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November 2023

# ANCBH Newsletter

*Association of North Carolina Boards of Health E-Newsletter*


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## **Healthcare Worker Burnout is Still a Problem**

Merle Green, Executive Director, ANCBH

From early 2020 in the initial months of the Covid-19 pandemic, much of U.S. society shut down, and our North Carolina public health departments went into action. Public health nurses, pharmacists, educators, laboratorians, dentists, directors, and all staff of our local health departments put their own safety on the line and kept going to work to care for clients who sought our services.


Now, in post-pandemic times, the health department staff continue showing up to work but the pandemic took its toll. Here's how:



Nationally, and in our state, the toll on our health workers is still alarming. As recently as September, 2023, more than half of US health workers report symptoms of burnout, and many are battling insomnia, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental-emotional challenges. (US Centers for Disease Control) Empirical data show that health care workers in NC are reflective of these national statistics.

As we were planning for our ANCBH Nurses Conference in May of this year, a public health nurse told me, “During the height of COVID some days I would feel zombie-like, and I would just go home and cry.” She said that “caring for patients has always been emotionally and physically demanding, but under these circumstances, we are quickly reaching our limits.”

The mounting stressors have pushed millions of health workers to the brink. Some 52% of nurses (according to the American Nurses Foundation) and 20% of doctors (Mayo Clinic Proceedings) say they are planning to leave their clinical practice. Shortages of more than 1 million nurses are projected by the end of 2025 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics); a gap of 3 million low-wage health workers is anticipated over the next 3 years (Mercer). This is not a good time to experience a shortage of public health workers; at this point, we need to strengthen our defenses against future public health threats!



So what can be done? On May 23, 2022, our US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, issued the Surgeon General’s Advisory on Health Worker Burnout and Well-being. Through the document, the Surgeon General declared this crisis a national priority.

With this awareness, ANCBH is calling upon Board of Health members in our state to support your local health department as they focus on health and well-being among our health department staff. Health workers reported fewer mental health issues when they worked in supportive environments. Factors that may make workplaces more supportive include:

- Participation in workplace decisions
- Trust between management and workers
- Proactive and helpful supervisors that promote
- Stress prevention
- Psychological health
- Reasonable amounts of productivity
- A calm and supportive workplace

Let’s support our public health workers and let them know that we appreciate their essential work!


# **Will public health need to address the triple threat of influenza, COVID-19, and RSV this winter season?**



**Heads up! The US, and of course North Carolina, may face a triple threat, with a convergence of viral infections due to respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza and COVID.**

Public health departments should be on the lookout beginning now, including the entire holiday season, and winter of 2024 for increases in these viral infections.

Immunizations are encouraged. With more people traveling and gathering indoors, likely with fewer precautions than in the previous three years, there could be more opportunities for increased cases of these infections.



We in public health will promote strategies to reduce the risk of infection and administer vaccines, especially to the highest risk groups such as infants, children, and those over 65 years of age. We will monitor for and raise awareness of the possibility that a person can have 2 or more of these infections at the same time. We will promote access to therapeutic treatments when clinically appropriate. We will advise officials and the public on the need for effective preventative behaviors such as masking, hand washing, and social distancing.


PRESS RELEASE FROM NCDHHS DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH.  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2023

**State Health Improvement Plan is Updated, Addressing Social Drivers of Health, Medicaid Expansion and Behavioral Health for a Healthier NC**

PRESS RELEASE — The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services today announced recent updates to the NC State Health Improvement Plan, which includes priorities for addressing the full set of factors that impact a person’s health and updates data on the progress of improvement.

RALEIGH

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The NC SHIP recognizes that multiple factors influence health, including social and economic factors, health behaviors, clinical care and the physical environment. The plan highlights the importance of addressing these various factors through interventions that support education, access to healthy food, air and water quality, and access to care, among others.

"When people are healthy and our communities are strong, we all thrive," said Dr. Elizabeth Cuervo Tilson, State Health Director and NCDHHS Chief Medical Officer. "That's why we want to make sure everyone in North Carolina, no matter where they live or their economic circumstances, has the opportunity for health."

In addition to addressing these drivers of health, the NC SHIP also recognizes the pressing concerns related to behavioral health, including mental health, substance use disorders and suicide prevention as part of whole person health. North Carolina's drug overdose death rate has nearly tripled in seven years, from approximately 14 per 100,000 in 2014 to nearly 40 per 100,000 in 2021, underscoring the critical need for mental health support, prevention and treatment of substance use disorders, and suicide prevention efforts in the state.

The 2023 NC SHIP places particular importance on Medicaid Expansion as a critical element in improving health care access and reducing disparities. On Dec. 1, 2023, NC will begin Medicaid Expansion, and we anticipate 600,000 North Carolinians will qualify for Medicaid and gain access to health care.



"This plan identifies best practices communities can implement to have positive impact on health and well-being," said Dr. Susan Kansagra, NCDHHS Assistant Secretary for Public Health. "All of the practices promoted in the NC SHIP are rooted in local community support and emphasize the reduction of health disparities."

The plan reflects the insights and contributions of the NC SHIP Community Council, which includes other government agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, businesses, community members, philanthropies and academia.

To access the full 2023 North Carolina State Health Improvement Plan document and learn more about our efforts, please visit <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/units/lidas/hnc.htm>. If you are interested in joining the NC SHIP Community Council, please fill out the following form:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/11d4db4ad3974b26905642de1e139804>

# ANCBH Season of Colors

It is fall and ANCBH is undergoing changing colors also.

We have splashing ‘red’ colors in the new board members we have added and are in the process of ‘on boarding’. We have already seen positive benefits from our new members from Wake, Hoke, Alamance, Durham, Surry, Alleghany, and Yadkin counties and we are most proud.



We have ‘orange’ colors’ for the counties who have submitted their Board Chair contact information and we have developed a list serve for communication of upcoming training and project work. We are again shooting for 100% participation.

Alamance, Alexander, Anson, Appalachian District (Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga), Beaufort, Brunswick, Cabarrus, Carteret, Catawba, Chatham, Clay, Cleveland, Columbus, Dare, Davidson, Duplin, Edgecombe, Forsyth, Franklin, Gaston, Graham, Granville/Vance District, Greene, Guilford, Halifax, Henderson, Hike, Iredell, Jackson, Johnston, Jones, Lee, Lincoln, Macon, Martin/Terrell/Washington District, Montgomery, Moore, Nash, Northampton, Onslow, Orange, Pender, Person, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Stanly, Stokes, Surry, Transylvania, Union, Wake, Warren, Wayn, Wilkes, Yancey



We have also had seen some ‘fading’ colors as projects are falling off our list as completed. Some projects that have been successfully completed recently include: Nursing conference wrap-up, successful Annual Meeting, Bylaws update, learning more about traditional vs consolidated governance models, building the Board Chair Network, recognizing excellence with awards, identifying topics for training BOH members, and engaging students in organization work.



And, as the colors fade and fall, we know that we have accomplished many good things these past few months and are enjoying the benefits of the colors this season.

We have ‘green’ colors on our ANCBH map of counties who are current on their membership dues, and we are grateful for that. We are seeking to get 100% participation this year so we may provide the projects you have identified. **Thank you.**

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**Thank you for working with us as we support you and your county. We are moving quickly to set up the Board Chair Network. The next zoom training session on key legal information from the UNC School of Government will be announced very soon.**



## **Staff and ANCBH Contact Information**

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