

Alexander County

State of the County's Health Report—2011

Community Health Assessment

The State of the County health report is a yearly report that gives a snapshot on the health status of our county. The report provides an overview of the progress of our efforts toward improving the priority areas identified in our Community Health Assessment. The county wide needs assessment was conducted in Alexander County from March 2009 to September of 2010. Many resources were utilized to conduct a community health assessment survey. The public received information about the CHA survey and how to access it from Healthy Alexandrians Coalition members along with Alexander County Health Department staff. Announcements were made at various community meetings and at display booths at health fairs throughout Alexander County. The community health surveys were available online through the Alexander County Health Department and Alexander County's Facebook page.

The three health priorities identified with our Community Health Assessment process are:

1. Healthy Families
2. Mental Health/Substance Abuse
3. Health Care Access

Healthy Alexandrians Task Force

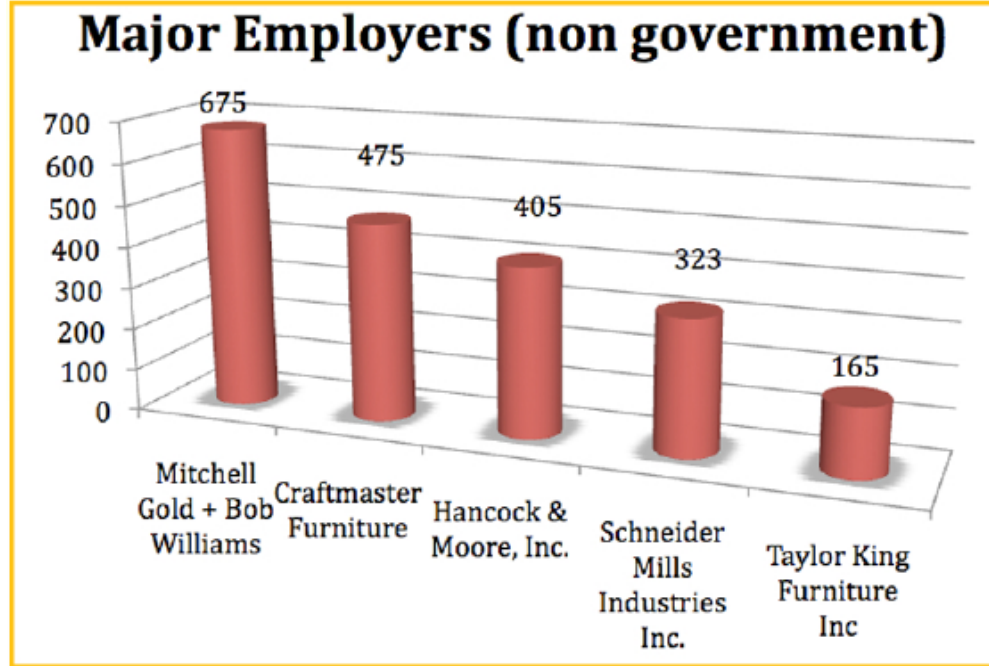
Healthy Alexandrians mission statement is to improve the health and quality of life for Alexander County residents through education, public awareness, and community involvement. Some successes of the group in years past include:

1. Court Improvement Project
2. Kate B Reynolds Grant
3. Web-Based Resource Guide: www.AlexanderResources.org
4. DWI Project

Overview of Alexander County

Alexander County is located in the scenic foothills of North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains. Bordered on the south by the Catawba River, the county offers numerous recreational activities, upscale and moderate housing, and opportunities for industrial and commercial operations. Alexander County's motto is "Gem of North Carolina" referring to the precious emeralds found in the Hiddenite community as well as the low taxes, affordable sites, dependable workforce, and small town quality of life which make Alexander County an attractive location for residents, industries, and businesses. While focused on diversifying the employment base, Alexander County has maintained its rural nature.

Two-thirds of Alexander County's 263 square miles are devoted to Agribusiness, producing approximately \$100 million in annual income. Alexander County also has a long tradition of manufacturing. In fact, with some 30 percent of the workforce holding manufacturing jobs, the county has one of the highest manufacturing workforce percentages in the state.



Future Forward Population by Age Group, 2000-2010

Age Group	2000 Census	2010 Census	Change 2000-10	% Change 2000-10
Under 5 Years	48,419	50,137	1,718	3.5
5 to 9 Years	52,681	54,188	1,507	2.9
10 to 14 Years	51,806	57,076	5,270	10.2
15 to 19 Years	50,718	61,282	10,564	20.8
20 to 24 Years	50,385	54,923	4,538	9.0
25 to 34 Years	110,310	96,267	-14,043	-12.7
35 to 44 Years	121,742	121,110	-632	-0.5
45 to 54 Years	108,376	131,783	23,407	21.6
55 to 59 Years	43,037	58,558	15,521	36.1
60 to 64 Years	35,262	55,214	19,952	56.6
65 to 74 Years	56,439	74,659	18,220	32.3
75 to 84 Years	34,256	40,276	6,020	17.6
85 Years and Over	11,091	14,327	3,236	29.2
Total	774,522	869,800	95,278	12.3

Source: 2000 and 2010 Census, US Census Bureau.

Alexander County Total County Population

2010 Census

50,137

% Change from 200 Census

+3.5%

Alexander County Poverty Rates (All Ages)

2005-2009

14.8%

% Change from 2000 Census

+ 6.3 %

Poverty Rates (All Ages), 2000-2009

County	2000 Census (1999 Income)		2005-2009 American Community Survey		Change	
	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty
Alexander	2,821	8.5	5,371	14.8	2,550	90.4
Avery	2,345	15.3	2,115	13.1	-230	-9.8
Burke	9,132	10.7	14,660	16.9	5,528	60.5
Caldwell	8,161	10.7	12,242	15.7	4,081	50.0
Catawba	12,688	9.1	18,678	12.2	5,990	47.2
Iredell	9,894	8.2	18,877	12.7	8,983	90.8
Lincoln	5,766	9.2	9,485	13.3	3,719	64.5
McDowell	4,726	11.6	6,495	15.2	1,769	37.4
Mitchell	2,142	13.8	2,562	16.5	420	19.6
Rutherford	8,513	13.9	11,040	18.0	2,527	29.7
Watauga	6,761	17.9	8,843	22.5	2,082	30.8
Wilkes	7,662	11.9	12,253	18.7	4,591	59.9
Future Forward Area	80,611	11.7	122,621	15.1	42,010	52.1

Source: 2000 Census and 2005-2009 (5-Year) American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

Alexander County Poverty Rates (Under 18)

2005-2009

18.0%

% Change from 2000 Census

+ 7.4 %

Alexander County Health Priorities

1. Healthy Families

Alexander Physical Activity and Nutrition Coalition was developed in November of 2011. The goal of this coalition is to create healthy and fit children in Alexander County. Accomplishments to date include:

1. Alexander County Smart Start has received a NC Shape Grant whose vision is to change child care communities so that young children's earliest experiences with food and physical activity promote a lifetime of healthy behaviors. A portion of the grant will be used to update LuLus's Child Development Center's Playground by increasing active play by creating outdoor learning environments. The remaining portion of the grant will be utilized in other ways to improve children's healthy weight and physical fitness initiatives. Committee work is still on progress to determine community interventions.
2. Eat Smart Move More Weigh Less Classes are offered in Alexander County in Partnership between The Alexander County Health Department and The Alexander County Cooperative Extension. Eat Smart Move More Weigh Less is a 15 week weight management program that uses strategies proven to work. The program is offered to worksites, groups and individuals interested in eating smart, moving more and achieving a healthy weight.
3. A County Wellness Fair was held for all Alexander County Employees along with a wide variety of wellness programs offered. All County Employees also have the option to utilize a free YMCA membership.
4. Alexander County also has developed an employee wellness committee that focuses on reducing health risks and decreasing costs of preventable illness. Employees learn ways to develop and incorporate healthy choices into their lifestyle through education, walking programs, and nutrition services resulting in healthier employees, improved morale, reduced absenteeism, and cost savings for Alexander County.
5. Alexander County also received a grant from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments for parks and recreational projects to serve the public. The County was able to use the donation of the land as the match for the grant. Rocky Face Mountain, located in the Northeastern section of Alexander County, which will be the site of the county's first passive recreation park. Rocky Face Park will include a one-half mile paved ADA trail as well as picnic shelter, restroom, and park office. It will also feature a sheer cliff face which is attractive for qualified rock climbers. The site is especially attractive for winter climbing. Outside the quarry area, the park will initially include a hiking trail of approximately 1.5 miles which will take hikers along the top of the quarry cliffs and to the mountain peak. The trail will also include various markers depicting some of the rare plants and animals which are located at the park. Construction is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2012. Additional trail mileage will be added to the park as funds are available.

2. **Substance Abuse/Mental Health**

Mental Health: Our mental health services continue to decline as our communities needs for these services increases. Alexander County's community provider and local mental health entity has changed. Smokey Mountain Center contracts with RHA Behavioral Health Services to provide mental health services for Alexander County. New River Behavioral Health Care had also planned to stay in Alexander County to offer mental health services but due to financial constraints they had to cease operations in August of 2010. During the transition of mental health services, the Alexander County Health Department stepped in and offered limited services to these patients. We continue to work toward increasing services and capacity for mental health services in Alexander County.

Substance Abuse: Alexander County Health Department has received a grant from Project Lazarus obtained through the Smokey Mountain Local Mental Health Entity for overdose prescription prevention in Alexander County. Project Lazarus empowers communities and individuals to prevent drug overdoses and meet the needs of those living with chronic pain by providing technical assistance to create and maintain community coalitions, helping harness existing public health data, and empower community groups to create locally tailored drug overdose programs. Accomplishments to date include:

1. Community Forum held to develop plans, discuss solutions, current challenges, and the next steps for Project Lazarus in Alexander County. This was also our first step to increasing the awareness of the serious issues of prescription drug abuse in Alexander County.
2. Substance Abuse Subcommittee developed to provide a collaborative group to lead and oversee the Project Lazarus Campaign. Committee members represent the medical community, faith community, law enforcement, education, private industry, non-profit sector and the community at large. The committee plans a multi phase approach to include public education, student education, and medical provider education.

3. Health Care Access

Alexander County has limited health care services to offer Alexander County Residents. At present, the only providers of family care are: Family Care Center, Family Medical Associates, Bethlehem Family Practice, Dr. Wayne Wilson and Stony Point Family Medicine. A health care access coalition was developed in hopes to increase health care access in Alexander County. The coalition continues to look for future grants and funding. Accomplishments to date include:

1. A new Dialysis Center built with plans to open in early 2012. The center was proposed for a 10 station dialysis center, making it the only dialysis center in Alexander County. This will prevent dialysis patients from having to go out of county for services.
2. New Dentist office called Carolina Dental Care opened in early 2011. The dental practice accepts adults and children with Medicaid, Health Choice, or self pay.
3. The Alexander County Health Department has taken over a new program called Care Coordination for Children (CC4C). CC4C is a new program partnering with community care networks to improve the health of children by linking to effective services that will meet the needs of children and their families. The health department is in the process of doing outreach and education to all the doctors' offices in the county about the CC4C program.
4. Alexander County Health Department applied for a Federally Qualified Health Center Grant but was not funded. The current application will be held if new funding arises through June 2012.

Review of Morbidity and Mortality Data

2005-2009 Top Leading Causes of Death, Unadjusted Death Rates per 100,000 Population.

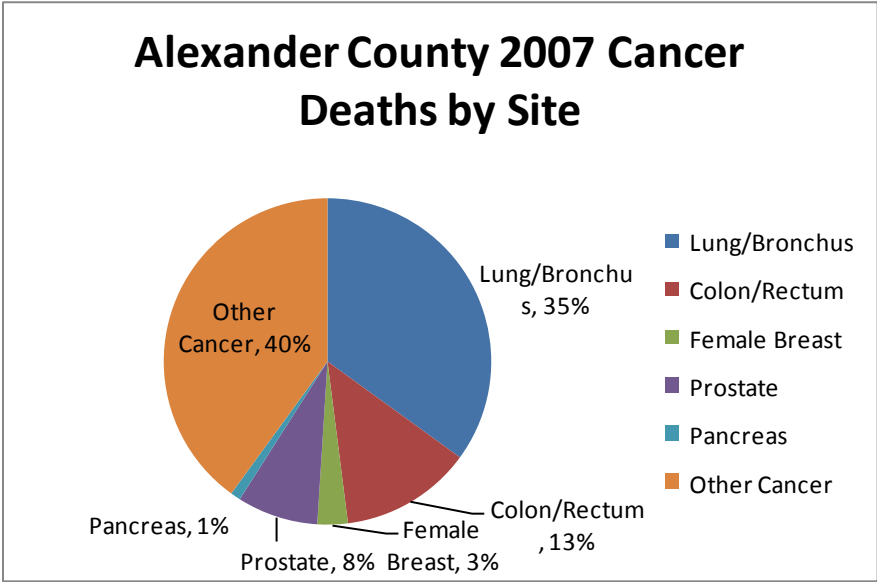
	Alexander County	North Carolina
Cancer	205.3	190.7
Diseases of the Heart	202.6	192.2
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	60.1	46.9
Cerebrovascular Diseases	42.6	50.0
Other Unintentional Injuries	36.6	28.5
Pneumonia & Influenza	33.3	19.1
Motor Vehicle Injuries	22.4	17.8

Alexander County had a higher age adjusted average death rate from 2005-2009 than the state average per 100,000 people for the following reasons: cancer, diseases of the heart, chronic lower respiratory diseases, pneumonia & influenza, motor vehicle injuries, and other unintentional injuries. Cancer is still the leading cause of death in Alexander County.

Cancer Data

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in North Carolina and in the United States. In 2007, 17,425 persons in North Carolina died from cancer, 78 in Alexander County. It is estimated that nearly four in 10 North Carolinians will develop cancer during their lives.

Cancer is a group of more than 100 different diseases, but all are characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Cancer risk increases with age, and varies by gender and race. As the average age of the population increases, the incidence of cancer will increase as well. Currently in North Carolina, cancer is the leading cause of death for people under the age of 85. Cancer is expected to surpass heart disease and become the leading cause of death in North Carolina and the nation by the year 2015. The majority of cancer deaths occur at five sites: lung, colon, female breast, prostate, and pancreas.



It is generally accepted that over 60 percent of all cancers are related to personal lifestyle or environmental factors, such as smoking and diet, and are therefore preventable. Other factors such as age, gender, and family history of a specific cancer are also associated with the development of cancer and aid in the identification of people at high risk.

In 2006, 172 cancer cases were reported for Alexander County residents. These numbers are expected to increase as the population ages.

Community Advertisement

Alexander County Health Department plans to distribute this year’s SOTCH report to the Alexander County Board of Health, Board of County Commissioners, posting at various other county departments (library, school board administration, Department of Social Services), will also be linked to our county website, and Alexander County Health Department’s website and Facebook Page.