

Tarheel Footprints in Health Care

Recognizing unusual and often unsung contributions of individual citizens who have made health care for North Carolinians more accessible and of higher quality

Paul A. Buescher, PhD **Director, State Center for Health Statistics**



North Carolina has a deserved reputation for excellence in collecting and reporting vital and health statistics. This is due in large part to the early development of a State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS) and the quality of individuals who have led that Center. The current director, Paul Buescher, is keeping alive the tradition of objectivity, responsiveness, and accuracy that has marked the SCHS since its beginning. Paul, in a sense, is one of our own at the *North Carolina Medical Journal* since he has edited a regular feature, *Running the Numbers*, for the past 7 years. We wish to recognize him, however, for his work at the Center. Paul has steadily and constructively made the State Center for Health Statistics a trusted and relevant participant in the health policy making process in North Carolina, and his willingness to bring the data of the Center into public forums sets him apart.

Paul became director of the State Center for Health Statistics in 2005 after serving in progressively responsible roles. He began work at the SCHS in 1980 as a statistician and gained a reputation as a productive contributor to its work. In 1993 he became head of the Statistical Services Unit. Having spent most of his career at the SCHS, Paul is intimately familiar with its programs and is highly committed to its ongoing success and improvement. Leah Devlin, state health director, notes that Paul "...is a master of turning data into meaningful information that is routinely used across North Carolina to identify health problems, define effective strategies, and evaluate outcomes. He is incredibly knowledgeable and dedicated—we all stand on his recommendations with absolute confidence."

Paul's role as a communicator is an important asset for both state and community leaders. Paul has been tasked to publicly explain positions that are often hard to grasp by a layperson, such as how an unusual number of cancer cases occurring in a community is unlikely to be due to a specific environmental cause but has a much greater probability of happening due to chance. These kinds of public discussions can become stressful and contentious, but Paul is able, through his calm demeanor and clear language, to make convincing arguments that rely on statistical facts and understanding—a skill that he has mastered.

An Eagle Scout who received his undergraduate degree in Sociology from Louisiana State University, Paul went on to receive a MA in Sociology and a PhD in Sociology/Demography from the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. He has been an adjunct professor in the Department of Maternal and Child Health in the UNC Chapel Hill School of Public Health since 1991 and is a ready and willing mentor to students and faculty at the university.

Paul is an accomplished scholar and has published extensively in the medical and public health literature. He was the recipient of the national 2004 Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Epidemiology Effective Practice at the State Level Award from the Coalition for Excellence in MCH Epidemiology. The Effective Practice Award recognizes individuals who make significant contributions to MCH public health practice through the effective use of data and epidemiology. North Carolina is fortunate that Paul Buescher brings his knowledge and skills to the work of the State Center for Health Statistics.