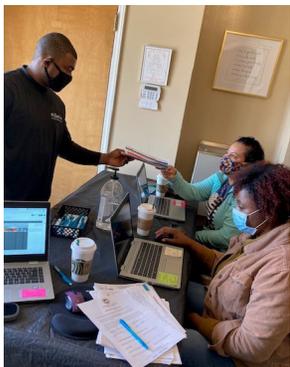


# 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

## Forging Ahead

CATAWBA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

Our mission is to promote, protect, and improve the health of the community by assessing and responding to needs, assuring services, developing policies, and fostering collaboration.





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 COUNTY-SERVICES/PUBLIC-HEALTH](http://WWW.CATAWBACOUNTYNC.GOV/COUNTY-SERVICES/PUBLIC-HEALTH)

**A special thanks to the Catawba County Board of Health for their service during FY 2020-21**

- Dr. David Hamilton Jr.
- Ms. Gloria Costin
- Dr. Matthew Davis
- Mr. John Dollar
- Dr. Dana Greene
- Mr. Dan Hunsucker
- Mr. Austin Allran
- Mr. William Pitts
- Mr. Brian Potocki
- Dr. Gail Hamilton Brandon
- Ms. Susan Knowles, RN

## CONTENTS

Service Areas .....	3
Demographics .....	3
Finance .....	3
COVID-19 Response .....	4-7

### Program Area Highlights

Environmental Health .....	8
WIC .....	8
Adult Health .....	9
Immunizations .....	9
LiveWell Catawba .....	9
Early Childhood Support Team ...	10
Communicable Disease.....	10
School Health.....	11
Care Management .....	11
Partnerships .....	12
Farmer’s Market.....	12

# Message from the Health Director



**Jennifer McCracken,  
 RN, BSN, MPA**

COVID-19 response dominated the work of Catawba County Public Health this fiscal year. Despite the countless hours of hard work our staff devoted to pandemic response, they were still able to provide a high level of service in all of our service areas, **forging ahead** with efforts to prevent the spread of other communicable diseases, connect families with nutritious foods, ensure that restaurants were safe, help families move forward with home construction, and much more. Thanks to our staff and support from other county departments, Catawba County Public Health is positioned to continue providing services at a high level while recommitting to pandemic response in the coming year.

# Public Health Employee of the Year



**Lina has a passion for our community and has painted Catawba County Public Health in a positive light on countless occasions throughout our COVID-19 response.**

**Lina Lemus** has been employed with CCPH for more than two years. Since that time, she has become a dedicated employee, willing to go the extra mile to help participants and her own teammates. She works hard to provide outstanding customer service and wants to ensure that community needs are met, all while displaying a positive attitude each and every day.

Lina has continued to show hard work and dedication this year during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her willingness to serve as a frontline worker and providing her bilingual skills to assist the community in the CCPH testing efforts has been outstanding. From the beginning, when testing began, Lina’s positive attitude never wavered and she was always willing to lend a hand when needed. She never complained and looked at this as a way to help serve her community during this critical time. Lina has worked more testing and vaccination events than almost anyone else in our agency. She has worked testing events during some of the hottest days of summer, the coldest days of winter, and through several strong rain storms, and yet her positive attitude never falters. Since our shift to vaccination, Lina has volunteered to work most of our vaccination clinics, and is always available to help whenever called upon. She consistently provides compassionate care and support to all those she assists.

# Service Areas

- » **FAMILY PLANNING** — Provides services related to family planning and birth control
- » **SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE** — Confidential services to prevent the spread of common sexually transmitted diseases
- » **BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCER CONTROL PROGRAM (BCCCP)** — Provides cancer prevention services to older adult women
- » **WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)** — Nutrition program that serves children from birth to age 5 and pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women
- » **IMMUNIZATIONS** — Offers all required immunizations for children, travel and other vaccinations for adults, and flu shots for all ages
- » **COMMUNICABLE DISEASE** — Monitors disease reporting and provides management and treatment of communicable diseases
- » **SCHOOL HEALTH** — Ensures children in grades K-12 have access to preventive and acute health care
- » **EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT TEAM** — Provides health services to children, staff, and families in child care centers
- » **CARE MANAGEMENT FOR AT RISK CHILDREN (CMARC)** — Supports healthy development of children ages birth to 5
- » **CARE MANAGEMENT FOR HIGH RISK PREGNANCY (CMHRP)** — Connects pregnant women with resources during pregnancy and after childbirth to help ensure healthy birth outcomes
- » **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH** — Provides inspection and plan review services to ensure clean water, sanitary septic services, and works with facilities and restaurants to encourage the use of procedures that protect the public

## ASSURANCE PARTNERSHIPS

- » **CATAWBA VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER - MATERNITY SERVICES** — Prenatal care for women, including those with high-risk medical conditions
- » **KINTEGRA FAMILY DENTISTRY - HICKORY** — Family dental services for children and adults who qualify
- » **CATAWBA PEDIATRIC ASSOCIATES, PA** — Comprehensive medical care and immunizations for children

# Finance

Catawba County Public Health strives to meet the needs of the community through the responsible and effective use of monetary resources.

## Budgeted Revenues

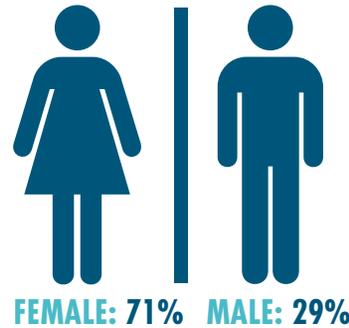
STATE/FEDERAL .....	\$1,947,124
FEES.....	\$1,861,631
COUNTY .....	\$4,140,825
OTHER .....	\$1,637,321

## Budgeted Expenses

ADMINISTRATION .....	\$949,520
CASE MANAGEMENT .....	\$690,113
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH .....	\$1,428,398
SCHOOL HEALTH .....	\$2,000,918
CLINICAL/PROGRAM SERVICES .....	\$4,517,952
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$9,586,901</b>

# Who We Serve

## Clinical Services



## RACIAL BREAKDOWN

WHITE .....	77%
AFRICAN-AMERICAN .....	18%
ASIAN .....	5%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE....	<1%
MULTI-RACIAL/OTHER .....	<1%

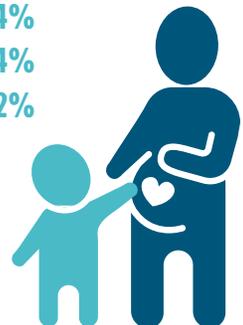
## Women, Infants & Children (WIC) (average month)

### RACIAL BREAKDOWN

WHITE .....	72%
AFRICAN-AMERICAN .....	14%
ASIAN .....	9%
MULTI-RACIAL/OTHER .....	5%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE....	<1%

### AGES

INFANTS .....	24%
CHILDREN AGES 1-5.....	54%
WOMEN .....	22%



## COVID-19 RESPONSE

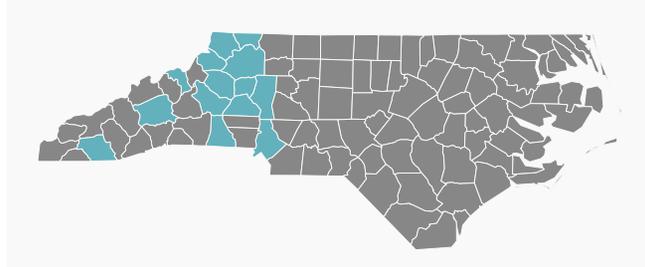
# Vaccination Planning

In mid-2020, as we first heard word of vaccines being developed for COVID-19, we convened our Epi team and Emergency Services partners to discuss what implementing mass vaccinations might look like in the coming months in Catawba County.

We reviewed previous mass distribution plans and began tailoring those to COVID-19 vaccine. As more information started to become available through the state, we were able to begin making more concrete plans, deciding on a site location at the Hickory Metro Convention Center. This proved to be an excellent facility choice, as it was easily recognizable, accessible from major thoroughfares, close to a Greenway Transportation bus stop, with convenient parking for people with mobility needs and ample parking to handle crowds. This location also served us well during the winter, when adverse weather conditions could have dramatically affected our operations if we had chosen an outdoor site.

### Site and staffing

When laying out the site, we looked at what would offer us flexibility in staffing



**We have transferred out vaccine to 14 counties around the region, some of which are very rural or do not have the same level of resources as Catawba County.**

as the number of people who wanted the shot expanded or contracted, what would be convenient for our county's residents, especially those with access and functional needs, we planned for efficient throughput and a process that would be clear and easy to understand for staff and residents alike, and a clinic flow that would provide as much as possible for client comfort and privacy.

### Storage Foresight

When we began hearing that the vaccines might need to be stored in an ultra-low temperature freezer, we proactively sought out a supplier and purchased one to ensure that we would be prepared for that scenario. That purchase allowed us to begin receiving shipments of vaccine before other providers



**We began COVID-19 vaccine administration at the Hickory Metro Convention Center, which allowed us to vaccinate around 1,000 people some days.**

in North Carolina, enabling us to push out vaccine into our community as soon as it was received. Because of the storage capacity this brings to our community, we have been able to serve as a hub for vaccine transfers both in and out of Public Health and are a distribution site for our entire region's vaccine supply. Looking past COVID-19, the freezer gives us flexibility in storing more than just COVID-19 vaccine long-term.

### Paperless Process

We decided that our vaccination process should be paperless from the start, which reduced the administrative burden of administering 500-1,000 shots a day. Our entire process was widely lauded by the public, and we have an entire bulletin board full of thank-yous from people from all walks of life who received their vaccines through our efforts.



### Joint Effort

As vaccine became available, we noticed people were scheduling appointments with all three local vaccine providers, so we partnered with both local hospital systems to ensure a coordinated way for individuals to make appointments. This provided convenience for residents who were trying to make appointments, prevented many “missed appointments,” allowing for better planning, and helped all three partners better manage vaccine supply. Out of this partnership grew [catawbavaccine.org](http://catawbavaccine.org), which allowed residents to request an appointment and receive a call back from a provider with available supply. We also stood up a coordinated phone line so residents would have a single entry point to schedule an appointment.



and the state began inching toward Phases 3 and 4 (essential workers) being eligible for vaccine, we planned and stood up a system to schedule large numbers of people through their employer, which reduced strain on the scheduling system and provided a simple online tool for employers to use to conveniently get their employees vaccinated. We partnered with the Chamber and the Catawba County Economic Development Commission to reach employers and scheduled staff for nearly 200 companies during this time.

In one of our largest-scale efforts, we offered vaccinations to employees of our county’s three school systems plus all of our county’ child care centers. We gave thousands of vaccines to these individuals in only a matter of days, partnering with both Frye Regional Medical Center and Catawba Valley Medical Center to provide shots to this population, which interacts with approximately 25,000 children a day. The effort to vaccinate educators also extended to Lenoir-Rhyne University and Catawba

### Educators and Other Essential Workers

As supply became somewhat more plentiful



Valley Community College, where we vaccinated staff and students alike.

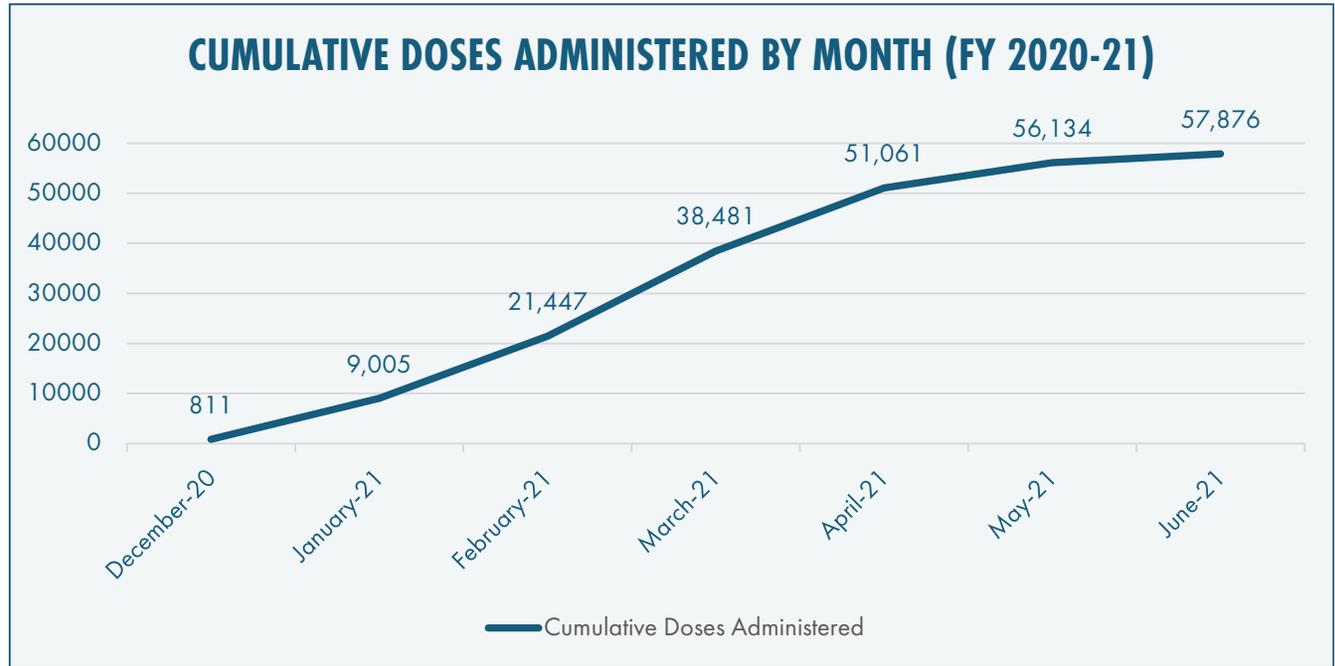
### Extending Partnerships

From the outset, we adopted a strategic planning process where we engaged stakeholders and other experts to assess the needs and resources already in our community.

From this, we learned that pediatric practices and OB-GYN practices were eager to vaccinate residents, and we became the first health department in North Carolina to transfer vaccine to these practices, expanding vaccinations out into the community and serving people through their own trusted providers.

### Equity Work

We also heard the need for equitable distribution and partnered with StarMed to go out into the community, specifically into areas with a high concentration of people from historically marginalized communities to provide vaccination events aimed at



**“I just wanted to express my compliments to the county and especially to the health department. My wife and I just had our first COVID shot and it was a pleasant experience. They have it down to a military precision and know what they’re doing and it was no stress whatsoever. Just as a couple of citizens, we want to let you know that you have a good team over there...”**

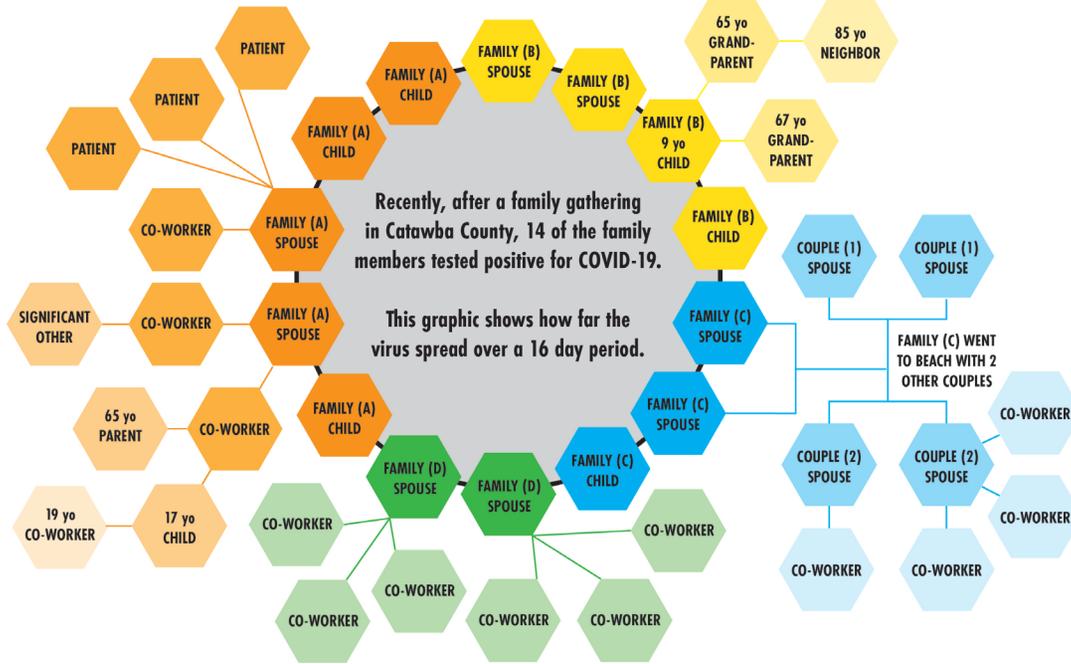
— TERRELL RESIDENT

giving those individuals ready access to the vaccine. We deployed our Community Health Advocates, who educated individuals in these communities on the vaccine, its safety and effectiveness. Because of the success of this model, we were also able to expand it to area businesses, where the Community Health Advocates would provide education and StarMed would provide vaccine at an on-site event.

### Transition

Once vaccination demand began trending down, we planned how we would transition vaccination to the Public Health building. This transition included planning for some people to receive their first dose at the Metro Center and second dose at Public Health, and others to receive both doses at Public Health. This process went smoothly, thanks to advance communication and planning.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE



## Community Spread Explained

We received national and international media attention and widespread community praise after developing and releasing a case study accompanied by a column that demonstrated what community spread actually looks like in Catawba County. For the graphic, we used a real situation where more than two dozen people attended a family gathering. Attendees did not wear masks or observe physical distancing at this gathering, and 14 people who attended subsequently tested positive

for COVID-19. Before they started to show symptoms, they continued with their daily lives, going to work and taking a vacation with other families. This set into motion a person-to-person contact chain that spread COVID-19 to 41 people in 9 different families and 8 different workplaces. We have since been recognized as one of 10 winners of the Local Government Federal Credit Union Innovation Award for this highly visual way to illustrate the concept of community spread.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

### LONG-TERM CARE OUTBREAKS:

Outbreaks of COVID-19 flared up in our county’s long-term care facilities in July and August 2020, then sustained outbreaks began in January 2021, lasting several months. Since then, many long-term care residents and staff received COVID-19 vaccines, which has kept subsequent large-scale outbreaks at bay.

**CASE TRENDS:** We saw the largest numbers of new daily COVID-19 cases from December 2020 through January 2021, just as the vaccine was becoming available. After peaking early in the year, numbers decreased until there were only a handful of new cases per day at the end of the fiscal year.

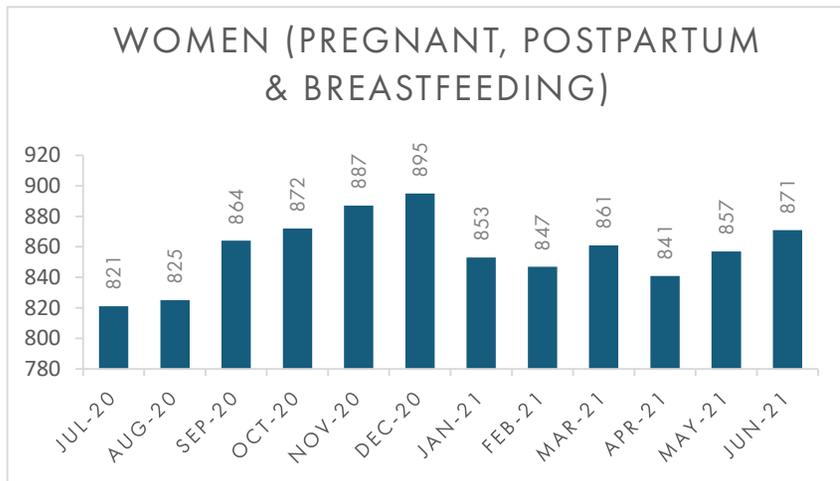
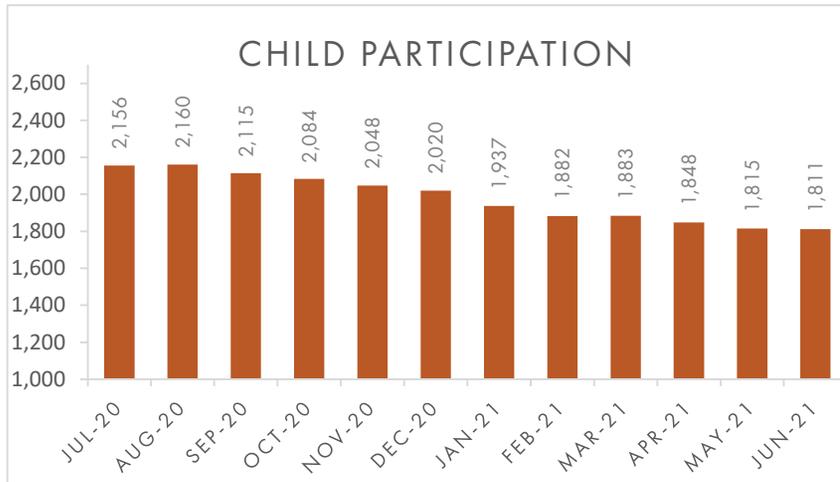
**BACK TO SCHOOL:** In the spring 2021 school semester, we piloted the use of rapid COVID-19 testing for students and athletic teams. Based on this program’s success, our nurses now regularly test in the school setting.

**PARTNERSHIP WITH STARMED:** As we went through the winter of 2020, we knew vaccines were on the horizon and transitioned our free testing over to a new community partner, StarMed. After the success of this partnership, we once again partnered with StarMed to provide on-site vaccinations at events and employers as supply became available.

# Continued Service

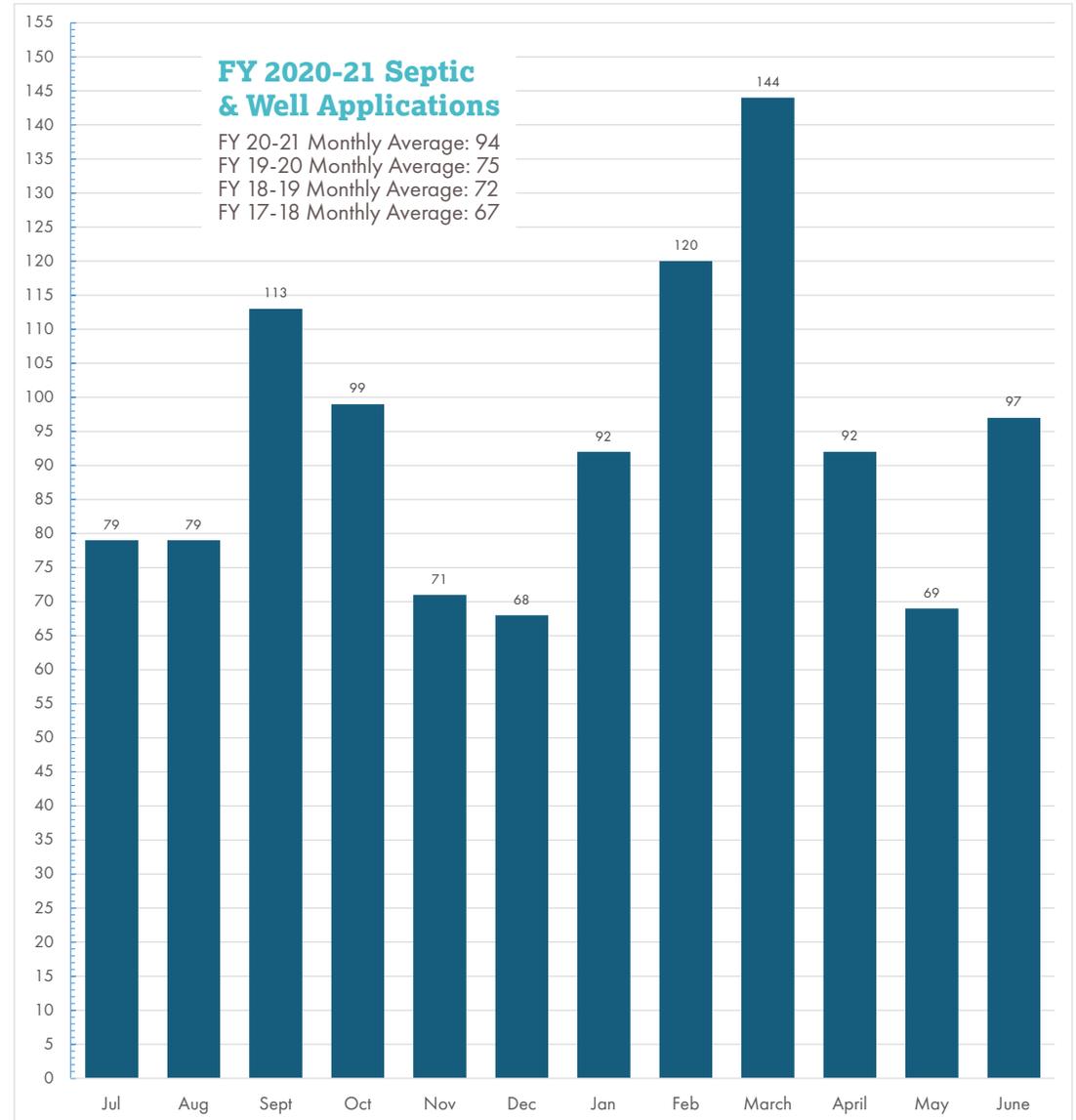
The Catawba County Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program was able to continue providing a high level of service throughout the pandemic, thanks to temporary waivers from the state. We were allowed to provide services over the phone and online instead of in person. When necessary, in-person visits took place. The state also continued automatic benefit issuances to eligible families and allowed substitution of items, which guaranteed access to nutritious foods.

**As of the end of April 2021, Catawba County WIC served an average of 3,821 women and children per month.**



# Managing Growth

Environmental Health received an average of 94 well and septic applications a month in 2020-21, well over previous years' monthly averages. More than half of the applications were for new construction of homes and businesses, additions to homes, construction of new decks or pools, and people applying for "perc tests" before purchasing and building on new property. Many of those applications are in the rapidly-growing area around Lake Norman, in Sherrills Ford, Denver and Terrell.



# Preventing Disease

**57,876**  
 COVID-19 vaccines administered to individuals age 12 and up.

**1,844**  
 other vaccines given to 1,008 children and adults.

**324**  
 flu shots given during the 2020-21 flu season.

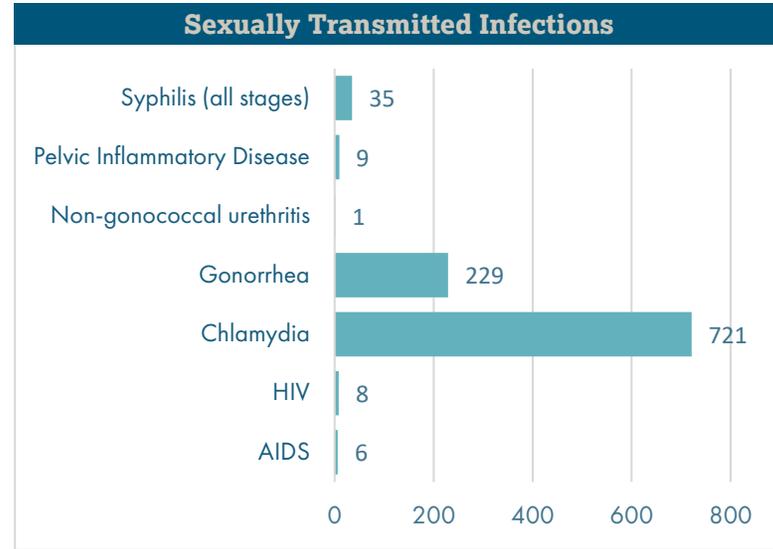
# Balancing Service, COVID Response

The Adult Health clinic served 2,150 clients in FY 2020-21, including those needing breast and cervical cancer screening, family planning services and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) testing and treatment.

Our staff continued to see patients in person during the pandemic with safety measures in place. Staff also helped with COVID-19 vaccine administration while also maintaining continuous services in the Adult Health clinic.

## By the Numbers

- » 108 women received Breast and Cervical Cancer Control services.
- » Staff conducted 1,337 visits for family planning.
- » The number of people infected with syphilis and chlamydia increased this year. This is consistent with nationwide trends.



## Respect for All:

We served a transgender client who was highly complimentary of our entire staff. The client had been worried about coming in because of being transgender and was concerned about potentially being judged. The client left saying she will let her friends know how great her experience was and will encourage them to utilize our services in the future.



# Strategically Improving Community Health

Our Community Health Improvement Plan strategically looks at how to address our community's top health priorities. It guides the work of Catawba County Public Health, LiveWell Catawba, and our participating community partners. Four workgroups with approximately 15 active participants apiece are addressing the top concerns to come out of the Community Health Assessment process. The behavioral health workgroup includes leaders in behavioral health and people from other professions who have

an interest in making positive change in this area. The chronic disease workgroup is a multidisciplinary group looking at underlying causes for diseases that affect much of our county's population in one way or another. The Catawba County Food Council includes community partners that are focusing on ways to increase healthy food consumption, especially in communities where there is not easy access to fruits and vegetables, offer opportunities for healthier choices and level the playing field for everyone. The LiveWell

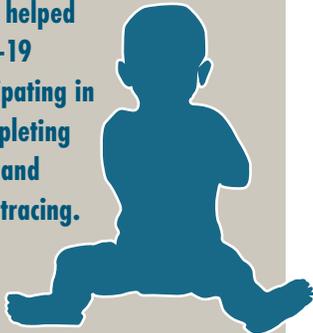
at Work group focuses on providing a culture of health in the workplace. This is particularly important, as it directly affects the health and wellbeing of our county's workforce. It is also an opportunity for workplace leaders from all sectors to come together and address underlying factors for health outcomes. All these groups have a few commonalities – they are driven by partner agencies coming together to address a shared goal and leverage all of our community's available resources to do so.

# Supporting Children

Our Early Childhood Support Team provided continued service for our area’s child care centers, all while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. ECST nurses trained 263 child care staff in more than 48 classes on health and safety of children in the child care setting. They were also able to continue transitioning children with chronic health conditions to the schools nurses for entry into kindergarten and taught several classes on healthy lifestyles for parents of children enrolled in child care.

## COVID-19

- » ECST nurses provided education and consultation on protocols to prevent spread of COVID-19 within child care centers.
- » ECST nurses provided education to staff and families on ways to prevent disease transmission at home and in the community.
- » ECST nurses linked families to COVID-19 testing and other community resources.
- » ECST nurses have helped manage the COVID-19 pandemic by participating in testing events, completing case investigations and performing contact tracing.



# Addressing Disease Trends

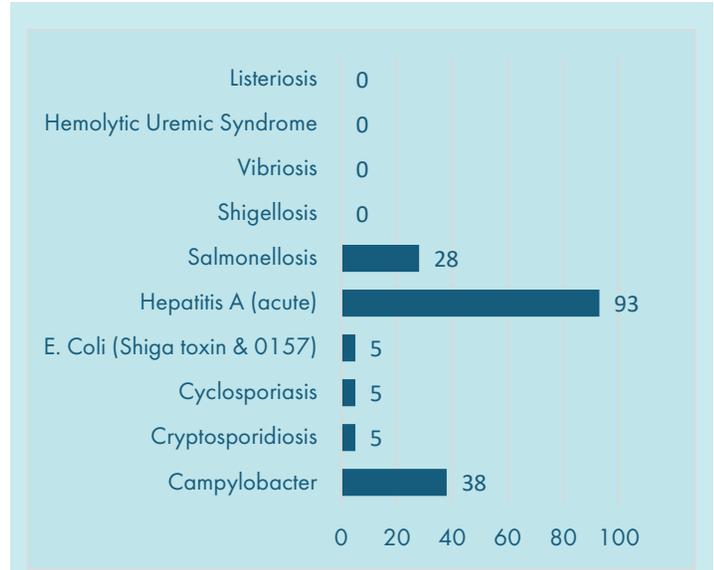
Our Communicable Disease team was able to manage routine communicable disease and tuberculosis investigations while continuing to fight through the COVID-19 pandemic. Our team has gained experience in prioritizing case investigations, contact tracing, and overall time management skills to help us serve our community efficiently, and the team has persevered through the numerous challenges this year has brought.

» **COVID-19:** Our Communicable Disease team, alongside nurses and other staff from across Public Health, responded to 18,835 reported cases of COVID-19 in FY 2020-21. Weekly cases peaked in December 2020 and January 2020, then dropped significantly through the end of the fiscal year. Sadly, by the end of the year, there had been 296 COVID-19 deaths reported.

» **Hepatitis A Outbreak:** We marked the second year of responding to an expanding nationwide outbreak of Hepatitis A that is affecting mostly individuals who have used drugs and individuals who have experienced homelessness. In Catawba County, there were 63 new cases of Hepatitis A diagnosed in the first six months of 2021, up from 34 in all of 2020 and 1 case in 2019. We continued working with community partners to combat the ongoing outbreak and these collaborations will result in off-site clinics for Hepatitis A vaccines beginning July 2021. At Public Health, we continue to offer enhanced screening and testing, and offer Hepatitis A and B vaccines at no charge to individuals at increased risk.

» **Hepatitis Coalition:** Since 2017, the coalition has focused on providing seamless, coordinated care for those with Hepatitis C. Based on an overall increase in hepatitis cases, the coalition will expand its scope to include Hepatitis A, B and C and is also looking to collaborate with surrounding counties in the 2021-22 fiscal year.

» **Influenza:** We experienced a light flu season in 2020-21, thanks in large part to COVID-19 precautions



## GASTROINTESTINAL DISEASE

We saw a 46% increase in reported cases of gastrointestinal illness from FY 2019-20 to FY 2020-21. Although roughly half the number of salmonella cases were reported, the expanding Hepatitis A outbreak drove the overall increase.

such as masking, increased hand washing and social distancing. Because both COVID-19 and influenza spread in much the same way, preventing one also limits spread of the other. Catawba County did not record a single flu-related death in the 2020-21 influenza season.

» **Expanded Capacity:** We were able to hire an additional Communicable Disease Nurse to assist in investigating tuberculosis and other communicable disease reports.

» **Electronic Records:** We transitioned our tuberculosis visit records into a paperless system via CureMD, the same Electronic Health Record software that is used in the Adult Health clinic. This helps our nurses more easily offer seamless care for these individuals.

# School Nurse Program

The 2020-21 school year posed unique challenges, as schools began the school year with remote learning and transitioned during the school year to full in-person learning. Here is a look at some of the work school nurses were able to accomplish in all three local districts in the face of the pandemic.

**1 to 854** NURSE TO STUDENT RATIO



## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

As all three local school systems resumed in-person instruction in spring 2021, school nurses were integral in helping school leadership and educators prepare for providing a safe, healthy environment for children. School nurses are also responsible for following guidelines in the Strong Schools NC Toolkit, which

outlines procedures for ensuring that students, educators and other school staff were quarantined if they had been exposed to COVID-19 and that people who tested positive were isolated. They advised families on measures they could take at home and out in the community to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and worked closely with athletic teams and other extracurricular activities to help keep students and

adults healthy. School nurses conducted rapid testing with parental permission for students who became ill while at school and linked parents whose children became ill outside school hours to places where they could obtain testing for their child for COVID-19 in the community. Catawba County Public Health's school nurses also participated in the administration of COVID-19 vaccines to the community at the Hickory Metro Convention Center beginning in December 2020.

**1,984**  
RAPID TESTS PERFORMED IN SCHOOLS



## Dedication to Nutrition

Thanks to strong participation this year from our shoppers, the Public Health

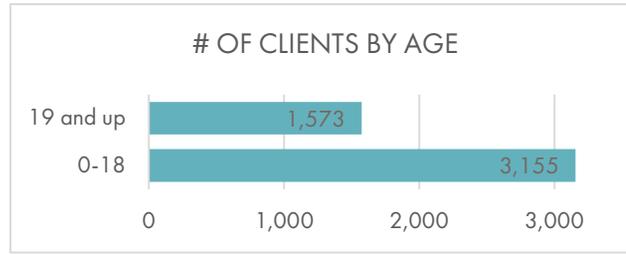


Farmers Market served 2,485 customers and brought in more than \$18,000 in non-cash revenue for our local farmers.

Market shoppers included including the general public, WIC participants, SNAP beneficiaries, people coming for COVID-19 vaccines, and people who received Bonus Bucks and Double Bucks, thanks to funding from LiveWell Catawba.

## Dental Access

Located in the Public Health building, Kintegra Family Dentistry - Hickory serves individuals from babies through age 19 and some adults, including women receiving Medicaid. In FY 2020-21, the clinic provided service at 4,730 visits, including routine client education, in-office preventive care, and surgery. This ongoing valued partnership ensures that children and vulnerable adults have access to high quality dental care.



## Helping Mothers

The prenatal clinic at Public Health is operated through a partnership with Catawba Valley Medical Center-Maternity Services, which provided 6,133 visits for pregnant women in FY 2020-21. The partnership ensures that women have access to high quality prenatal care, without regard to financial status, when the mother seeks care, or risk. Early prenatal care increases the likelihood of healthy babies being born, preventing hospital stays and other poor outcomes for babies and mothers. There were 364 babies born this year whose mothers sought care with CVMC-MS.

Through a partnership with Kintegra Family Medicine, the clinic provided medication-assisted treatment to 4 women with a history of substance use. When these mothers deliver, their babies spend less time in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and have shorter hospital stays.

# Care Management Programs

### CARE MANAGEMENT FOR HIGH-RISK PREGNANCY



- » Helped women navigate care during the COVID-19 pandemic and linked women with COVID-19 resources and vaccination
- » Supported overall COVID-19 response efforts by conducting case investigation and contact tracing, and answering questions and concerns from the public
- » Continued to increase families' access to healthy foods through enhanced collaboration with Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program
- » Each care manager carries 50-65 clients on their case load
- » Transitioning to working with the state's selected 5 managed health plans to coordinate our role in Medicaid transformation

### Family Success Story:

Maria Hawkins, BSW, worked with a single-parent family with 4 children. The mother and 2 children caught COVID, all were sick and there were no family or friends able to help the mother get groceries and medications. Maria worked with community resources to obtain food, medications and other supplies. The impact she made was like the difference in light and dark.

### CARE MANAGEMENT FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN

- » Helped families navigate care during the COVID-19 pandemic and linked families with COVID-19 resources and vaccination
- » Supported overall COVID-19 response efforts by conducting case investigation and contact tracing, and answering questions and concerns from the public
- » Continued to increase families' access to healthy foods through enhanced collaboration with Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program
- » Focused on the foster care population to ensure that children in foster care receive services according to the Fostering Perspectives NC Initiative
- » Each care manager carries 50-60 clients on their case load
- » Transitioning to working with the state's selected 5 managed health plans to coordinate our role in Medicaid transformation