State of the Community's Health

Watauga County | 2022

AppHealthCare
Caring for our Community



Promote. Prevent. Empower.

Table of Contents

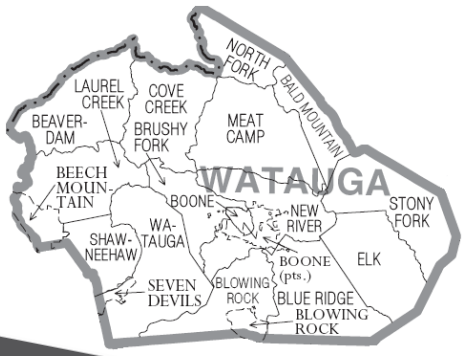
Overview and Demographics 3
Reaching for Health Equity and Resilience 4
Public Health Priorities 4
Health Priority: Mental and Behavioral Health 5
Health Priority: Family & Social Support 8
Health Priority: Housing 10
Emergency Issues and Other Initiatives 11

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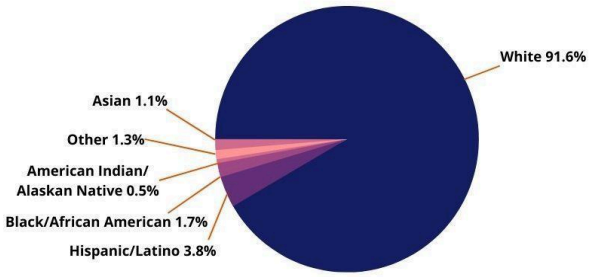
Overview and Demographics

In North Carolina, each local health department conducts a **Community Health Assessment (CHA)** every four years. AppHealthCare published the CHA in January 2022. During the years between community health assessments, health departments submit a **State of the County's Health (SOTCH) report.** In Watauga County, this report includes a summary of demographics, health indicators, and main causes of death. This report also contains updates on the community's top three health priorities, action plan projects, local initiatives and emerging trends.

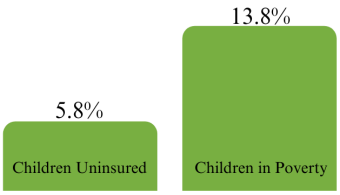


Watauga County Demographics Snapshot
Total Population 54,234 (U.S. Census, 2021)

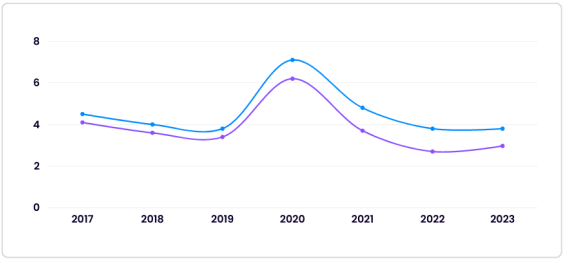
Race Distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)



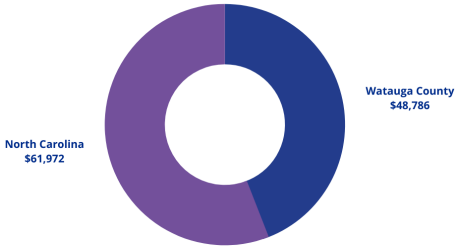
Poverty &Uninsured, SAHIE County Health Rankings (2020)



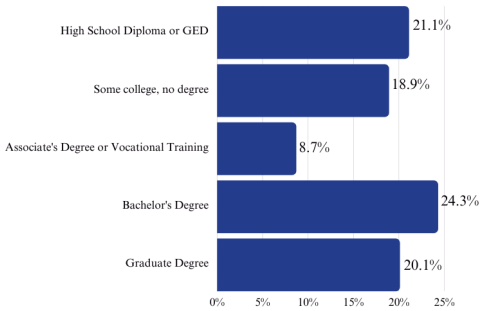
Unemployment Rate, by % (N.C. Department of Commerce, 2016 - Sept. 2022 ---Incomplete



Median Household Income (U.S. Census Bureau 2021)



Educational Attainment by % (U.S. Census Bureau 2021)



Leading Causes of Death

(North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, 2019)

1. Cancer
2. Diseases of the Heart
3. Alzheimer's Disease

Leading Risk Factors

- Tobacco Use
- Lack of Physical Activity
- Poor Nutrition

Sharing the State of the Community's Health

Copies of this report may be found at www.apphealthcare.com. The report will be presented to community leaders and groups during different events. To learn more, follow us on Facebook at AppHealthCare, log on to our website, and check your local radio and newspapers. To request more information or to schedule a presentation of this information for your group, call our Watauga County Health Center at 828.264.4995 or email info@apphealth.com.

About Public Health: Reaching for Health Equity and Resilience

AppHealthCare is committed to making sure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives.[1] In order to reach this vision of health equity, Watauga County is working to eliminate health disparities—differences in health outcomes among groups of people—that are created by social, economic, and environmental conditions. These conditions lead to behaviors such as smoking, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise, which affect our health.

Public Health Priorities

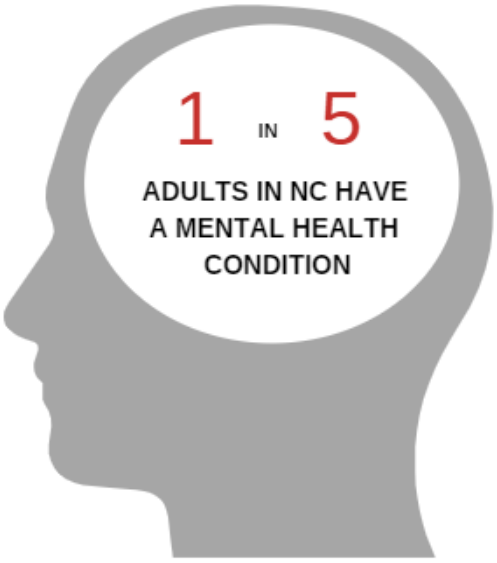
The Watauga Compassionate Community Initiative selected the health priorities in August 2021. These priorities were chosen based on the 2020 Watauga County Community Health Assessment. The public health priorities identified for Watauga County include mental and behavioral health, family and social support, and housing.

[1]Image source: http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/what-makes-us-healthy-vs-what-we-spend-on-being-healthy/
https://healthequity.sfsu.edu/

Health Priority: Mental and Behavioral Health

Update to Local Community Objectives

Community Mental Health Project



The Community Mental Health Project (CMHP) is a Watauga-based coalition made up of agency leaders, clinicians, faith leaders, law enforcement and others who want to improve quality of life and prevent loss of life related to mental health issues. With such a diverse group participating in this effort, the target population of this group ranges significantly and many projects are directed towards the general population of Watauga County. In the Spring of 2022, CMHP completed a Results-Based Accountability action planning exercise and in the Fall hosted a roadmapping event to help determine gaps and barriers to accessing mental health services locally. Recent activities of the coalition include making revisions to the website to make it more accessible, developing a logo that will be recognizable in the community, and restructuring into workgroups. Going into 2023, the workgroups will develop goals around publicity and education of the community, case management and obstacles to care, and resources/education for providers.

Gatekeeper Training

AppHealthCare recently realigned grant strategies to further focus resources toward mental health based on conversations with and feedback from community partners. AppHealthCare is in the process of onboarding contractors to work with local organizations to establish policies and/or programs to address suicide prevention. Additionally, contractors will work with organizations and community members to provide gatekeeper training for suicide prevention. Types of training will be determined with the input of community members. The goal of this effort is to equip individuals in a variety of settings to know what to do in situations where someone may be at risk for suicide.

School Based Behavioral Health

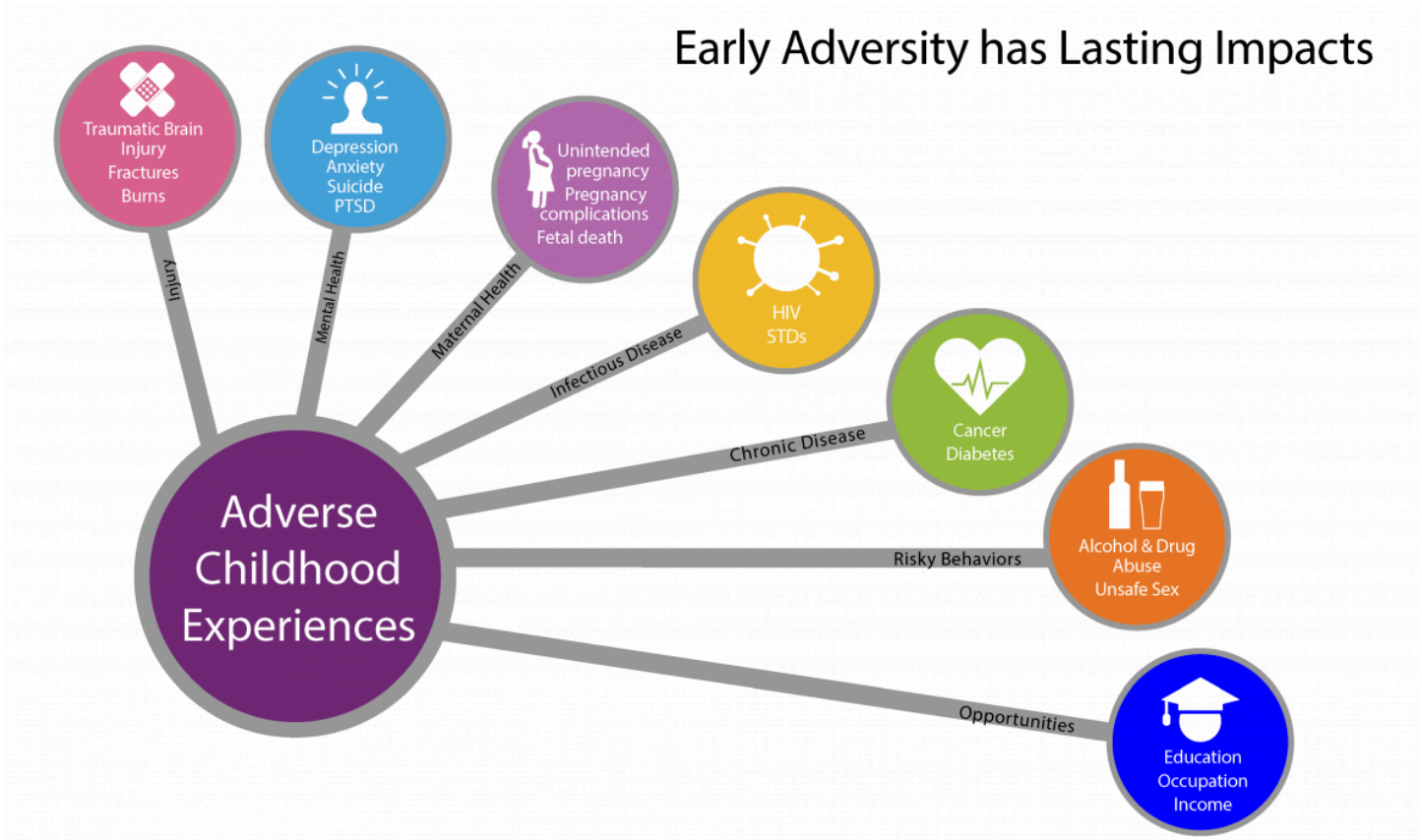
AppHealthCare works with the Watauga School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) around student health, including disseminating the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). YRBS results are provided to the SHAC team to help determine resources provided to students. The Assessment, Support, & Counseling (ASC) Center is a valuable program that supports Watauga County School students in mental and behavioral health. As the school mental health program, the ASC Center works closely with schools and local partners to prevent suicide. According to the 2019 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 36.3% of high school students reported that they felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in a row during the past 12 months, 18.9% of high school students considered attempting suicide, 15.4% of high school students and 16.3% of middle school students made a suicide plan, and 9.7% of high school students and 11.5% of middle school students attempted suicide. The following table outlines this data, collected in 2021, locally in Watauga County. New data will be available in 2023. More information through the NC Institute of Medicine about Youth Suicide & Suicide Attempts Rising in U.S. and N.C. can be found here.

Where	During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?	During the past 12 months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?	During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide? (one or more times)
Watauga High School 2021 (n= 1028 survey respondents)	15.7%	11.5%	6.5%
Watauga High School 2018 (n= 870 survey respondents)	15.4%	9.8%	6.1%
Watauga High School 2016 (n= 909 survey respondents)	15.5%	11.9%	5.8%
NC State Comparison (2019)	18.9%	15.4%	9.7%
National Comparison (2019)	18.8%	15.7%	8.9%

Where	Seriously thought about killing yourself, EVER	Have you EVER made a plan to kill yourself	Have you EVER tried to kill yourself
Watauga Middle School 2021 (n= 818 survey respondents)	13.2%	10.2%	4.1%
Watauga Middle School 2018 (n= 872 survey respondents)	17.2%	12.3%	6.1%
NC State Comparison (2019)	23.4%	16.3%	11.5%

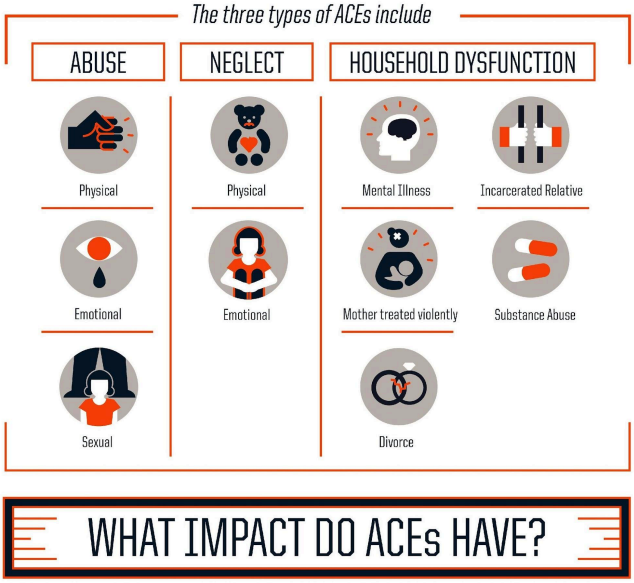
Watauga Substance Action and Prevention

Watauga Substance Action and Prevention is a data-driven, evidence-based, multi-sector coalition with a goal to reduce youth substance use in Watauga County, North Carolina. WSAP utilizes the Seven Strategies for Effective Community Change and the Drug-Free Communities Model. The areas of focus are alcohol, tobacco and prescription medications. They continue to study the data procured by the YRBS and how it relates to the youth mental health and substance use in Watauga County Schools. Alongside this, they actively perform alcohol purchase surveys in the community which lessens the chance of youth being able to purchase alcohol without having a valid ID. Other successes of the group include establishing the Watauga Youth Council, installing the first Drug Drop Box in Seven Devils, using billboards to raise awareness around underage drinking, and building coalition capacity through Reconnect for Resilience training.



Adverse Childhood Experiences

Many health disparities begin early in life with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the imprisonment of a parent. ACEs are also associated with chronic, long-term health issues such as chronic stress and diabetes. Initiatives such as the Positive Parenting Program, Family Connects home visiting program, and the Watauga Compassionate Community Initiative are successful at addressing these challenges because they address the whole person in the context of our relationships and local environment.



Update to Local Community Objectives

Watauga Compassionate Community Initiative

Watauga Compassionate Community Initiative (WCCI) is a local coalition devoted to promoting health and resiliency in the community and effectively preventing, recognizing, and treating trauma. WCCI achieves this by creating safe, stable, nurturing environments and relationships through education, awareness, advocacy and policy change. In 2022, WCCI conducted **six** trainings on trauma and resilience for **45** individuals and organizations and created **four** new trainings for organizations to further engagement. Members of the group also created **30** newsletters and compiled and developed a 33-page North Carolina Proclamation Week Resource Guide that was distributed statewide. Other activities included website upkeep and data compilation. Lastly, WCCI participated in three collaborative mini events across the county to inform, connect, and assess needs and assets.

Building Community Resilience/Resilience Catalysts

AppHealthCare was selected in 2019 to partner with George Washington University, National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and American Public Health Association (APHA) as a Chief Health Strategist, or Resilience Catalysts site, to push forward initiatives that address the Pair of ACEs. Resilience Catalysts foster integration of cross-sector and community services and community-wide prevention by leveraging a public health approach to prevent the Pair of ACEs with a focus on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), opioid misuse, and suicide. One of AppHealthcare's focus areas for the Resilience Catalysts project is employment because we know that economic stability leads to improved health outcomes for individuals and their families.

STABLE Workplaces

STABLE Workplaces is a new initiative in Watauga County with a vision of thriving workplaces sustained by a stable workforce. STABLE Workplaces stands for 'Staff Training and Business Leadership for Evolving Workplaces'. The effort was born out of an event back in August which convened area agencies and partners alongside Watauga County business owners and employers to discuss the possibility of an ongoing collaborative effort toward more resources in the workplace. The August event built on years of data collection efforts to better understand challenges around workforce development through the perspectives of local stakeholders, including business leaders and staff. STABLE Workplaces recognizes that the business sector is facing unprecedented recruitment and retention challenges alongside complex challenges among staff (family needs, mental health and substance use concerns, lack of housing, etc.). STABLE is exploring ways to better deliver resources to the business sector and other employers through unified messaging, collaborative training efforts, toolkit development and incentivized participation. The group is currently working on developing a web page, a STABLE 101 presentation to orient workplaces to the offerings of STABLE and its partners, and an incentive program and/or designation that workplaces can gain through participation in trainings & utilization of resources.

Family Based Intervention: Family Connects

Through a collaboration between AppHealthCare and the Children's Council of Watauga County, Family Connects International Nurse Home Visiting Program continues to increase child well-being by helping connect families with newborns to community resources. Using the Family Support Matrix, home visiting nurses assess the well-being of the mother, father, and infant by asking questions regarding general health, infant care, safety, social and emotional support needs, and more. All families in Watauga County are eligible for one home visit by a registered nurse to all parents of newborns up to 12 weeks old born in the service area, up to two additional home visits from the nurse home visitor for families who need additional support, and referrals to resources and services as needed. Family Connects staff have been recruiting at Watauga Medical Center since October of 2021 when staff resumed home visits. As of October 2022, the Family Connects program was reaching **68%** of all eligible births in its service area and **100%** of all post-visit referrals were being completed.

Family Based Intervention: Positive Parenting Program

Watauga County practitioners continue to implement positive parenting strategies in hopes of reducing serious negative childhood outcomes. Healthy children equal healthy adults later in life. AppHealthCare collaborates with The Children's Council as the local Triple P hub agency. In 2022, **177** interventions were delivered to families and **391** children were served. Improved child behavior and decreased parent stress is being reported based on Client Satisfaction Questionnaires received. The Triple P Team is working with partners and practitioners to consistently collect this data to ensure that important feedback loop is sustained.

Health Priority: Housing

Update to Local Community Objectives

Watauga Housing Forum

Issues related to housing can impact community members in a variety of ways, including impacting long-term health outcomes. In early 2022, a diverse group of community members and key agencies came together to take action on the increasingly complex topic of housing in Watauga County. The group hosted a four-session series to discuss the safety, accessibility, and affordability of housing in Watauga. Each session featured community members sharing their personal housing experiences. Participants reviewed key local housing data among participants.

Watauga Housing Council

The Housing Forums led to the formation of the Watauga Housing Council (WHC) in June 2022 as a collective impact initiative. All Watauga Housing Forum participants & other community members were invited to join. WHC used the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) Framework to identify a population-level desired community result, quantitative indicators, the community's housing "story," housing assets/barriers, stakeholders, and a first set of achievable action steps. The WHC is structured into 3 committees to conduct work: Community Outreach (continues to gather targeted community input about housing needs/assets), Housing Solutions (explores, prioritizes, and executes action steps), and WHC Structure & Fiscal/Sustainability (focuses on backbone for the WHC & funding and project opportunities). Achievements of WHC in 2022 include:

- Securing a grant to support communication outreach via social media, communications, & website development
- Conducting its first targeted community conversation in November 2022 at a rural church
- Researching initial community-identified action steps as well as other potential action steps to be assigned in 2023
- Exploring different backbone models to support WHC collective impact & voting to form a 501c3 organization
- Developing and distributing a housing survey to the community–89 completed surveys collected to date

Emerging Issues Since Last CHA

Substance Use and Misuse Prevention

Opioid Settlement

In July 2021, Attorney General Josh Stein announced a historic $26 billion agreement that will help bring desperately needed resources to communities harmed by the opioid epidemic. The agreement resolves litigation over the role of four companies in creating and fueling the opioid epidemic. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the State and local governments directs how opioid settlement funds are distributed and used in our state. To maximize funds flowing to North Carolina communities on the front lines of the opioid epidemic, the MOA allocates 15 percent of settlement funds to the State and sends the remaining 85 percent to NC's 100 counties and 17 municipalities.

The overdose death rate in Watauga County was 20 out of 100,000 people in 2020. This represents 11 people in Watauga who died from overdose in that year. For every death, there are more non-fatal overdoses. While we are not able to capture all opioid overdoses, emergency department visits for overdoses are one way to measure the number of overdoses happening. The overdose emergency department visit rate in Watauga County was 39 out of 100,000 people in 2020, with a population of 54,000. This represents 22 emergency department visits by Watauga residents for overdose in that year.

As a result of the opioid settlement, Watauga County government is set to receive $3,024,789 over an 18-year period. Before spending settlement funds, every local county or municipality must first select which opioid mitigation strategies they would like to fund.

In November 2022, Watauga County agencies and partners initiated a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) action planning process in which focus areas were determined for the next four years. In March 2023, the Watauga County Commissioners approved the utilization of $300,000 to fund two-year pilot projects based on Exhibit A strategies in the MOA. In alignment with guidelines set by the North Carolina Attorney General's Office and North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Watauga County will consider funding agencies to implement the following Exhibit A strategies:

1. Collaborative strategic planning
2. Evidence-based addiction treatment
3. Recovery support services
4. Recovery housing support
5. Employment-related services
6. Early intervention
7. Naloxone distribution
8. Post-overdose response team
9. Syringe Service Program
10. Criminal justice diversion programs
11. Addiction treatment for incarcerated persons
12. Reentry programs

Priority will be given to projects that align with the top 5 focus areas determined through RBA action planning: 1) Harm reduction, 2) Connections to care, 3) Support for people in treatment and recovery, 4) Treatment, and 5) Addressing the needs of criminal-justice involved persons.

In 2023, AppHealthCare in partnership with the County will release a Request for Proposals to fund eligible organizations to implement evidence-based, high-impact strategies to address the opioid epidemic in Watauga County, North Carolina. In addition, this RFP builds capacity and local infrastructure to respond to the overdose crisis in Watauga County, North Carolina. The goal of the RFP is to reduce overdose deaths, emergency department visits for overdose, and illicit opioid involvement.

Peer Support Specialists

In 2019, AppHealthCare hired two part-time Peer Support Specialists (PSS). Then applied for the Community Linkages to Care grant that, once received, allowed for the support of an additional (full-time) PSS to serve the district. There are three PSS that work across the district. The PSSs work as advocates for those struggling with substance use disorder by relating on a personal level through lived experience to promote trust among the people they serve. The PSSs work to serve the community through education, prevention measures, harm reduction, training, connecting individuals to care, working with justice-involved individuals, and helping with environmental and policy change work.

Current PSS initiatives are being captured and evaluated using a combination of pre- and post-test comparisons and follow up with program participants and agencies, as well as maintenance of data logs. The following are measures that are in place and have been tracked since February 2019 (when the NC CPSS program started):

- Board of Health resolution to support comprehensive strategies to address the opioid epidemic
- Total number of individuals served by NC Peer Support Specialists (PSS) across Alleghany, Ashe, and Watauga Counties: **(424 unique, 3510 follow-up contacts)**
- Total syringes returned: **48,000**
- Total naloxone kits distributed: **2,290**
- Number of unique justice-involved persons served: **103**
- Number of justice-involved people and their families or loved ones educated on harm reduction strategies before release, including (but not limited to) training on how to recognize an overdose, how to administer naloxone, and how to prevent an overdose: **130**
- Number of justice-involved individuals reporting overdose reversals: **59**
- Percent of justice-involved individuals who are given access to naloxone upon release: **100% are offered - approximately 30% receive kits**
- Number of Narcan/Naloxone trainings in business and agencies: **13** (including ASU, community organizations, businesses, churches), **380 kits distributed to 350 participants**
- Number of average contacts with each individual served: **14**
- Number of individuals connected to medical, social services, emergency housing, transportation, food, treatment, behavioral health, SSP: **339**

Medicaid Tobacco Free Policy

Starting December 1, 2022, North Carolina Standard and Tailored Prepaid Health Plans serving Medicaid and uninsured patients will require contracted medical, behavioral health, and some intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD)/traumatic brain injury (TBI) organizations to provide a 100% tobacco-free campus. On September 7th, 2021, DHHS released a memo to providers advising them of the new tobacco-related policy

requirements going into effect December 2022. Daymark Recovery has begun to implement their tobacco-free campus policy and is working to make tobacco cessation part of the standard of care.

Live Vape Free NC
A media campaign aimed to help push vaping cessation among youth launched in Spring 2022 and ran through December 2022. The campaign is called Live Vape Free and is a digital campaign that targets youth. The ads drive those who click on the ad to a webpage where they can sign up to start the cessation program. This campaign runs in a ten-county region.



Quitline
AppHealthCare staff is able to offer Quitline services to clients by referring them through their online referral platform. QuitlineNC provides free cessation services to any North Carolina resident who needs help quitting commercial tobacco use, which includes all tobacco products offered for sale, not tobacco used for sacred and traditional ceremonies by many American Indian tribes and communities. Quit Coaching is available in different forms, which can be used separately or together, to help any tobacco user give up tobacco.

Tobacco 21
In December 2019, the FDA made a rule to change the age of purchase for tobacco products from 18 to 21. North Carolina General statute still has 18, which makes enforcement on a local level a gray area. The Board of Education for Watauga County Schools and the AppHealth Care Board of Health passed resolutions in support of a strong Tobacco 21 law.

Community Justice

Watauga Community Justice Coalition
The Watauga Community Justice Coalition (WCJC) is an inclusive group of community members and stakeholders working to implement restorative justice principles in the High Country through a set of collaboratively developed priorities. WCJC formed out of the planning group that developed and implemented Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) in Watauga County. This planning group included representatives from the Watauga County Sheriff's Office (WCSO), the Mediation and Restorative Justice Center (MRJC), AppHealthCare, the Office of the District Attorney, Watauga County Clerk of Court, Social Services, Daymark Recovery Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the High Country Council of Governments. The group worked to create agreements, shared understandings, policies and procedural guidelines for the LEAD program, which was established in 2020 by MRJC, with partners WCSO and AppHealthCare. Once LEAD was implemented, the planning group decided to continue meeting and working together, re-branding themselves as WCJC and adopting priority goals identified through the 2019 Watauga Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM) process. The SIM event, led by trained external facilitators, was hosted by the LEAD Planning group, MRJC, and AppHealthCare for a diverse group of community stakeholders. The original five priorities were as follows: 1. Develop and support a trauma-informed criminal justice and crisis response system. 2. Cross-train law enforcement / 1st Responders & behavioral health providers. 3. Develop a local reentry council. 4. Coordinate

effective release planning with hospitals and area facility-based crisis centers. 5. Develop a post-booking jail diversion program.

In 2022, WCJC reviewed community progress in relation to the identified goals and revised these priorities, outlining a new action plan for 2023 with four main goals/priorities. The revised priorities are as follows: 1. Develop sober living and transitional housing in Watauga County. 2. Repair identified gaps in the community's behavioral health safety net. 3. Develop and support a trauma-informed criminal justice and crisis response system. 4. Build an enhanced recovery ecosystem that allows for successful reentry. This group's accomplishments since inception include establishing a LEAD program in Watauga County, hosting a Sequential Intercept Mapping process, hosting presentations and guest speakers, supporting the development of the High Country Reentry Collaborative, beginning a Results-Based Accountability process, creating collaborative community action plans, and building new partnerships.

Food Access

Under our Healthy Communities strategy our goal is to increase the number of new community venues providing access to healthy foods and/or the number of existing community venues providing enhanced access to healthy foods. This includes new efforts for implementation as a result of COVID-19. Healthy foods are defined by the USDA as nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups and are mentioned in the USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025. Programs such as the High Country Food Hub operated by Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture are making the availability of fresh food and produce more accessible to those who are in more rural parts of the county. They have a well established satellite pick up location in Deep Gap. We are also supporting outreach efforts for the Double Up Food Bucks program which matches your SNAP/EBT dollars so you get twice the amount of fruits and veggies.

Through our Advancing Equity strategy, our goal is to work with partners from historically marginalized populations to increase healthy food access through community-based policy, environmental change and/or programmatic interventions. We have been actively forming relationships with community partners and touching base on how to best support their efforts. We hope to continue to increase and/or enhance distribution networks supporting local, healthy foods.

Q'Pasa Appalachia, Watauga County Farmers Market, AppHealthCare, WIC & Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture have partnered to develop an educational vlog that would help those who speak Spanish feel more comfortable going to the local farmers markets and using the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) check from WIC. The vlog will walk viewers through the process of how to use the Double Up Food Bucks program and what you can purchase.

AppHealthCare has begun exploring the NC Healthy Food Retail Designation supported by the Advancing Equity and Healthy Communities programs. Initial steps include forming relationships with local stores to see what support they need in offering healthy food options, particularly in areas where there is not a big box grocery store.

New/Paused/Discontinued Initiatives Since Last CHA

Paused- Distribution of Resource Cards

In recent years, AppHealthCare and the School Health Advisory Council have discussed distributing a Survive and Thrive resource card to ensure that Watauga County's youngest citizens were aware of mental health services available to them. These cards would outline signs of serious distress, helpful tips for reducing stress, and a list of local and national crisis resources. While the resource cards could still be an area of focus in the future, AppHealthCare has focused on other initiatives related to the selected priorities, including supporting the efforts of Watauga Substance Action and Prevention.