

Preventing Disease and Promoting Health in North Carolina Communities: The North Carolina Prevention Action Plan and Healthy Carolinians

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In 1994, Governor James Hunt appointed a task force of health care, nonprofit, and community leaders to implement a coordinated effort to plan and create healthy communities throughout North Carolina based upon the national Healthy People model. The initial goals for the Governor's Task Force for Healthy Carolinians were to create and disseminate state-level health objectives for North Carolina, to encourage the organization of local partnerships and coalitions to support community health improvement, and to report on North Carolina's progress in achieving our health improvement objectives.

Healthy Carolinians has grown remarkably from Governor Hunt's original vision to encompass two, decade-long health improvement plans (Healthy Carolinians Objectives for Years 2000 and 2010) and to support 77 Healthy Carolinians partnerships and coalitions promoting health improvement in 83 North Carolina counties. These communities include small and large, urban, suburban, and rural places. The consistent recipe for success in Healthy Carolinians over the years has been the combination of individual leaders and diverse organizations working as partners to improve the health of North Carolinians. They do this by focusing on aligning the health needs, resources, and assets of the local community and surrounding regions.

Governor Beverly Perdue has embraced the Healthy Carolinians concept and expanded the Governor's Task Force by setting a goal of accelerating health improvements for North Carolinians by creating Healthy North Carolina Objectives for the decade 2010 to 2020. The basic strategy of Healthy Carolinians is to embrace evidence-based disease prevention and health promotion mechanisms, with an emphasis on eliminating health disparities; promoting access to health services; developing healthy living, learning, and work environments; and supporting the knowledge and capacity of North Carolinians to pursue healthy lifestyles.

Healthy Carolinians adheres to the belief that the strength and power of engaged communities and leadership can transform and improve health. Accountability, actively engaged partnerships, and measureable results will be the hallmarks of Healthy Carolinians during the next decade.

Emphasis on Prevention and Health Promotion

Since the founding of Healthy Carolinians, disease prevention and health promotion strategies have been the primary health improvement opportunities endorsed and adopted in the statewide objectives. The 2010 Health Objectives specifically addressed access to health care, chronic disease prevention, reducing the impact of disabilities, cutting the state's high infant mortality rates,

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injury prevention, improved oral health, and reducing infectious disease. These priorities were seen to have the highest potential impact for consistent, long-term health improvement. Furthermore, the 2010 Objectives highlighted the critical importance of reversing North Carolina's trends in factors that undermine health such as obesity, poor nutrition, lack of physical exercise, tobacco use, and risky lifestyle choices.

North Carolina has not significantly reduced or reversed these trends, thus, the Healthy NC 2020 Objectives will continue to emphasize evidence-based practices in disease prevention and health promotion as the most cost-effective

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and best outcome-driven strategies to achieve breakthrough improvements in the health status of North Carolinians. The value of prevention and health promotion cannot be overstated in the potential to transform North Carolina into a healthier state with a significantly healthier population and dramatically fewer health disparities.

The *North Carolina Prevention Action Plan*, published by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine, represents a significant foundation to build upon the most recent knowledge, research, and expertise in population health improvement. The challenge for Healthy Carolinians has never been to identify the health factors and measures that require change and improvement; we already know the major health issues that demand our attention, the problems that make North Carolina less healthy. The challenge is in helping local health coalitions and communities connect with the best strategies and health improvement practices that have the greatest potential to increase the health of their community.

Helping communities learn and adequately implement evidence-based strategies for disease prevention and health promotion is a monumental task. The *North Carolina Prevention Action Plan* is the first step in the process to create a health improvement plan for North Carolina that is actionable, measurable, and achievable. The critical next step is to engage communities, partnerships, coalitions, organizations, and leaders in adopting best practices for their communities, marshalling and supporting resources to transform health, and sustaining health improvement and disease prevention strategies that achieve results. Learning from each other, rigorously applying the Model for Improvement, which includes setting breakthrough improvement goals, conducting small tests of change, transparently measuring health outcomes, innovating, and spreading best practice strategies—are the building blocks for year-after-year improvements in community health.

Community Partnerships: The True Strength of Healthy Carolinians

The central tenet of Healthy Carolinians is the organization and development of successful community-focused partnerships to assess, plan, structure, and engage community leaders and resources in the rewarding work of implementing and monitoring health improvement strategies. The Governor's Task Force for Healthy Carolinians is charged with the responsibility of officially designating local Healthy Carolinians Partnerships and Coalitions. The Office of Healthy Carolinians and the Governor's Task Force work together to support local coalitions and partnerships in achieving certification status.

The Governor's Task Force for Healthy Carolinians awards certification to communities that have organized broad-based partnerships which adopt and embrace a prevention-oriented mission and that understand, improve, and monitor the health needs of the community. The certification process for a local partnership is conducted every four

years, with approximately 25% of partnerships applying for certification annually. The purpose of the Healthy Carolinians certification is to ensure that local partnerships and coalitions are actively conducting and performing the evidence-based community health organization strategies that are demonstrated to plan, coordinate, and support sustainable improvements in population health.

The local partnerships are capable of organizing and leading health improvement strategies because of these essential, demonstrated capacities, as incorporated in the Healthy Carolinians certification standards:

- alignment with statewide health objectives and action plans to reduce health disparities;
- development of both short-term and long-term health improvement objectives;
- establishment of a partnership with diverse membership and community engagement;
- demonstrated and engaged leadership;
- completion of a comprehensive community health assessment to determine health improvement priorities;
- regular and effective communication strategies;
- support and commitment from community members and leaders involved in the partnership; and
- a resource, funding, and financial sustainability plan to support the improvement plan of the local partnership.

The action plans developed and managed by the local Healthy Carolinians partnerships must be linked to prevention and health promotion strategies with measurable outcomes and results.

How Partnerships, Statewide Goals, and Evidence-Based Strategies Improve Health

Combining the strength of local Healthy Carolinians partnerships with the alignment, focus, and proven concepts of the *North Carolina Prevention Action Plan*, and guiding collaborative work and learning through the performance outcomes defined in the Healthy NC 2020 Objectives will provide a running start for North Carolina leaders, communities, and stakeholders to sustain the decade-long journey towards our healthier destination. However, a well-defined roadmap, engaged partners, and aligned visions will not accomplish ambitious health improvement goals on their own—incredible effort, dedication, and effective work are required, too.

The North Carolina Hospital Association, in creating the NC Center for Hospital Quality and Patient Safety, has learned that improvement strategy must be linked to key improvement concepts and principles in order to guarantee the best probability of meeting expected goals and objectives. These concepts are:

- Effective and sustainable **execution** of evidence-based health improvement strategies.

- **Transparency** of measurable outcomes and results, to inform collaborative learning and to guide improvement.
- **Accountability** for the accomplishment of expected goals and objectives.

The basic improvement model is to specifically identify break-through “how good by when” goals, develop health improvement portfolios that emphasize effective execution of evidence-based strategies to accomplish the goals, then link transparency and accountability in order to understand whether breakthrough performance objectives and improvements are being accomplished. The cycle of goal-setting, effective execution, measurement against expectations, then linking to transparency and accountability is the best methodology to drive consistent, sustainable improvement.¹

Prevention Strategies Accomplished by Healthy Carolinians Partnerships

Healthy Carolinians’ partnerships and coalitions are already embracing these improvement concepts and engaging in the disease prevention and health promotion strategies identified in the *Prevention Action Plan*. The following community engagement stories illustrate the hope and promise of health improvement partnerships linked to prevention strategies:^a

Partnership for a Healthy Durham: Durham Eating Smart and Moving More

The Durham Partnership’s Obesity and Chronic Illness committee, composed of 26 partner agencies, created *Durham Eating Smart Moving More*. This resource compiles Durham trails, parks, recreation centers, water activities, and physical activity and nutrition resources to share with the community. The brochure was officially kicked-off at the 2009 Public Health Day and Earth Day events.

This resource is available online at <http://www.healthydurham.org>. Copies of the guide are also available at Durham Parks and Recreation sites, Duke-affiliated clinics, and community venues. Health care providers are using the resource as a wellness prescription with patients by discussing nutrition and physical activity resources in the patients’ neighborhood.

Overweight and obesity are associated with long-term, costly, and serious health conditions, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.^{2,3} Many Durham residents are not aware of the opportunities for physical activity and better nutrition and *Durham Eating Smart Moving More* is just one strategy to improve the health of county residents.

Iredell County Healthy Carolinians: Prostate Cancer Male Peer Educator Program

Iredell County Healthy Carolinians has created a male peer educator program focused on early detection of prostate cancer. Each year, local men volunteer to educate others in the community about prostate cancer and prostate cancer screenings. The three local hospitals work together to coordinate free prostate cancer screenings during the month of September. The objective of the early detection program is to reduce prostate cancer deaths for Iredell County minority men by 10%. In four years, 785 men were screened for prostate cancer. In addition, approximately 2,000 men in Iredell County have received education about prostate cancer.

When the prostate education program began, the prostate cancer death rate for minority men in Iredell County was 70 men per 100,000 population. Since the inception of the program, the prostate cancer death rate has decreased to 67.5 men per 100,000.

Onslow Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP): Jones Onslow Employee Wellness Program

With over 175 employees, Jones Onslow Electric Membership Corporation (JOEMC) understands the importance of a productive, satisfied workforce. JOEMC is an active wellness partner of the Onslow County Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP). A Health Risk Appraisal is conducted for each employee, followed by an employee survey, to guide the Wellness Program’s efforts to address the three top health factors: obesity, inactivity, and heart disease. Activity-based programs were implemented, including ‘The Biggest Loser Weight Loss Program,’ ‘Walking Your Way to Health,’ and vigorous exercise programs. After this program was implemented, employees lost over 300 pounds and logged more than 8,000 miles walking.

JOEMC also partnered with the Onslow County Health Department, CHIP, and Coastal Carolina Community College to bring in 28 medical laboratory and nursing students to perform blood screenings, blood pressure checks, and Body Mass Index measurements for 155 employees. JOEMC’s Wellness Program is successful in educating employees and their families, motivating them to lead a healthier lifestyle, and creating a culture of health to support individual wellness goals.

Healthy Cabarrus Partnerships for Life: Teen Talk—Providing Health Information to Teens in Cabarrus County

Teen Talk is a telephone health information service organized for teens in Cabarrus County. The service was created by the Healthy Cabarrus Teen Task Force in

a. Annotated from: *Healthy Carolinians Partnership Stories, 2007 to 2009*. Available at <http://www.healthycarolinians.org>.

response to teens identifying a lack of resources for accurate information on health issues. The *Teen Talk* line allows callers to access more than 130 pre-recorded health topics or speak with a health professional.

Teen Talk brochures are distributed to 20,000 middle school and high school students in Cabarrus County. *Teen Talk* receives an average of 200 to 250 calls from teens each month. In addition to creating *Teen Talk*, the Teen Task Force tackled a number of teen health issues and developed and implemented educational campaigns including:

- Educating the community about smoke-free environments, helping to launch the Teen Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Program in Cabarrus County Schools.
- Created and implemented the Be Empowered campaigns, encouraging teens to make healthy life choices by avoiding drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.
- Implemented bullying awareness campaigns, which reached 8,500 high school students.
- Implemented nutrition, exercise, and body image awareness campaigns for seven local high schools.
- Developed resource manuals on STDs, HIV/AIDS, and abstinence for ninth grade health teachers.

Pitt Partners for Health: Injury Prevention Program Makes an Impact in Pitt County

The Eastern Carolina Injury Prevention Program, created in 1995, is one of the longest-standing injury prevention programs in North Carolina. The mission of the program is to improve the health of eastern North Carolina by reducing the number and impact of injuries. The Program engages community agencies to create safer environments. The projects and interventions are driven by local injury data. Interventions include:

- SAFETeens, an interactive curriculum presented to high school driver education classes, educating teens about the dangers of risky driving habits. Over 700 students participate in the program annually.
- AARP Driver Safety Class, a partnership with Pitt Partners for Health to provide refresher driver safety classes for older drivers. Over 100 drivers completed the course over two years.
- The Bicycle Safety Initiative, offered to fourth grade physical education students. The Safe Communities Coalition provides a helmet for each student and an average of 800 students at six to eight schools participate annually.
- Pitt County SAFE KIDS conducts a weekly child safety seat inspection station. They distribute and properly install child safety seats for 200 indigent families annually and provide 800 child safety seat checks annually.

Healthy Carolinians of Macon County: Macon County Responds to Those in Need of Health Care

Where do you go when you're sick and have no medical insurance or money to pay for a doctor's visit? What do you do when you're given prescriptions for medications that total \$300 and you just lost your job and have no pharmacy insurance? Following a community health assessment by Healthy Carolinians of Macon County that showed a need for access to primary care, a group of concerned citizens, local doctors, and representatives of Healthy Carolinians of Macon County formulated a plan to meet the medical needs of the uninsured and low-income residents of the county.

After 11 months of meeting and planning, the Community Care Clinic of Highlands-Cashiers opened its doors to its first patient on December 8, 2005. The support from the community continues to grow with volunteer doctors, nurses, Spanish translators, and clerical volunteers caring for patients. The clinic is open every Thursday evening and patients can be seen on either an appointment or walk-in basis. The clinic serves both acute and chronic disease patients, ranging in age from birth to 64 years old. Approximately 50% of the patients are of Hispanic origin.

In addition to primary care services, the clinic provides free prescriptions to patients. For patients with ongoing medication needs, the clinic works directly with pharmaceutical companies to obtain free medications. Patients in need of outpatient diagnostic testing may receive services without charge through a partnership between the clinic and the two local hospitals. In the months after opening, the clinic served over 760 patients for a total of 1,520 visits. As demand from uninsured patients grows, other groups within the county are considering the feasibility of opening another free clinic.

Healthy Carolinians of Macon County is providing guidance to these new groups as well as the hope that all residents of Macon County can have access to primary care when needed, regardless of ability to pay.

Connecting Communities, Strategies, and Resources

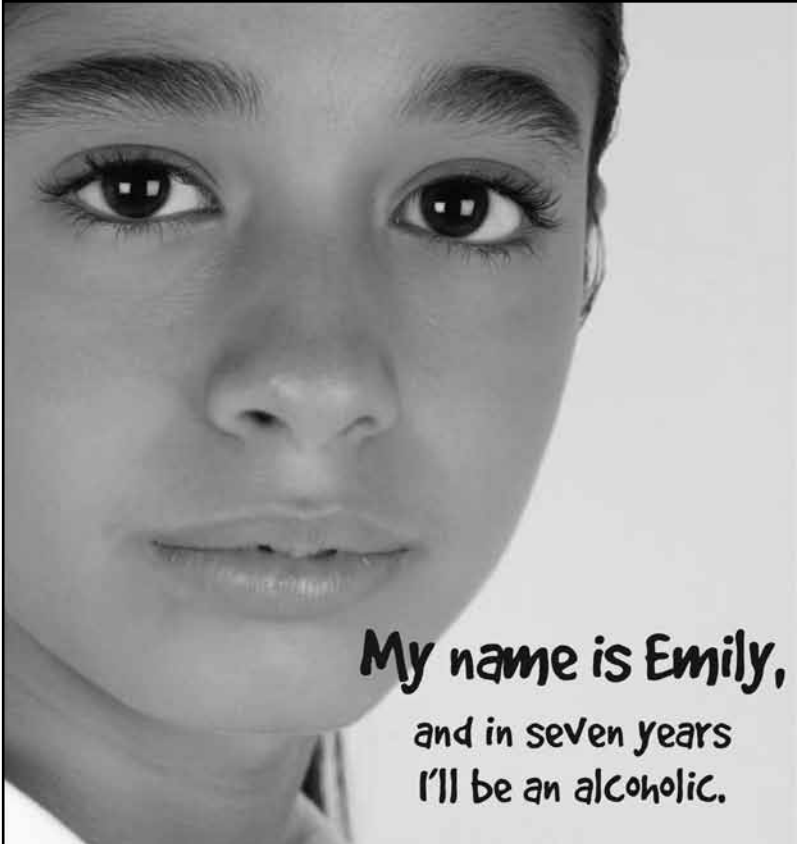
The Office of Healthy Carolinians and the Governor's Task Force are passionate about the ideal of local communities and partnerships actively engaged in and leading community health improvement. We are committed to our partnership with the North Carolina Institute of Medicine, with statewide health care foundations, and with the leadership organizations represented on the Governor's Task Force to disseminate and implement the *North Carolina Prevention Action Plan*, to organize the Healthy NC 2020 Objectives, and to develop a successful health improvement campaign to guide engagement, alignment, transparency, accountability, and leadership. By embracing evidence-based and community-focused improvement strategies, by supporting local health improvement with

policy development and resource deployment, and by helping local coalitions and partnerships connect with robust improvement tools, consulting expertise, health assessment/measurement, and technical assistance, we

can eliminate health disparities, increase health promotion and disease prevention activities, and improve the life-long health of North Carolinians. **NCMJ**

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