



## Buncombe County Health and Human Services

Public Health ~ Adult & Children's Protective Services ~ Economic Services & Work Strategies  
Parks, Greenways & Recreation ~ Human Resources, Services Support & Finance

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### Buncombe Ranks in Top 20 Healthiest NC counties

Buncombe County ranks #19 in the state when it comes to overall health. Today the Annual County Health Rankings Report for each county in the nation has been released, offering a way for us to take a look at how healthy we are today and how healthy we will be in the future. Buncombe's overall health rankings have stayed in the Top 20 for the last three years and this year also ranks in the top 20 in four of the six major categories: Healthy Outcomes, Health Behaviors, Clinical Care and Social and Economic Factors.

When compared to North Carolina averages, Buncombe meets or exceeds the state averages for 24 of the 30 measures, which contributes to higher rankings in most categories. However, when compared to national benchmarks, we meet or exceed only six of the measures. North Carolina ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation for overall health in 2012 (American Health Rankings 2012), only better than 17 other states. This leaves room for a lot of improvement, even if we were to rank #1 in our state.

The County Health Rankings reinforce the fact that our health is affected by income, education, access to healthy foods and recreation, as well as the health behaviors we adopt and where we live. Although Buncombe County continues to rank well in the categories of health behaviors, clinical care and social/economic factors, the ranking for physical environment factors continues to be in the bottom half of the state (74<sup>th</sup>). In this category, despite the overall lower ranking, there **was significant improvement** in the percentage rate of our low-income population with limited access to healthy foods, which improved by 44% (9% this year compared to 16% last year).

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This is encouraging news for our community members and partners who are working hard to make accessing fruits and vegetables easier– for everyone. The improvements still leave us behind by state and national comparisons. The number of recreational facilities for our population and a new air quality indicator also appear to contribute to the lower rankings in the Physical Environment category. All of the 25 worst NC counties for air quality appear in WNC due to the quality of air from other parts of the US which move into our region. Air quality across NC improves as we move to the northeastern counties, where we find the top 25 counties with the best air quality.

Our county also has fewer recreational facilities in relation to our population. This indicator accounts primarily for facilities that feature exercise and other active physical fitness conditioning or recreational sports activities such as swimming, skating or racquet sports. Unfortunately, the abundance of greenways, bikeways and natural walking and hiking trails in our community is not accounted for in the indicator used for ranking.

In 2012, our community leaders and health professionals reviewed data and identified four public health priorities, which are comparable with the health rankings, indicating a need for improvements that will lead to better health in the future:

- Healthy Living
- Preconception Health
- Early Child Development
- Access to Care

A Public Health Advisory Committee, a newly formed committee of the county’s integrated Health and Human Services (HHS) Board, will be working with the Board and the staff of HHS to guide efforts, in collaboration with community organizations and groups who are working together to make improvements in each of these areas of health.

For more information go to [www.buncombecounty.org](http://www.buncombecounty.org) or to schedule interviews, please contact Buncombe County Department of Health’s Media Phone: (828) 775-1321.

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