



NC CITIZENS

for Public Health

NC Citizens for Public Health (NCCPH) was founded to enhance greater involvement of local citizens in setting public health priorities and increasing communication between citizens and public health officials. Today, our mission is more critical than ever.



May 2026

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

My dear public health friends:

You may notice a theme in this quarter's newsletter—it is all about **ADVOCACY**. On April 29, many members of NCCPH joined colleagues from the NC Public Health Association and the Tobacco 21 Youth Advisory Council for a day at the legislature to make the case for raising the age to sell nicotine and vapor products from 18 to 21 and to set up a retail licensing system. We had nearly 80 people, both young and young-at-heart, visiting with their legislators and talking about passing Solly's Law—HB 430.

Other stories in this newsletter will give you the details of the day, but my point is to say that when public health speaks with one voice on an important issue, we can make a difference.

Late April was about Solly's Law, but we can use the same organizing techniques, the same

determination and passion to speak up for all the things we know are right and science-based. And we as NC Citizens for Public Health, many of whom are retired, can speak the loudest.

We know that children should be vaccinated against all the major childhood diseases, that people in many regions of our state are desperate for timely and affordable dental care, and that expanded Medicaid has made an incredible impact on the lives and health of so many working North Carolinians. We also know that improperly sited septic systems can contaminate a neighbor's drinking water and food not stored at proper temperatures can be a disaster.

So, let's use our informed and mature voices to educate our policymakers that public health is essential to the health of the public. Let's be **LOUD** and **PROUD** Citizens for Public Health!

Peg O'Connell

NCCPH MEMBERS JOIN PUBLIC HEALTH GROUPS IN CALL FOR TOBACCO 21

By Peg O'Connell

On Wednesday, April 29 several members of NC Citizens for Public Health joined members of NCPHA and the Tobacco 21 Youth Council at the North Carolina General Assembly to advocate for Solly's Law (HB 430). The bill would raise the age to sell nicotine and tobacco products from 18 to 21 and set up a retail licensure program to help enforce the new age. The bill is named Solly's law to honor the memory of Solomon Wynn, a 15-year-old who died from complications of vaping.

Advocacy Day began with a news conference where T21 Youth Council members were featured asking the legislature to raise the age to protect them and their friends. The news conference also featured bill sponsors, the Director of Alcohol Law Enforcement Bryan House and Halifax School Superintendent Dr. Eric Cunningham. Each speaker focused on how dangerous, disruptive and addictive vapes and other nicotine products are to our youth.

After the news conference Advocacy Day attendees, including Youth Council members, fanned out and made more than 80 legislative visits.

Dr. Suzanne Lea, NC Citizens immediate past president, made visits with members of the Pitt County delegation urging them to pass Solly's Law and provide law enforcement with tools to protect young people.

"The day generated enthusiasm and support from many of the policymakers we met with," said Lea.

"I was also moved by the impressive array of speakers at the press conference and humbled by the Halifax Superintendent who spoke from being on the front lines," she said.

Charlene Zorn, Solly's stepmom and T21 parent advocate, attended the advocacy day, which was organized by NCPHA in collaboration with the Tobacco 21 coalition.



NCCPH members among the attendees at NCPHA Advocacy Day

"Watching our youth coalition advocate for themselves and their peers was an extraordinary experience for those of us who witnessed it. These youth will change our world for the better. I am proud of their advocacy," said Zorn.

"They helped me honor Solomon. It is my hope they cherish the memories and build on the relationships they are making and continue to use what they've learned as a stepping stone to help protect themselves and their peers. Their future is bright and I can't wait to see what they do next," she stated.

Dr. Meg Molloy, T21 Campaign Director and member of Citizens, expressed frustration that products targeted at youth are so easily accessible to young people in our state. "You need a permit in North Carolina to sell a turtle, but you don't need a permit to sell highly addictive vapes and pouches that cause serious illness and even death," she said.

"Without a permit there is no accountability for someone who sells to a 14-year-old. I am grateful for the strong leadership from legislators and community partners to stop underage sales of nicotine with Solly's Law," said Molloy.

To learn more about Solly's Law and how you can get involved, visit <http://ncpha.com/t21/>.

GENERAL ADVOCACY TIPS FOR NC CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

By Sally Herndon

As your new advocacy committee chair, I'm glad you are considering more advocacy work! Here are some tips to help you plan for success with your advocacy work in the NC General Assembly:

- Find the Legislator who represents you. <https://www.ncleg.gov/findyourlegislators>
- Explore the NC General Assembly website. <https://www.ncleg.gov/>
- Get to know your Legislators in the NC House and NC Senate. If you do not know much about them, review their page. This provides a brief bio, including the names of their staff, how long they have held office, their introduced bills, their votes, what committees they serve on. There is also a contact page, where you can write a brief advocacy message.

But, first...

- Find out a bit about what interests them; for example, are they likely to vote for bills that improve health or save the state money? Find out about who influences them. Is there a more Senior Legislator they look up to? Is their Faith community something of a driving force for them? Are there influential business or family or community interests they care strongly about? Ask leaders of NCCPH/NCPHA.
- Learn more about who they receive donations from. Try doing an AI Search for [what is the most reliable source for information about who contributes money to a legislator in NC?](#)
 - The most reliable, primary source for campaign contribution information regarding North Carolina legislators is the [NC State Board of Elections \(NCSBE\) Campaign Finance Database](#). It provides official, public data on candidate reports, allowing searches by committee name, donor, or transaction. Other reliable tools include the [NC Campaign Finance Tracker](#) and [FollowTheMoney.org](#).

- Learn the facts about what you want to advocate and prepare no more than 2-3 talking points.
 - Don't use a lot of statistics.
 - Instead, use "social math" to share context and be more memorable. Something like "Did you know that in NC you have to have a permit to sell a hot dog or an ice cream cone but not to sell tobacco products, including e-cigarettes?"
- Start your communication by showing appreciation for their time and use your time wisely. You may only get 3-5 minutes with them, if you are lucky.
- If visiting in person, note what is on their walls, like a photo or a banner from a team they root for.
- Try to find some common ground, like for example, if they are interested in children, or health, or saving money for NC.

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Halifax County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Eric Cunningham Addresses the toll vaping and nicotine takes on high school and middle school students.

NCCPH Advocacy Tips (continued)

- Perhaps most important is to share a memorable personal story – one that explains why this is an important issue for you as a constituent.
- Be persistent, but don't be a pest! Legislative wins take time, especially with complex policy issues like public health. Timing is important. Know if they are up for reelection and how your issue may weigh into that for them.
- Share what you learn back with NC Citizens for Public Health!



ELECTION DAY IS COMING! ARE YOU READY?

All eligible North Carolina voters can cast ballots in the 2026 general elections! Federal, state, and local offices are up for election — including one of NC's U.S. Senate seats, NC's entire delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives, our entire state legislature, a seat on the NC Supreme Court, county school boards, mayors, and city councils.

The November 2026 general election will take place Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2026. Learn about the 2026 general election: [Upcoming Election](#).

You may need to update your voter registration!

The NC State Board of Elections is asking a small number of voters to “repair” their voter registrations by providing their NC driver's license number, NC DMV ID number, or the last four digits of their Social Security number. Repairing your registration will ensure that you can vote a regular ballot rather than a provisional ballot in upcoming elections.

See if you are on the list: [Registration Repair](#).

Make sure your registration is up to date!

Already registered to vote? Use the [NC State Board of Elections' Voter Search Tool](#) to check your registration. Make sure you are registered at your current address and everything else is up to date.

The voter registration deadline for the November 2026 general election is 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 9, 2026. Read more here: [Voter Registration Deadlines](#).

If you miss the voter registration deadline, you may still be able to register and vote or make changes (except for party affiliation) to your voter registration and vote during the early voting period. Find out more here: [Register in Person During Early Voting](#).

NCCPH MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: EDNA RAILEY HENSEY

By Ann Staples

Edna served as the first president of the NC Citizens Committee, which went on to establish NC Citizens for Public Health (NCCPH). The committee was formed at the recommendation of more than 100 attendees at the NC Citizens' Conference on Public Health, held at the Four Seasons Holiday Inn in Greensboro on June 2, 1976. To share more about Edna, here are some questions and answers we exchanged with her.

NCCPH: What is your association with public health in North Carolina?

E.H.: I have worked in North Carolina Public Health, either full or part-time, for 60 years. I am partially retired and currently work part-time as a consultant with the NC Comprehensive Cancer Control Program.

NCCPH: What is the most important thing NC Public Health needs to thrive?

E.H.: The most important need for public health in North Carolina is stronger citizen involvement. When people understand the value of public health and how it impacts their lives and their communities, they are more likely to engage and offer support. Greater involvement also empowers citizens to advocate for public health priorities.

NCCPH: What is your educational background?

E.H.: My initial training was as a dental hygienist, which sparked my interest in public health. I later earned my MPH from the Gillings School of Global Public Health.

NCCPH: Tell us a bit about your favorite hobby.

E.H.: I am a church librarian so naturally reading is my favorite hobby.

NCCPH: Please share a little about your family.

E.H.: My family includes two sons, their lovely wives, and five grandchildren.



*Thank
You*

Much appreciation to Edna for her efforts founding NCCPH and for agreeing to be highlighted in this issue of the newsletter!

Special thanks to Taylor Main for all the photos in this newsletter.

NCCPH members convene at the North Carolina Legislative Building on April 29, 2026.



Wes Gray, Lindsey Bickers Bock and Suzanne Lea speak with Region 5 Tobacco Prevention Manager, Jasmine Strurdivant.

MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

By Betsy Vetter

One of the most important ways we can demonstrate our support for public health is to use our voice to speak up about the issues and policies we care about. [Are you using yours?](#)

Last month, advocates gathered at the legislature to talk with lawmakers about Solly's Law (H430/S318). This legislation raises NC's minimum tobacco sales age from 18 to 21 and establishes a retailer permitting system to hold retailers accountable for following state tobacco control laws. And it removes penalties from our kids and instead helps them get the help they need to quit nicotine use.

The stark reality is NC is **one of only 3 states** that does not require a license to sell vapes & nicotine and has not raised the sales age for nicotine to 21! These high nicotine products are addictive, cause serious harm to youth health, mental health, and can even cause death – yet are very easy for kids to buy in NC corner stores and vape shops. The result? **NC high school students vape e-cigarettes at more than double the national rate.**

We are calling on all members of NC Citizens for Public Health to speak up for this important legislation.

[Click here to take action for Solly's Law.](#)
NCCPH has provided a [sample letter](#) for you to download and customize to [send to your legislators.](#)

Donate
to support



www.givebutter.com/NCPHA-T21-Donate

WANT TO HELP SUPPORT THE T21 COALITION?

The NC Tobacco 21 Coalition is now a part of the NC Public Health Association.

