



2021-2022

catawba county  
public health

# Annual Report

## RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY, INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

### DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Each year brings with it a unique set of challenges, opportunities and successes, and fiscal year 2021-22 marked a year of adaptation, as Catawba County Public Health continued to respond to COVID-19

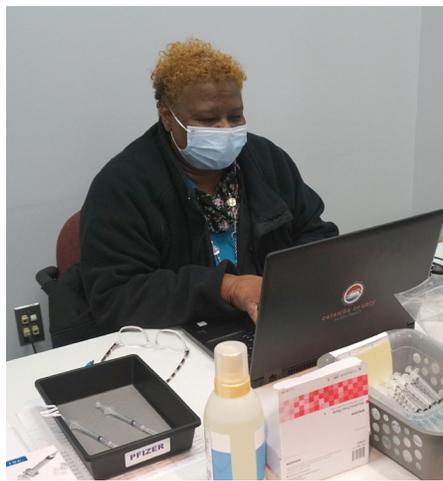


**Catawba County  
Public Health  
Director Jennifer  
McCracken**

while also responding to a changing communicable disease landscape, major changes in several areas due to Medicaid's transition to managed care, and a

nationwide infant formula shortage.

While COVID-19 still dominated large parts of our work, with a surge in cases and deaths early in the year, and the Delta wave that began just as children were headed back to school, and then a third, much larger Omicron wave, which hit hard at the end of the year, Public Health staff from all sectors stepped up to the challenges of



**The COVID-19 vaccine clinic transitioned from the Hickory Metro Convention Center to the Catawba County Public Health facility in FY 2021-22.**

responding to this ever-evolving pandemic, ensuring that our community had the resources it needed for people to stay healthy.

School Health staff helped all three local school systems navigate challenges, as did our Early Childhood Support Team in child care facilities. WIC once again pivoted and offered services both in-person and over the phone to ensure that families had access to good nutrition, even during a pandemic.

Public Health staff also faced an increase in the TB footprint in our county, addressing more cases of both active and latent TB, a continuation of a trend started the year before. Staff continued to address a growing Hepatitis A outbreak that swept through the state, providing vaccine in the community to those who were most vulnerable. By the end of the year, their efforts resulted in a dramatic drop in cases in Catawba County, and the team was honored with a statewide award recognizing their work, in addition to multiple speaking engagements to share their keys to success. Late in the fiscal year, WIC staff responded to a nationwide shortage of infant formula, and helped some families locate difficult-to-find specialty formulas, while guiding others through the process of changing from a formula that was unavailable to an equivalent one that was. Medicaid transformation brought unique challenges for care management staff, as they learned how to work through five separate insurance plans while continuing

to provide seamless support to the children and mothers in their care.

Other program areas have also made an impact on an individual level. Perhaps no better example than the everyday work of the Care Management for At-Risk Children program, where we helped a new mother find the services she needed for her child and return to high school herself. This seemingly everyday action could potentially

**Although 2021-2022 posed unique challenges, Catawba County Public Health staff rose to the occasion, responding to a pandemic and increase in other communicable diseases, and continuing to provide the highest level of service to our community, and building for the future.**

impact that family for years to come, as education is linked to earning potential, which means the child is less likely to end up in a situation of generational poverty. Looking down the road, this family will be healthier — all because a care manager took the time to help this young mother obtain services and return to school. By looking at

individuals’ needs, we are building community strength.

Looking to the future, the Adult Health clinic was able to ensure continuity of services by adding a LEEP machine, which prevents our clients from having to be referred elsewhere for services, allowing them to continue care with us as their trusted provider.

Although 2021-2022 posed unique challenges, Catawba County Public Health staff rose to the occasion, responding to a pandemic and increase in other communicable diseases, and continuing to provide the highest level of service to our community, and building for the future.

— Jennifer McCracken,  
Catawba County Public Health Director

**CATAWBA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH  
THANK YOU TO BOARD MEMBERS WHO  
SERVED DURING THE 2021-22 FY.**

Susan Knowles, Dr. Gail Hamilton-Brandon, Dr. David Hamilton, Gloria Costin, William Pitts, Dr. Matthew Davis, Austin Allran, Brian Potocki, John Dollar and Dr. Dana Greene.

**FINANCE**

**REVENUES**

State Grants: \$5,159,308  
Private Grants/Donations: \$55,250  
Outside Funding for School Nurses: \$1,330,940  
Fee Revenue: \$1,055,388  
Medicaid Revenue: \$1,370,237  
Other Revenue: \$1,916,475

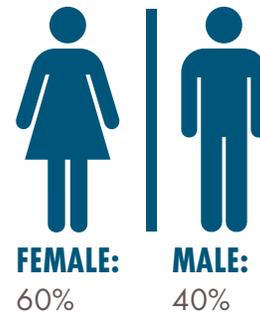
**EXPENDITURES**

Administration: \$1,031,872  
Care Management: \$1,060,443  
Environmental Health: \$1,593,470  
School Health: \$3,596,632  
Clinical Programs and Services: \$3,605,181

**2021-22 FY TOTAL: \$10,887,598**

**WHO WE SERVE**

**CLINICAL SERVICES**



**RACIAL  
BREAKDOWN**

White..... 79%  
African-American.... 15%  
Asian..... 5%  
Other..... <1%

**PRIMARY  
LANGUAGES**

English..... 89%  
Spanish ..... 11%  
Others ..... <1%

**WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)**

**RACIAL  
BREAKDOWN**

White..... 78%  
African-American.... 13%  
Asian..... 9%  
Other..... <1%

**AGES**

Infants ..... 24%  
Children 1-5.... 54%  
Women ..... 22%

## 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

## RECOGNITION

» Catawba County Public Health was recognized as one of 10 winners of the **Local Government Federal Credit Union Innovation Award**, which celebrates solutions that improve services delivered to counties' citizens. Our use of a highly visual way of illustrating community spread led to hundreds of thousands of people in our

community and beyond understand how COVID-19 moves through the population through what seem like routine social interactions (July 2021).

» **Lenoir-Rhyne University** recognized Jennifer McCracken through its community service award, which



We were awarded a **Key to the City of Conover** in recognition of our hard work and dedication in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic (November 2021).

names her an honorary Bear after helping guide the university through the last year and a half of the pandemic as a member of the Presidential COVID-19 Task Force (September 2021).

» Staff were asked to present at the **NC Viral Hepatitis Task Force Meeting** and at the **United States Conference on HIV/AIDS**. We provided history and background on Catawba County's Hepatitis Coalition and the goals that this group

has accomplished. The coalition model is one that other groups have chosen to implement for their communities. (October 2021).

» The **Catawba County Board of Commissioners** declared April 2022 as Public Health Month in Catawba County.

» Catawba County Public Health was recognized in May by the **North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services** for the innovative work we did on our most recent Community Health Assessment (CHA). It was released in 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic began to sweep across the county (March 2022).

» Staff were asked to present on our innovative efforts to increase vaccine confidence at the **National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO) 360 Conference** (June 2022).

## CLINICAL QUALITY

Several clinical areas successfully underwent their periodic state monitoring, including the Adult Health Clinic, Immunizations Clinic and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. Clinical Laboratory

Improvement Amendments (CLIA) also completed its regular monitoring of our lab and found no deficiencies. CLIA regulates all laboratory testing in the U.S., including those in Public Health.

### RENOVATIONS

Several areas around Public Health were renovated, including floors in the main lobby, painting in some areas, a new counter top in the main reception area and improvements in the area that once held medical records as well as an upgraded staff fitness area.

### MEDICAID MANAGED CARE

With the statewide implementation of Medicaid managed care came changes to several areas at Public Health. Due to a shift from one payer to five as part of North Carolina’s ongoing Medicaid transformation, our billing team had to work with all the plans to ensure claims and payments were processed correctly. Adult Health Clinic eligibility staff and Immunizations staff also had to adjust to the changing payer landscape.

Throughout the transition, we continued providing the same high level of service to our clients, and our Care Management for At-Risk Children (CMARC) and Care Management for High Risk Pregnancy (CMHRP) social workers and nurses helped clients navigate through changes to their plans and continued linking clients to new opportunities to improve their health. Care managers have also helped families through the transition as they work to understand what services are available and how to access them under the new plans.

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

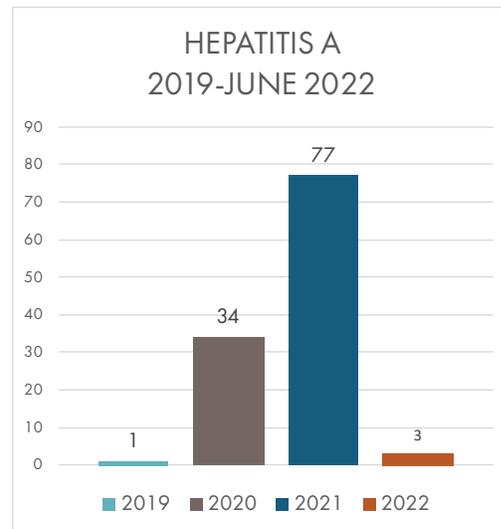
Environmental Health implemented new permitting software that allows for seamless use among multiple county departments, offering a way to better serve the public, a user-friendly interface for staff, and allowing for simplified maintenance of the system by county IT.

Environmental Health received an average of 94 well and septic applications a month in 2021-22, about the same as the last fiscal year, but 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. We were able to hire additional Environmental Health staff to accommodate this increase in applications and an increase in lots that require additional staff time.

### HEPATITIS

In response to an outbreak of Hepatitis A that began in 2020 and expanded in 2021, we have continued our outreach efforts among people who use drugs and people who are experiencing homelessness, as these two populations have been affected the most by the ongoing outbreak. To do this, we strengthened our partnerships with organizations that serve the homeless population and organizations that provide harm



reduction services, including ALFA, Olive Branch Ministry, Hickory Soup Kitchen and Open Door Homeless Ministry and have offered Hepatitis A and B vaccinations

to at-risk individuals at off-site events sponsored by these trusted organizations. We have seen dramatic success, as there were 77 cases in 2021 and just 3 in the first half of 2022.

The Catawba County Hepatitis Coalition continues to focus on providing seamless, coordinated care for those with hepatitis of all types. Because the population most affected by Hepatitis in recent years tends to cross county lines, our coalition expanded across those lines as well. By adopting a regional approach, we can leverage resources in multiple counties to address spread across county lines.

### COVID-19

Late summer 2021 brought with it a large wave of new COVID-19 cases that were caused by rapid spread of the Delta variant. This caused a surge in hospitalizations and deaths, putting strain on the healthcare system.

Then, from December 2021 through February 2022, an enormous surge of new cases were caused by the Omicron variant. Public Health and its community partners worked to encourage vaccination, coupled with masking and social distancing to help keep people safe.

During the 2021-22 fiscal year, the federal government authorized the use of booster doses to increase vaccine efficacy over time and gave both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines full approval. The Novavax vaccine, which uses more traditional vaccine technology, was also authorized for use, and the age groups for vaccine eligibility dropped down to anyone over age 6 months.



The Vaccine Coordinator has attended **community events** like this one with Exodus Ministries to build trust within the community and encourage people to receive the COVID vaccine.

During the course of the year, Public Health administered 10,217 first, second and booster doses of vaccine.

As we transitioned the vaccine clinic to the Public Health building, we also began billing insurance for its administration.

In February, the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO) awarded \$75,000 to Catawba County Public Health to address vaccine confidence among the county’s African-American population as part of the

Equipping Local Health Departments to Build COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence grant. The grant funds allowed us to hire a Vaccine Coordinator who has forged relationships in the African-American community and built confidence in the vaccine, resulting in an increase in vaccinations among this population.

## SCHOOL HEALTH

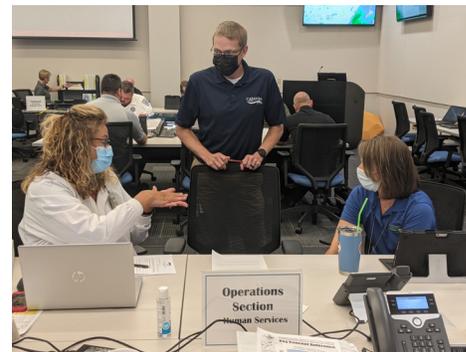
Just as students and staff headed back to school in August 2021, the Delta wave brought with it many illnesses and a wave of students and staff who were sick or exposed. In response, we were able to hire approximately 40 school health assistants who were able to alleviate some of the administrative burden for school nurses. We were able to hire and onboard them in a matter of weeks, a monumental task for human

resources and other staff who participated in the process. As a result, we had a strong team in place before the Omicron wave hit just a few months later.

The school health team also piloted the state’s Test to Stay program in all three local school systems, which allowed more students and staff to remain in the classroom after a potential COVID exposure.

## PREPAREDNESS

In August 2021, Catawba County Public Health, Catawba County Emergency Management and other first-responder agencies participated in the McGuire Nuclear Graded Exercise, which presents a



fictional, but possible type of disaster scenario at the nuclear station and requires counties that surround the station to simulate what their response

would look like if the scenario were actually happening. Because the drill includes a handful of counties around the station, capabilities surrounding communication and coordination among counties are key components to the exercise’s success.

## WOMEN, INFANTS & CHILDREN (WIC)

Our WIC team helped local families navigate through changes to the WIC program during the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes allowed families to receive services over the phone and to receive automatic benefit issuances, as well as enhanced Cash Value Benefits that could be used for additional fruits and vegetables. Because of the hard work of our WIC staff, more than 3,500 people per month in Catawba County received WIC benefits and nutrition education. These families spent their WIC benefits on nutritious foods to help keep our families healthy and strong, despite the year’s challenges.

Pandemic supply chain issues, coupled with a months-long infant feeding formula factory shutdown led to widespread shortages of formula throughout the U.S. in the spring and summer of 2022. The shortage impacted many of our WIC families, especially those whose

babies were using formulas for special dietary needs, as some became difficult to find at local retailers. WIC staff worked with these families to ensure that they all had access to the formula their baby was already on, or helped the family get an order for an alternative, but comparable formula. We also communicated broadly with WIC clients to share information on the shortage and which formulas could be purchased under an expanded state list of approved products.

### FARMERS MARKET

The Catawba County Public Health’s Farmers Market returned for its 10th season in June, offering fresh produce from local farmers and activities for people of all ages. To celebrate a decade of nutritious foods at the market, we offered weekly special activities, including visits from the Catawba County Library to Go, food trucks, games, giveaways and drawings. The Catawba



County Public Health Farmers Market improves individual and community health by increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

The good nutrition they provide is an important building block for a healthy body and healthy community.

Because fresh fruits and vegetables offer excellent nutrition, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clients receive Farmer’s Market Nutritional Program Vouchers when available to supplement their WIC food benefits with fresh, local foods. In addition, LiveWell Catawba supported the Double Bucks and Bonus Bucks programs which doubled the purchasing power of both WIC Farmers Market Vouchers and SNAP benefits.

### ADULT HEALTH CLINIC

The Adult Health clinic made a small change in late 2021 that resulted in a big improvement for patients: Instead of walking to the lab for screening, many patients are now able to utilize the restroom within the clinic. This change resulted in fewer moves from one area to another, fewer steps and door openings, fewer check-ins, less time in waiting rooms, and shorter overall

appointment times.

The clinic also initiated Male Family Planning, which offers more comprehensive family planning services for men, and began offering PrEP, a medication that can prevent the spread of HIV.

### VITAL RECORDS

Our vital records staff transitioned to processing new statewide electronic death certificates via the North Carolina Database Application for Vital Events (NC DAVE).

### EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

In April, Public Information Officer Emily Killian was named Catawba County Public Health’s 2022 Employee of the Year. From her nomination:



*“Emily has played a very important role in CCPH’s COVID-19 response. Her work is often behind the scenes and deliverables are needed on short notice. Emily was available at all hours and even on vacation and weekends in order to ensure communication needs were met. She has created presentations, talking points, articles, letters and responded to countless media questions, provided interviews and answered questions from citizens. Emily has provided thoughtful and practical perspectives on many topics throughout the year. She has been instrumental in assisting with outreach information related to COVID-19 and other public health issues as well.”*

### MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

In response to an ongoing statewide outbreak of Hepatitis A, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the need to reconnect with the community, the Immunizations and Health Promotion and Strategy teams have worked hard to develop partnerships and reconnect with organizations that serve vulnerable populations in our community. Through partnerships with the Hickory Soup Kitchen, Open Door Homeless Ministry, ALFA, the Greater Hickory YMCA and more, we have increased our presence and enhanced our collaboration in the community. This embodies the spirit of “meeting people where they are” and we look forward to continuing this work into the 2022-23 fiscal year.