FAMILY DENTISTRY — HICKORY

**Children served: 1,862**  
**Children seen on the dental bus: 730**  
**Adults served: 1,026**

## PUBLIC HEALTH FARMERS MARKET

The Catawba County Public Health Farmers Market opened in June for its 13th season. The market features locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables and demonstrates our commitment to improving access to healthy foods and is a way we contribute to the success of our county's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). This year's market included activities for all ages, visits from community partners, including the Hickory Fire Department and Catawba County Public Library's Library-To-Go, and taste testing provided by the Catawba County Cooperative Extension, plus weekly scavenger hunts for kids. For the second year, we were able to use funding from Blue Cross Blue Shield



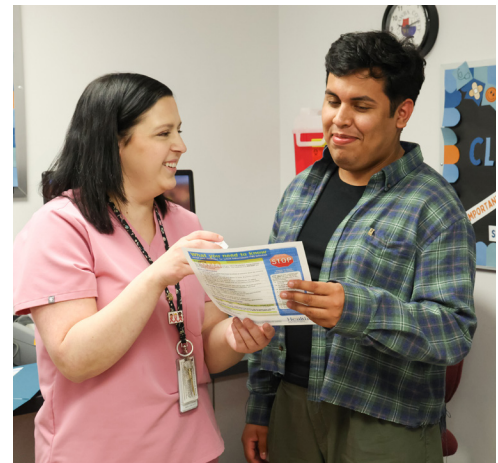
of North Carolina to provide Bonus Bucks for people who use SNAP at the market and Double Bucks for people who are eligible to receive state WIC Farmers Market nutrition benefits. Bonus Bucks and Double Bucks help stretch food budgets for these shoppers, allowing them to purchase additional produce for their families.

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

Communicable disease response included investigation and response for more than 1,600 cases of state-mandated reportable diseases, including pertussis, which involved close coordination with our School Health team, local school systems and health care providers.

We also prepared for potential outbreaks of "bird flu" and measles, and collaborated with partners to educate the public and encourage prevention measures, including measles vaccines. Our measles preparations will help ensure a rapid response to this fast-spreading disease if a case is reported in Catawba County in the future.

We also hosted an annual meeting with local animal control partners, emergency management and Dr. Carl Williams, the state Public Health Veterinarian, who shared updates.



## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

**Total number of investigations: 1,623**  
**Gastrointestinal: 143**  
**Respiratory: 29**  
**Tuberculosis (TB): 108**

This is considered a best practice and helps ensure coordination of services, reporting and public health recommendations.



# OPIOID/SUD RESPONSE

The Opioid/SUD Coordinator for Catawba County is responsible for coordinating Catawba County's opioid epidemic response by recommending initiatives and programs either from existing community resources, or by utilizing Opioid Settlement Funds.

## OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS SUPPORTED:

» Community Paramedicine/Post Overdose Response Team (PORT): When EMS responds to an overdose call, this team follows up with that person to help them prevent future overdoses and access recovery resources. This team is part of Catawba County EMS, but is based at Public Health.

» Newton-Conover City Schools School Resilience Pilot: Significant negative childhood experiences negatively affect brain development and increase the risk of a person experiencing addiction. These experiences also have a strong link to the emergence of chronic disease in adulthood. By identifying and addressing these negative experiences early, children are able to learn and use the coping skills necessary to be resilient and overcome these experiences.

## COMMUNITY INITIATIVE INVOLVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS:

The Opioid/SUD Coordinator was also involved in the development of other community initiatives that did not require settlement funds to be used, including:

» Assisted in bringing Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) to the Catawba County Detention Center. By starting people on treatment while they are in custody, they are set up for success upon release. One of the times when people are most vulnerable to an overdose is following incarceration, so having someone already started on MAT reduces the risk and helps them take the first steps toward long-term recovery.

» Connected local school systems and school resource officers with prevention resources and participated in planning activities for school systems related to prevention.

» Connected the Catawba County Sheriff's Office with a resource that provided Narcan for all deputies at no cost to the County.

» Coordinated a project to help Detention Center inmates obtain Medicaid coverage.

» Expanded the county's Opioid Core Team, which consists of County leadership, Public Health, Social Services, EMS, law enforcement, Detention Center, both hospital systems and all three school systems. This sets the stage for strategic action and facilitates broader collaboration across sectors.

» Provided presentations and trainings on prevention, recovery, resilience and other topics that relate to substance use.

» Began planning an opioid conference aimed at health care providers in partnership with Catawba Valley Medical Center.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

The Community Health Worker program continues to seek out ways to collaborate with other community organizations to better serve families throughout Catawba County. This resulted in us partnering with Centro Latino to offer a Community Health Worker there monthly and begin assisting patients who are admitted to Frye Regional Medical Center and who don't have insurance coverage. The Community Health Workers also supported older adults who were displaced due to an apartment fire at their senior housing complex.

They also began assisting Catawba County Detention Center inmates with Medicaid applications to ensure they have coverage at release that provides continuity of care by paying for substance use treatment services and other needed healthcare. The Community Health Workers are also able to link these inmates to other community supports, like employment, housing and mental health resources.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

**Families served: 1,069**



## WOMEN, INFANTS & CHILDREN

The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program focused on identifying and serving pregnant mothers in first trimester to ensure that they have the best nutrition possible during their entire pregnancy. Good maternal nutrition lays the groundwork for healthy babies and sets up families for long-term healthy eating success.

### WIC

**Infants (under 1 year old): 9,288**  
**Children (birth-5 years): 18,493**  
**Women: 9,513**  
**Average case load: 9,906 people**

# COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN

We implemented our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) this year. The plan addresses our three health priority areas of Access to Healthy Foods; Brain Health; and Safe, Engaging and Active Spaces. Highlights of our work include:

- » We launched the CredibleMind platform to give everyone in Catawba County an opportunity to access mental health resources in a convenient, stigma-free setting. By addressing issues early, and often with simple tools like what are offered on this web platform, we can prevent some people from turning to substances by addressing potential problems early.
- » Community groups had the



opportunity to attend several trainings on Resilience through the Center for Trauma Resilient Communities.

- » We led several Walk Your Block events in Ridgeview and Longview, and

results of these assessments have been used by residents to improve walking conditions in their neighborhoods.

» Through grant funding from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, we offered Bonus Bucks and Double Bucks to our farmers market shoppers. These nutrition incentives increase the amount shoppers can spend on fresh fruits and vegetables and have put thousands of dollars into the local economy.

» We helped pilot groups launch the Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project and these groups are looking at ways our county's youth can get involved to promote healthy eating and active living.

## FUTURE FOCUS

### UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP GROWTH

Training the next generation of leaders will help public health remain strong for many years to come. We participate in many activities for institutions of higher education, including both Appalachian State and Lenoir-Rhyne University.

Health Director Jennifer McCracken was a panelist for Appalachian State University's College of Health Sciences Leadership Forum that focused on leading with compassion and we also provided Lenoir-Rhyne University Nursing students with guest lectures on community health and public health, and hosted students here for their Community Health Nursing clinical rotation.

### STRATEGIC PLAN

We continue to implement our new strategic plan, which incorporates key strategies to improve the underlying drivers of health.

Priority areas continue to be:

- » Foster and develop a strong public

health workforce

» Strengthen capacity for data-driven decision-making and performance improvement

» Align organizational priorities with the 2024-27 Community Health Improvement Plan

» Intentionally address drivers of health



### COMMUNITY LEARNING

Catawba County Public Health hosted a session for the Catawba County Civic Leadership Academy, where participants learned more about population health and why where we live matters to our health, our county's health priorities, the services we provide and services we assure through

partnerships. This annual course is a way for us to highlight our work and show the big picture for how public health affects everyone who lives here.

### COORDINATION OF RESOURCES

NC Care 360 is a coordinated network of healthcare, government, nonprofit, and other organizations that all use the online platform to securely and seamlessly connect individuals to available services that address needs, including those surrounding the Social Drivers of Health. Our Community Health Workers and other teams use NC Care 360 for both internal referrals and referrals to other service providers. We worked to expand this network and met with key agencies, faith leaders, and hospital partners to grow the platform. Using NC Care 360 is an efficient way for organizations to work together to address the underlying drivers of health, which is one of the priority areas in our Strategic Plan and is a Board of Health priority.