



# Cherokee County 2017 *State of the County Health Report*

TO ASSESS, ADDRESS AND ASSURE THE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS OF CHEROKEE COUNTY.

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The Cherokee County Health Department is pleased to present the 2017 State of the County Health Report (SOTCH), with the focus on Cherokee County's top health issues. Cherokee County completed their most recent Community Health Assessment (CHA) in 2015. Chronic Disease Control and Prevention was determined to be the first priority as the number one cause of death in Cherokee County among both men and women. In Cherokee County obesity and disease rates are on the rise with inadequate nutrition and physical activity practices being two of the most common contributing factors. Cancer Control and Prevention was chosen as the second priority and Access to Healthcare was chosen to be the third. This SOTCH report will give an update on how we are working to address these issues, and will also serve to educate Cherokee County residents about the health issues in their community. There have been no new emerging issues affecting the communities health since the 2015 CHA was completed in December 2015.

## Top Health Concerns Based on Primary and Secondary Data

▶ ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

▶ CANCER CONTROL & PREVENTION

▶ CHRONIC DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION

*\*Unless otherwise, all data is from the State Center for Health Statistics*

## Chronic Disease Control & Prevention

During the 2015 CHA and the 2016 SOTCH the number one cause of death in Cherokee County was Chronic Disease. Chronic Disease causes a heavy burden on our citizens in not just Cherokee County but in the Western North Carolina Region, and our state as a whole. Cigarette smoking damages almost every organ of the body. As a community there have been many efforts surrounding the need to education and support surrounding not only managing the many chronic diseases plaguing Cherokee County but to also to begin to focus more efforts toward preventing these diseases. By reducing the number of people affected by these diseases it will in turn decreasing the number of people dying from these diseases.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable deaths in North Carolina and in Cherokee County alone approximately 34% of all cancer deaths are due to lung/bronchus cancer. According to research it is estimated that smoking contributes to more than 80% of all lung cancer deaths while those who are nonsmokers but are exposed to second hand smoke at work or home have a 20-30% percent greater chance of developing lung cancer. Second hand smoke exposure also causes serious health problems such as heart disease, and stroke. Addressing tobacco use is complex and will require the collaborative, planning, action, and coordination of multiple partners in our community. According to the PRC Survey results from the 2015 CHA 24% of respondents said that they were exposed to secondhand smoke at work within the past week. This is increased from 16% in the 2012 CHA. Cherokee County Health Department is continuing to work with the local Coalition for a Safe and Drug Free Cherokee County to educate and promote the adoption of tobacco free policies county wide. Collaborations will also be made in raising awareness of the dangers surrounding E-Cigarettes as more national research is being conducted daily.



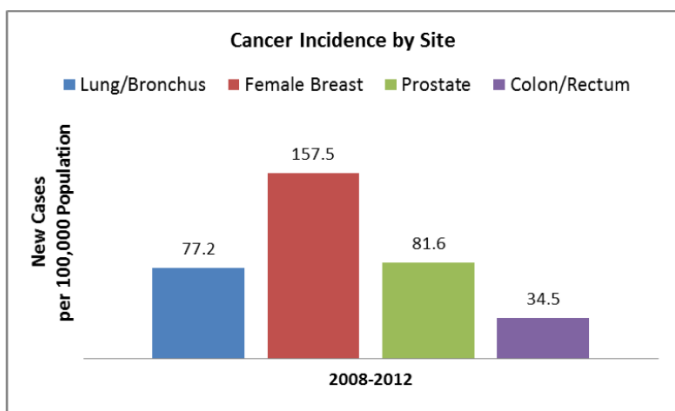
In 2017 the Cherokee County Health Department (CCHD) expanded our tobacco treatment services by beginning to offer both one-on-one counseling as well as group sessions for clients and the general public. Stopping the use of tobacco is challenging in part because of the body's addiction to nicotine. Our tobacco treatment program draws on a wide range of approaches to help a participant quit. Therapies can include nicotine replacement and other tobacco cessation medications, along with practical behavioral strategies for managing tobacco urges and cravings. We also teach relaxation, stress management techniques, mood management approaches both in individual and group settings. Through this program we are able to develop a personalized quitting plan that will maximize participants chances of success.

Within the past year CCHD has also partnered with our local Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch Consultant in providing support and technical assistance to our local Public Housing Agencies with the newly mandated Smoke-Free Rule in Public Housing.

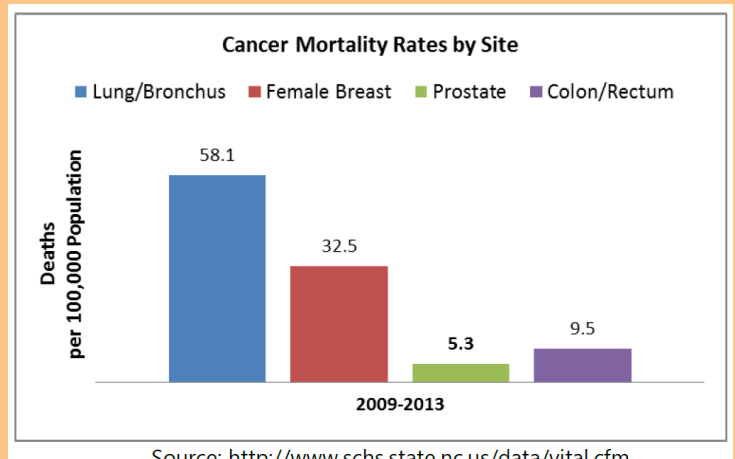
## Cancer Control & Prevention

According to the 2015 CHA Cancer was found to be the second leading cause of death in Cherokee County. Every year in the United States, more than 1.5 million people are diagnosed with cancer and research shows that over half of those could have been prevented through healthy lifestyle choices, screenings, and vaccinations. In Cherokee County we see many opportunities for education, counseling, and screening resources.

While cancer incidence rates have continued to rise especially among breast cancer the actual number of people dying from this type of cancer is beginning to decrease.



Source: [http://www.schs.state.nc.us/data/cancer/incidence\\_rates.htm](http://www.schs.state.nc.us/data/cancer/incidence_rates.htm)



Source: <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/data/vital.cfm>

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services in conjunction with the Cherokee County Health Department through the North Carolina Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (NC BCCCP) have provided hundreds of screening services at low-cost or no-cost to eligible women. BCCCP provides much needed screening services such as breast exams, screening mammograms, pap tests, diagnostic procedures and medical consults. This program focuses on providing access to women who are uninsured, underinsured, and below 250% of the federal poverty level. In Cherokee County it is estimated that 3 out of 10 women in would qualify for this program. CCHD is reaching out to our hospital partners and is working to engaged our faith based community to educate and recruit patients for this lifesaving program. Within these faith based communities we are engaging and educating our at risk populations with information about health issues, lifestyle change, and prevention. In 2017 we served approximately 60 women in Cherokee County and we are anticipating serving more as insurance coverage is once again changing.



Internally within the health department we are also working with our clinical staff on the screening and referral processes within all of our clinics to the NC Quit Line and our in house tobacco treatment program. More specific targeting will include county employees who use tobacco products. Decreasing the number of county employees who use tobacco products will decrease costs to county insurance, lost productivity, and even help reduce the exposure to secondhand smoke by other county employees. We will be working with county Human Resources and Insurer to promote the use of available cessation resources to give them the best possible shot at quitting.

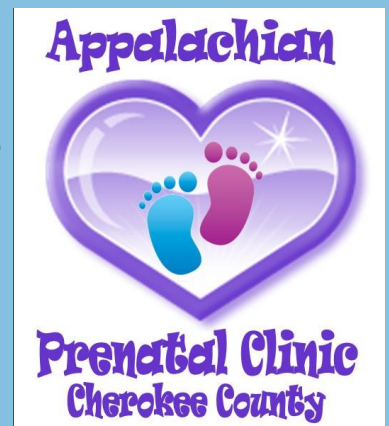
## Access to Healthcare

Access to comprehensive, quality health care services is important for the achievement of health equity and for increasing the quality of a healthy life for everyone. It impacts: overall physical, social, and mental health status; prevention of disease and disability; detection and treatment of health conditions; quality of life; preventable death; and life expectancy. Access to health services means the timely use of personal health services to achieve the best health outcomes. It requires three distinct steps: 1) gaining entry into the health care system; 2) accessing a health care location where needed services are provided; and 3) finding a health care provider with whom the patient can communicate and trust (DHHS, 2010). When conducting the survey for the 2015 CHA we found that the reason most people are not receiving medical care was due to cost/no insurance. As with years passed we have seen a continued increase in the need for free and reduced cost Primary Care here in Cherokee County and throughout the western region. There is a huge need for regular, continuous primary and preventative care. During 2017 CCHD has worked to improve access to care through implementation of Telemedicine for our two school based health center located in outlying areas of our county. The addition of this technology allows school nurses to utilize telehealth software to interact with our full-time provider at our main location in Murphy.



CCHD is using a targeted marketing and promotion to increase the number of immunized children and adults. By reducing out-of-pocket costs for clients more people will be more motivated to receive recommended vaccines for themselves and their children. CCHD has been working to increase insurance acceptance by contracting with numerous health insurers. There will also be additional promotion via social media around the Vaccines for Children (VFC) that is available for children who might not otherwise be vaccinated because of inability to pay. VFC will provide FREE lifesaving vaccines for children through age 18 if they meet the criteria of being Medicaid eligible, uninsured, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Underinsured.

CCHD has also began to address the need for increased access to Prenatal Care. According to 2015 CHA 3 out of 10 women said they did not receive prenatal care during the first trimester in Cherokee County. Through the Prenatal Clinic clients can receive prenatal services for free or at a reduced rate based on a sliding fee scale. This program is providing vital access to prenatal care for mothers during a critical time during their pregnancy therefore reducing low birth weight deliveries as a result. Mothers can also receive access to family planning resources after delivery as well in hopes of increasing birth spacing. During 2017 we saw approximately 33 prenatal patients within our prenatal clinic.



## What's New?

Over the past year Cherokee County has experienced many changes. During 2017 our county saw continued job growth as a result of the Harrah's Valley River Casino and Hotel. The facility has already begun breaking ground on their first expansion to the only year old facility. Partnerships and Community relations from Harrah's has provided volunteers as well as financial contributions to many community coalitions and organizations. One of the largest contributions in respects to public health came through the purchase of a incinerator for the Coalition for a Safe and Drug Free Cherokee County. Casino administration donated generously to help obtain this piece of equipment for our law enforcement community. Through the purchase of this incinerator local law enforcement will be able to more readily dispose of the medication and syringes that are disposed of through the Drop Boxes within Cherokee County. In order to keep family members and friends in our community safe, it is essential to properly dispose of medications so they do not become a safety hazard.

As noted in the 2016 SOTCH report the county's only hospital was accepting requests for proposals during 2016. In June 2017, Murphy Medical Center and Erlanger Health System signed an exclusive Letter of Intent to grow medical services within our community. We are hopeful that the new and fresh resources and management will have a positive impact on our county and the health services we will be able to provide locally. As partners of the hospital we are excited for the opportunity to work with Erlanger in improving and furthering our efforts to create a healthier community for all Cherokee County Residents.

## Morbidity & Mortality

In 2016 the leading causes of death in Cherokee County were heart disease, cancer, and chronic lower respiratory disease. These three conditions made up almost 57% of all county deaths. They were also the leading causes of death in 2013, 2014 and 2015 as well.

**Rank of Cause-Specific Mortality  
Numbers of the Top 5 Leading  
Causes of Death**

Leading Cause of Death	Rank	Deaths
Heart Disease	1	87
Total Cancer	2	77
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	3	27
Alzheimer's Disease	4	21
Cerebrovascular Disease	5	19

1 - Source: <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/interactive/query/lcd/getleadcauses.cfm>

## New and Immerging Issues

### Hepatitis C

As previously noted in our 2016 SOTCH the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified Cherokee County as one of five North Carolina counties identifies as most vulnerable to rapid dissemination of HIV and Hepatitis C infection among people who are intravenous drug users. According to the NC Department of Health and Human Services, the level of vulnerability is based on emergency department visits for opioid and prescription pain medication overdoses, reported cases of acute hepatitis C, chronic hepatitis C data from Medicaid records, percentage of white population and unemployment data. This statistic has increased the concern for many public health agencies.

Hepatitis C treatment has improved dramatically in the past few years. More than ever before, eliminating the Hepatitis C virus from the bloodstream is now accompanied by favorable odds. Efforts to eradicate this virus have been steadily gaining momentum, as the pharmaceutical industry has made Hepatitis C drug development a priority. Unfortunately, all of the medications that constitute the standard of care in 2015 are prohibitively priced in the U.S. A three-month course of Hepatitis C treatment typically runs between \$80,000 and \$120,000.

To help decrease the spread of disease, Cherokee County Health Department and local Coalitions are partnering together to focus on capacity building for mental health services, community education, HCV media and messaging, addiction treatment, lab testing, medical care, and harm reduction.

In 2017 Cherokee County Health Department began collaborating with Carolina Hepatitis Mentorship Program (CHAMP). CHAMP is a telementorship peer based training program designed to link primary providers to academic mentors for disease-specific training. As a result our Provider is able to provide case management and care for patients seeking treatment for Hepatitis C. Through collaborating with pharmaceutical companies prescription assistance programs and our contracts with insurance providers we are able to provide qualifying patients with the opportunity to receive this much needed treatment in a much more affordable setting. Although we are able to provide medication assistance and treatment our resources are still very limited for critical patient labs costs which can range from \$500-\$2000 depending on the patient. Although we are removing other barriers to care, the burden of the large population suffering from this disease and the possible costs associated are still issues we will continue to address and assess as an organization and with the state.

\*All data and information sourced from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov>

This SOTCH report will be available to the community partners and the general population of the Cherokee County website, at the Nantahala Regional Library and Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce. The Cherokee County Board of Health will be presented with this information and the Cherokee County Commissioners will also receive this report through direct mailing.

To help us work toward a healthier Cherokee County or for more information on projects mentioned in this document please contact 828-837-1212

January 4, 2018