

Caldwell County Health Department

# 2012 State of the County

Health Report



“A yearly progress report that gives a review of the health status of our county”

The Caldwell County Health Department is pleased to present the 2012 State of the County Health Report. This document provides updated information on key indicators for Caldwell County for the purpose of comparing local and state health data about our community's health and well-being.

This report includes information on the identified priority areas: Obesity, Teen Pregnancy and High School Dropout Rates.

This information is designed to educate and update community members, community leaders, agencies, organizations and others on progress in addressing certain health issues. This update is also intended to influence the development of new policies that affect the health of the community, guide the planning of health programs and recruit interested community members to participate in future activities.

The Caldwell County Health Department seeks to "promote, protect and improve the health of our community" by focusing on long-term health priorities identified in the 2011 Community Health Assessment. Our mission is to improve the health of all residents of Caldwell County.

If you would like more information on the services and programs offered by the Caldwell County Health Department or would like to be involved in community health programming, please contact the Health Education and Health Promotion Department at 828-426-8462. For additional information on Caldwell County please visit the county's website at [www.caldwellcountync.org](http://www.caldwellcountync.org).

Sincerely,

*Denise Michaud*

Denise Michaud, MPH, RD, IBCLC  
Health Director  
Caldwell County Health Department

# Obesity



Obesity in North Carolina has continued to be a concern for residents; Caldwell County is no exception. In 2000, about 10% of children ages 2-4 and about 17% of children ages 5-11 who lived in Caldwell County were considered obese. The percentage continued to rise in 2008 with 17% of children ages 2-4 and about 22% of children ages 5-11 considered obese. This trend continues at the state level as well. In 2008, 15% of 2-4 year olds and 25% of 5-11 year olds were considered obese statewide. Although the Caldwell County obesity rate for 5-11 year olds is below that of North Carolina, this is still a concern for our community. Studies have revealed that obesity in children can lead to an increased risk of disease in adulthood.

In 2009, between 63 and 66% of adults in Caldwell County were considered either overweight or obese. When compared to the 2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the county's rates/percentages increased slightly but remained lower than the state percentage of 65% of adults considered overweight or obese. This remains a concern and health issue in the county because studies show that obesity contributes to a number of leading causes of death including coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, stroke and several forms of cancer.

## Farmer's Market



Caldwell County continues to identify ways to reduce the obesity epidemic in the county. In 2011, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation selected Caldwell County as a "Sparkplug Community" and awarded \$33,000 to generate short-term, high impact programs focusing on healthy eating and physical activity. The Caldwell County Health Department was a recipient of a \$3,000 Sparkplug Mini-Grant for the development of an additional Farmer's Market in the southern end of the county. With the support of the Town of

Sawmills, NC Cooperative Extension, Health Department Staff and local farmers, the Sawmills Farmer's Market opened June 7, 2011 with over 30 vendors and more than 800 visitors. The excitement of a new farmer's market, live music and home grown vegetables kept visitors coming long after the vendors ran out of fresh produce. The market opened every Tuesday and welcomed an average of 600 customers each week. Mayor Bob Gibbs has been quoted as saying "This Farmer's Market is the best thing that could have happened in Sawmills". The Sawmills Farmer's Market continues to be a success in 2012 beginning on the first Tuesday in May and ending on the first Tuesday in December, offering the community fresh fruits and vegetables all season long.

## Community Gardens

This year, the City of Lenoir and Caldwell Memorial Hospital were recognized in Parade Magazine for their collaborative efforts to decrease obesity and increase the availability of fresh produce by forming the Unity Garden. Caldwell County resident Daniella Berry appeared on the cover of the magazine. Daniella was recognized for her participation in the Whitnel Elementary School Garden and Caldwell 4-H Plant-a-Row for the Hungry gardens. The Whitnel School Garden was started in November 2011 with the mission to reach, support and teach a new generation of gardeners. This not only creates an authentic experience for students, it also allows them to contribute to their family in a meaningful way as they share the harvest and reconnect with food and family around garden stories, food preparation and consumption of fresh produce from their garden. During harvest, the students and volunteers typically collect produce by the bushel on a weekly basis and families take the produce home when they pick their children up from childcare. The school garden program enrollment of 35-45 students participates in before- and after-school programs and summer camp. The garden is harvested 4 times a year and to date, the garden has produced: lettuce, radish, cabbage, onions, potatoes, summer squash, tomatoes, peppers, green beans, okra and herbs. For the fall, students have planted cabbage, kale, turnips, more greens, broccoli and brussel sprouts. For more information about 4-H Plant-a-Row for the Hungry, visit: <http://caldwell.ces.ncsu.edu/par/>.

## Did You Know...

- Only 44-45% of adults in Caldwell County meet daily physical activity requirements.
- Only 17-21% of adults in Caldwell County consume 5 or more fruits and vegetables per day.

\*Eat Smart Move More NC, 2009



# High School Dropout



The high school dropout rate is one of the many factors that affect the economic status of the county. Each year, high school dropouts cost the state millions of dollars, including taxes and public spending. Because of this economic effect, policy makers, educators and community and business leaders are looking at ways to decrease the high school dropout rate in North Carolina.

Caldwell County is focused on increasing the graduation rate among students. Graduation rates are calculated by looking at a four year span, starting when students enter the 9th grade and then calculated four years later. The graduation rate in 2007-2008 (calculated by starting with 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2004-2005) was 71.8%. During the past four years, Caldwell County has increase the graduation rate of its students. The graduation rate in 2011-2012 (calculated by starting with 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2008-2009) was 84.6%. Caldwell County has a number of successful programs which show evidence of increasing the graduation rate. Three of the programs currently being implemented include:



**“Communities-in-Schools”:** Communities-in-Schools (CIS) is the nation’s largest dropout prevention organization. The mission of Communities –in-Schools is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. By bringing caring adults into the schools to address children’s unmet needs, CIS provides the link between educators and the community. The result: teachers are free to teach and students – many in jeopardy of dropping out – have the opportunity to focus on learning.

For more than 21 years, Communities-in-Schools of Caldwell County has worked to ensure that every child receives these “Five Basics”:

- ❖ A one-on-one relationship with a caring adult
- ❖ A safe place to learn and grow
- ❖ A healthy start and a healthy future
- ❖ A marketable skill to use upon graduation
- ❖ A chance to give back to peers and community

**“Safe Schools”:** The Caldwell County School System will continue to implement their *Safe Schools Program*. One of the major goals of this program is, “All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug-free, and conducive to learning.” A safe environment is important for student success. Evidence shows those students who are of a minority background and who are less active in their school and academic programs are more likely to drop out. Evidence also shows that 1/3 of dropouts occur during the ninth grade. By partnering with local law enforcement and peer mediation groups, the Safe Schools Program will encourage students to work out their disagreements and encourage them to become active in school programs while teaching them the importance of living a drug-free and bullying-free life.

**“Why Try”:** The Caldwell County School System has implemented the *Why Try? Program*. This program is a strength-based approach to helping youth overcome their challenges and improve outcomes in the areas of truancy, behavior, and academics. Youth are taught social and emotional principles through a series of 10 pictures that teaches a discrete principle. These visuals are then reinforced by music and physical activities.



## Did You Know...

- The number of students who dropped out of school in 2009-2010 was at a record low in North Carolina.
- The number of suspensions and expulsions also decreased.
- At the same time, school crime and violence was up.
- Drop-out rate for Caldwell County decreased from 4% in 2011 to 2.89% in 2012.

\*NC State Board of Education, 2010

# Teen Pregnancy



Teen Pregnancy has been a concern for decades. Not only do these high-risk pregnancies put the teenage mother at risk but research shows there is a substantial public cost associated with adolescent childbearing. It is reported that teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues: poverty and income, overall child well-being, out-of-wedlock births, responsible fatherhood, health issues, education, child welfare and other risky behaviors. Both Caldwell County and North Carolina have exhibited a steady decrease in teen pregnancy rates since 1994, but more recent data reveals that Caldwell County's rate is increasing again and is nearly 29 percent higher than the N.C. rate. In 2010, there were 145 pregnancies in girls age 15-19 in Caldwell County, a 9% decrease from 2009. Of the teen pregnancies in 2010, 20% were reported as a repeat teen-pregnancy.

Caldwell Council on Adolescent Health (CAAH) is a non-profit organization, founded in 1983 with the purpose of reducing teenage pregnancy. The Council promotes positive life choices by using best practice models in the classroom. CCAH has three main programs which focus on teen pregnancy and other adolescent health issues.

**“Operation: Safe or Sorry”:** This program is a 14 session curriculum on Teen Pregnancy Prevention presented to 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students every year. The curriculum is science based and has been evaluated numerous times nationally through pre- and post-tests. This research is presented every other year and is tracked through a grant from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.

**“Reach Out”:** This program refers pregnant or at risk teen girls to resources they may be eligible for but are unaware of. CCAH employs a dedicated, confidential part-time nurse who visits all high schools, middle schools and K-8 grade schools. The nurse obtains referrals from teachers, counselors and principals. This program demonstrates confidence that if there is a teen pregnancy, the mother and the baby deserve to be healthy and should be able to complete high school.

**“Always Changing”:** This program presents a curriculum to all 4th, 5th, and 6th graders and is designed to help pre- adolescents navigate socially through early puberty. The project's goals are to decrease bullying in grades 4-6 and enhance self-esteem while increasing problem solving and responsible decision making skills in Caldwell County Schools.

## Did You Know...

- In 2010, there were 145 pregnancies in girls age 15-19 in Caldwell County.
- In Caldwell County, 20% of the teen-pregnancies in 2010 were reported as repeat pregnancies.
- From 2009 to 2010 there was a 9% decrease in teen pregnancies in Caldwell County.

\* The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina, 2011



# Emerging Issues



Although the public health community has made great strides in their efforts to educate the public of the hazards of cigarette smoke and the implications of smoking during pregnancy, Caldwell County's rate of women who smoke during pregnancy is still substantially higher than the state's rate. Although the smoking laws introduced in 2010 have reduced the exposure to second hand smoke, it is still important to inform women on the increased risk of preterm labor and delivery, reduced birth weight, spontaneous abortion, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and respiratory illnesses associated with smoking or exposure to second hand smoke during pregnancy. The state of North Carolina and Caldwell County are both doing their part to reduce the

burden of smoking during pregnancy through WIC and Women's Health programs at the Caldwell County Health Department and through the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS). In 2008, 44.5% of mothers quit smoking during their pregnancy while 12.3% smoked at least 3 months during their pregnancy. The percentage of mothers who quit smoking during pregnancy will continue to increase with the continued efforts of these programs.

Health Reform is an issue that encompasses all forms of health including insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, prescription drugs, hospitalizations, home health, women's health and more. This law will continue to bring opportunities to public health in the future. On March 23, 2010, President Obama signed comprehensive health reform, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, into law. Since then, the law has been implemented in phases and will continue until 2014. During 2011 and 2012, over 26 changes became effective, including insurance changes, closing the Medicare drug coverage gap, grants for wellness programs and free preventive services. There are challenges as well: the unemployment rate and lack of insurance in Caldwell County have made health reform an emerging issue for residents. Job fairs and new businesses coming to the area have reenergized the community in the hope of more jobs in the coming years. The Caldwell County Health Department has worked diligently to encourage employees to become healthier by providing wellness activities and helping employees understand the changes in insurance through programs and wellness screenings.



# Impact of Disease in Caldwell County

2010 Leading Causes of Death  
NC State Center for Health Statistics

