



Buncombe County Health and Human Services

Public Assistance & Work Support Strategies ~ Public Health ~ Social Work Services ~ Veterans Services

Stoney Blevins

Health and Human Services Director

March 19, 2019

Media Contact: (828) 775-1321

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Addressing social factors and health disparities are critical for improving the health of Buncombe County

Buncombe County, NC - Buncombe County continues to hold its position as one of the healthiest communities in the State of North Carolina, according to national County Health Rankings (CHR) released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Health begins where people live, learn, work, and play. Each year, the CHR offers a snapshot of how healthy communities are today and how healthy they are likely to be in the future by measuring a variety of factors known to impact health and quality of life, including access to quality healthcare, health behavior outcomes such as alcohol impaired driving deaths, sexually transmitted diseases, and teen births, as well as social and environmental factors that shape opportunities to be healthy, like education, employment, poverty, and pollution. Results are calculated for each county and compared within each state and against top-performing communities across the nation.

In the 2019 County Health Rankings, Buncombe County ranked 14th in the state for overall health outcomes. The average length of life for Buncombe residents in the 2019 CHR improved to a rank of #19 vs. #23 in 2018.

Buncombe ranked 3rd overall in health factors. Health factors such as access to medical care, health behaviors, education and employment as well as built and physical environment lay the groundwork for the eventual health outcomes of our population.

This is an opportunity for real improvement in important areas according to Jan Shepard, BCHHS Health Director. "We are pleased to see that we are holding the line on some pretty important factors., however, differences between racial and ethnic groups for key health outcomes and social conditions like length of life, birth weight, and childhood poverty rates show there is much work to be done to remove barriers and improve outcomes so all residents of our community have the full opportunity to thrive. As we continue to strengthen our communities by advancing health, safety, and opportunity, we will use this information to guide our efforts." says Shepard.

Buncombe County's Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP), helps coordinate and measure community-wide efforts aimed at improving health outcomes for the whole

P.O. Box 7408, Asheville, NC 28802
(828) 250-5500

buncombecounty.org

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Under the Food Stamp Act and USDA policy, discrimination is prohibited also on the basis of religion or political beliefs.

population. This strong network of cross-sector partner agencies ensures that efforts are aligned, measurable, and responsive to the needs of our community.

“We have a wealth of natural and built environment resources in place to make activity opportunities accessible. The current collaboration between ABIPA and the YMCA of Western North Carolina is a good example of how to increase access and usage,” says JéWana Grier-McEachin, ABIPA Executive Director. ABIPA (Asheville Buncombe Institute of Parity Achievement) is one such CHIP partner driving towards better outcomes. “The Minority Diabetes Prevention Program includes a membership to the YMCA which is an intentional alignment of priorities to impact one of the conditions where health disparities exists.”

“Access to affordable, high-quality early childhood programs can decrease poverty and have significant long-term improvements for children. The annual average cost for a high-quality preschool program (\$9,300) exceeds the cost of sending a child to a NC public university. Many centers can’t attract and retain highly skilled teachers in our competitive job market, leading to a child care shortage. Buncombe Partnership for Children and partners are working to leverage new early childhood funding and recruit and grow new teachers.” Amy Barry, Buncombe Partnership for Children Executive Director.

With a mission to eliminate racism and empower women, the YWCA is another CHIP partner that provides support to pregnant and parenting teens through the Motherlove program to assist in improving healthy birth outcomes and higher high school graduation rates. “In order to help reduce subsequent pregnancies and eliminate the racial disparity in birth weight and rate within the county, Motherlove provides resources such home visits and high school lunch sessions with education and peer support around healthy pregnancy, life skills, and community programs,” explains Kelley Hubbell, Women’s Empowerment Director of the YWCA.

When it comes to raising awareness of issues of health equity and health disparities in our community, Hubbell adds, “The YWCA holds an annual *Stand Against Racism* campaign in the month of April, which provides opportunities for organizations, businesses, and individuals to build community among those working for racial justice.”

“A concrete step towards improvement in the rankings would be for our community to look upstream and see what is holding us in this place. In our efforts toward improved health for our community, we must assure that true understanding of the realities people face are acknowledged and factored in to key improvement plans says Shepard. “Importantly, we must continue to mobilize action toward a resilient community, responding in a trauma informed way, encouraging systems change that can help reduce the barriers that are keeping us from moving forward.”

For more information on the CHR and this year’s rankings, visit www.countyhealthrankings.org.

###