

## Progress on CHIP

The Caldwell County Community Health Assessment was completed in 2017. Based on the primary and secondary data collected and analyzed, our research team determined that the three focus priorities are preventative care, substance abuse, and mental health. The progress made in these focus areas is listed below.

## PREVENTATIVE CARE

- **QuitlineNC-** QuitlineNC provides free cessation services to any North Carolina resident who needs assistance quitting tobacco use. The Caldwell County Health Department (CCHD) has partnered with QuitlineNC to provide free Nicotine Replacement Therapy to any Caldwell County resident who received counseling from a QuitlineNC counselor. This partnership provides a variety of NRT to residents including gum, lozenges, and patches. Chronic disease is a major cause of mortality in Caldwell County and tobacco is a major contributor to chronic disease, making this intervention a preventative care priority. In 2020 there were 87 calls to QuitlineNC from Caldwell County residents.
- **Tobacco Treatment Specialist-** The health educators at CCHD attend the Duke-UNC Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training Program. This program provides participants with knowledge in smoking cessation research and education. It trains health professions to provide evidence-based treatment for tobacco use and dependence to improve the health of individuals and populations. After attending this program, health educators provide tobacco cessation counseling to those seeking help. In 2020, our public health educators provided tobacco cessation counseling to 32 individuals.
- **Catch My Breath-** Catch My Breath is an evidence-based e-cigarette, JUUL, and vape prevention program specific to youth in grades 5-12. The CATCH My Breath Program was implemented in one Caldwell County Public School for grades 6-8. We hope to continue this program in all Caldwell County Public Schools for grades 6-8.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- **Drug-Free Caldwell-** Drug-Free Caldwell, previously known as Project Lazarus, is a substance abuse coalition, whose mission is to create a more connected, productive, and healthy community for adults and youth in Caldwell County by reducing substance use through education and community engagement. There are over 12 community sectors that are represented on this coalition including youth, parents, law enforcement, schools, businesses, media, youth-serving organizations, religious, volunteer, healthcare, government, and other organization involved in reducing substance abuse. The coalition continued to meet in 2020 in spite of COVID-19. The coalition focused on building up sustainability and outside participation to prepare to apply for the Drug-Free Communities Grant. They presented the grant proposal for the Caldwell County Board of Health and Commissioners and were granted to apply for the 2022 grant cycle.
- **Lock Your Meds-** Lock Your Meds is a national multi-media campaign designed to reduce prescription drug abuse by making adults aware that they are the "unwitting suppliers" of prescription medication being used by young people. Caldwell County continues to implement the Lock Your Meds Campaign through prescription medication safety education and providing free medication lock boxes. In 2020 over 200 lockboxes were purchased and distributed to facilities in Caldwell County including Caldwell County Public Schools, West Caldwell Health Council, Hospice, and Helping Hands Clinic.

## MENTAL HEALTH

- **Jonas Hill Hospital and Clinic-** Joans Hill Hospital is an integrated inpatient and outpatient behavioral health pavilion that increases access to inpatient psychiatric beds for rural Western North Carolina. Jonas Hill Hospital is a division of Caldwell Memorial Hospital. They opened in the summer of 2020. They have 27 beds for adult inpatient psychiatric hospitalization. The facility provides services that provide mental health resources for the community including in-hospital care, education, and at-home care management. Whether an individual is in crisis or wants to improve skills to manage everyday life, Jonas Hill can help meet the need.
- **Hope4NC-** Hope4NC is a free mental health resource available to any North Carolina Resident. It is a 24/7 hotline that provides confidential emotional support, counseling referrals, and community resources. Hope4NC includes a Crisis Counseling Program tailored for COVID-19, which will provide immediate crisis counseling services to individuals affected by the ongoing public health crisis. This program was promoted at the Drug-Free Caldwell Coalition meeting, where many mental health services including Vaya and RHA are present as well as clinical practices including Helping Hands Clinic and UNC Healthcare. This resource has been promoted on social media pages to increase its outreach.

Despite COVID-19's influence on public health resources, Caldwell County was still able to successfully implement many initiatives that target our focus areas of preventative care, substance abuse, and mental health. We were able to implement new programs that we haven't used before to target recurring issues. We addressed e-cigarette use in youth through the Catch My Breath Program. This was a significant milestone because youth electronic cigarette use was identified as an emerging issue in the 2019 SOTCH. More important progress that we made towards mental health was the opening of The Jonas Hill Hospital and Clinic. This behavioral health center will be influential in addressing many mental health conditions including alcohol and drug abuse. Lastly, we have adapted using web-based documents, from paper-based, which will improve the accessibility to our county-specific data.

### Morbidity and Mortality Changes Since Last CHA

- From March 2020 until December 2020, Caldwell County had 5860 COVID-19 cases.
- The Health Dept collected 4251 COVID-19 tests.
- There were 77 deaths in Caldwell County.

Rank	2018	2019
1	Diseases of heart	Diseases of heart
2	Cancer	Cancer
3	Alzheimer's disease	Chronic lower respiratory diseases
4	Chronic lower respiratory diseases	Alzheimer's disease
5	All other unintentional injuries	Cerebrovascular diseases
6	Diabetes mellitus	Diabetes mellitus
7	Cerebrovascular diseases	All other unintentional injuries
8	Influenza and pneumonia	Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis
9	Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome and nephrosis	Influenza and pneumonia
10	Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome and nephrosis

Source: State Center for Health Statistics, North Carolina

### Emerging Issues Since Last CHA

- Mental Health/Substance Abuse- Mental health was addressed as an area that needed focus prior to the pandemic, however, the pandemic only increased the debilitating mental health in our community. Not knowing the severity of the effects of COVID-19 in the beginning months enhanced feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed in the community. Many of the facilities providing mental health services either had to temporarily shut their doors, or had to change their services to be telehealth visits only. This reduced the number of mental health resources that we had available for community members, during a time that we needed them most. These two target areas, mental health, and substance abuse are listed together here because of the effect that they had on each other through the pandemic. While social distancing, isolation, or quarantine are important measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission, they are associated with negative emotions, such as irritability, anxiety, fear, sadness, boredom, and anger. These conditions are known to trigger relapse or intensify substance consumption. There was a significant increase in substance use during this time. According to the North Carolina Division of Public Health's Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, emergency department visits related to overdose increase by 22% compared to 2019 in North Carolina. People with Substance Abuse Disorder are at greater risk for lethality for COVID-19. For example, respiratory disease, such as COVID-19, is associated with increased overdose mortality due to opioids because they are a substance that can depress breathing. Trying to create and adapt mental health and substance abuse resources that would reduce this influx of demands, presented itself as a challenge to the community during 2020.

- **Hepatitis A-** Hepatitis A was another emerging issue that we identified for 2020. Many people do not know that they have Hep A, so they spread it without realizing it. The virus can be spread through sharing drug paraphernalia, sexual intercourse, touching objects, or eating food that someone with Hepatitis A handled. This virus became a health warning for people living homeless and recreational drug users, due to the way that the virus spreads. In 2020, Caldwell County was identified as a Hepatitis outbreak with 42 positive cases, up from only 2 in 2019. Of those 42 cases, 29 reported drug use with the most prevalent being methamphetamines. Only 3 of the 29 reported a non-injection route. The highest rate of occurrence was in the male population ranging in age from 20-40. To help combat the increasing number of cases, The Caldwell County Health Department held several Hepatitis A clinics at various locations within the community. These facilities were chosen so that we could reach those populations most at risk.

**New/Paused/Discontinued Initiatives Since Last CHA**

- Flu-Fit and Flu-FOBT- Discontinued during this time due to COVID-19.
- Active Routes to School- Discontinued due to end of grant funding
- Diabetes Prevention Program- Discontinued during this time due to COVID-19.
- RHA-Matrix Model- Discontinued during this time due to COVID-19.
- Mental Health First Aid- Discontinued during this time due to COVID-19.
- Community-based Behavioral Healthcare Collaborations- Discontinued during this time due to COVID-19.

**Actions**

Name	Assigned To	Status	Due Date	Progress