

Running the Numbers

*A Periodic Feature to Inform North Carolina Healthcare Professionals
About Current Topics in Health Statistics*

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Mental Health and Quality of Life among North Carolina Adults

Mental health problems are serious and widespread in North Carolina. Nearly 24 percent of the approximately one million hospitalizations in North Carolina in 2002 had a mental disorder (including alcohol and drug dependence) listed as either the primary diagnosis (5 percent) or as a contributing condition (19 percent). More than one-fourth of all Medicaid enrollees in North Carolina in 1998 had at least one health service during the year with a mental disorder as a primary or contributing diagnosis, or had a prescription for a drug used in the treatment of mental disorders. These services resulted in \$1.3 billion in Medicaid expenditures for 1998, or approximately 25 percent of the state's total Medicaid expenditures in that year. However, we have not had consistent, reliable data on the *prevalence* of mental conditions in North Carolina's population. The North Carolina Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) provides some information to fill this gap.

The BRFSS is an ongoing random telephone survey of health conditions and risk factors among non-institutionalized persons age 18 and older. It is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is conducted in all U.S. states. During 2001, more than 6,100 surveys were completed in North Carolina. The 2001 BRFSS included a number of questions related to mental health and quality of life. Following are the overall percentages of BRFSS respondents (weighted to reflect the state's population) who:

Said their mental health was not good for more than 7 of the past 30 days (due to stress, depression, and problems with emotions)	10.9%
Felt sad, blue, or depressed for more than 7 of the past 30 days	10.0%
Felt worried, tense, or anxious for more than 7 of the past 30 days	15.6%
Said their disability was due to mental/emotional problems (among those who reported having a disability)	4.7%
Felt very healthy and full of energy for less than 8 of the past 30 days	25.2%
Did not get enough rest or sleep for more than 7 of the past 30 days	33.8%
Rarely or never get the social and emotional support needed	4.4%
Are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life	3.3%
Said pain made it hard to do usual activities, such as self care, work, or recreation for more than 7 of the past 30 days	11.2%

In general, females and persons of lower income reported higher levels of these indicators. Persons with mental health problems are more likely than others to have physical health problems and to engage in behaviors that contribute to poor health (such as smoking, no exercise, and an unhealthy diet).¹ Appropriate treatment can alleviate mental health problems and improve daily functioning.

Complete results from the 2001 North Carolina BRFSS, broken out by demographics and selected counties, are at <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/healthstats/brfss/2001/index.html>. See the Health Status, Quality of Life, and Disability sections.

¹New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. There is no health without mental health. NYC Vital Signs, volume 2, no. 3, April 2003. (Data from the New York City Community Health Survey; see <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pdf/survey/survey-2003mentalhealth.pdf>)