

Health Communications Short Course

May 28, 2025

Storytelling to Improve Public Health



GILLINGS SCHOOL OF GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH
North Carolina Institute for Public Health



NCDHHS

Welcome!

Icebreaker:

If you could write a book about public health right now, what would be the title?

Please note that we are recording today's session to share with anyone who misses it and for future uses of mini-presentations.

Health Communications Short Course

Session 1: Welcome,
Health
Communicators'
Roles

May 7



Session 3:
Communication
Campaigns and Materials

May 21



May 14

Session 2:
Engaged Health
Communication

May 28

Session 4: Storytelling
to Improve Public
Health

Survey and Certificate

For additional
information
please see
document
linked to the
calendar invite.

Individual Session Structure

1. Welcome & Overview
2. Mini-Presentations
3. Q&A, Sharing & Discussion
4. Resources & Closing Circle

Please feel free to
**use the chat and
come off of mute** to
share thoughts,
questions, and ideas!

*Please keep your camera on as much as you can
and engage through the chat and verbally.*

A Today's Overview: Campaigns & Materials

What to Expect in This Session:

- Communicate about public health across sectors
- Integrate asset-based framing and storytelling into communication efforts, including data visualization
- Increase public health visibility in news media

Please keep your camera on as much as you can and engage through the chat and verbally.

THE
**THE UNSEEN
ARCHITECTS**

BUILDING A HEALTHIER FUTURE
THROUGH PUBLIC HEALTH



Bethany Milford (she/her)



Bethany is a Strategic Initiatives Program Manager with the North Carolina Public Health Collaboration. Bethany brings a strong health communications background having worked in health care agency settings, where she focused on translating science into compelling content for communication campaigns, disease awareness initiatives and patient advocacy programs. She also served on the North Carolina Division of Public Health COVID response team, and supported the Division with key initiatives, including the rollout of the AA program and workforce development.

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Communicating About Public Health Across Sectors

Bethany Milford
NC Public Health Collaboration



Why is this important?

Cross-sector partnerships are essential:

- Health and well-being are largely driven by upstream factors.
- Many sectors, including housing, education, business, and health systems, play a role in building healthier communities – from quality education and affordable housing to healthcare access and employment opportunities.



Why is this important?

There are barriers to collaboration:

- Professionals in other sectors may struggle to see the connection between the health of the community and their work – they don't understand the value of collaborating with public health agencies.
- Additionally, public health professionals may lack the training and skills to communicate effectively about the field of public health.



Bridging the Communication Gap

Strategic framing:

- Knowing both what to *say* and what to *avoid saying* to help people reason productively about a topic.

Ex: Demonstrate familiarity with the sector(s) of interest by avoiding broad generalizations and acknowledging subgroups.

- Instead of talking about the “housing sector”, refer to the specific subgroups that your communication aims to reach.
- This might entail communications targeting housing professionals working on affordability and homelessness vs market-rate developers.

Bridging the Communication Gap

Using clear language for effective communication:

- “Fluency theory” says that the more easily people understand information, the more likely they are to trust it.
- While jargon allows us to communicate quickly within our profession, it is one of the biggest challenges in communicating about public health to non-experts.

EX: Evidence-based: uses facts, data, evidence, scientific studies, and other objective or scientifically derived information; tested; shown to work; proven to work

Original: [The organization] works with multiple clinical and program sites to increase agencies' capacity to provide evidence-based interventions and connect youth to clinic services.

Plain Language: [The organization] helps clinics and community groups provide programs shown to work to prevent teen pregnancies and connect youth to clinic services.



What are some examples of public health jargon? Share in the chat!

Bridging the Communication Gap

Using clear language for effective communication:

- Research suggests that the most powerful language will create emotional reactions, be familiar and easy to understand, and evoke visual images in the mind. Use words and phrases that people will retain and repeat:
 1. Active verbs
Ex: "A multisectoral approach is necessary" -> "Different organizations need to work together"
 2. Familiar phrases
Ex: "public health indicators" -> "public health report card"
 3. Vivid words
Ex: "reduce exposure to air pollutants" -> "make sure the air we breathe is clean, fresh, and healthy"
 4. Repeatable Sayings
Ex: "antimicrobial resistance" -> "the disease fights back"

Bridging the Communication Gap

Keep it positive:

- A “can-do” attitude and positive outlook can inspire and help professionals in all sectors see themselves as having a role in building healthier communities.
- Use messages highlighting that “If we work together, we can achieve X, Y, and Z.”

Ex:

“If we don’t share insights across sectors, we are limiting the impact of our work.”

Vs

“If we share insights across sectors, we can double the impact of our work.”



Resources

FrameWorks:

- [Public Health Reaching Across Sectors](#)

Region IV Public Health Training Center:

- [An Overview of Public Health Reaching Across Sectors](#) (free ~30-min course!)

De Beaumont Foundation:

- [Communicating about Public Health](#)

PHRASES:

- [Motivating The Public To Support Public health: A Toolkit for Communicating with Non-Experts](#)

CDC:

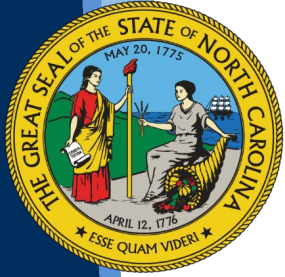
- [Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#)

Scott Proescholdbell (he/him)



Scott leads the Injury Epidemiology, Surveillance and Informatics Unit at the NC Division of Public Health where he is the Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-PI of the NC Violent Death Reporting System (NC-VDRS) and the NC Overdose Data to Action (NC-OD2A-S) CDC cooperative agreements. He has an Adjunct Faculty appointment with the Department of Epidemiology at UNC Gilling's School of Global Public Health at UNC. Providing leadership and institutional capacity for developing data driven, evidence-based public health program practice.

scott.proescholdbell@dhhs.nc.gov



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Telling our story. Injury and Violence as Public Health Issue

**Division of Public Health
Injury and Violence Prevention Branch
Injury Epi, Surv and Informatics (ESI) Unit**

May 2025

Injury & Violence are Public Health Issues

Man charged with murder, child abuse after baby dies from brain injury

LOCAL NEWS

Donate

Sub



Home About Contact Topics Series NCGA Videos Health Care Job Listings Coronavirus En Español

RURAL HEALTH

Wilson County installs naloxone kiosks to fight opioid overdose deaths

WBTV

Pedestrian killed in north Charlotte hit-and-run, police say

Raleigh News & Observer

19-year-old mom charged in bathtub drowning death of her toddler, NC cops say

16-year-old boy killed in shooting during 'situation between family members,' Rocky Mount police say

LOCAL NEWS

NBC NEWS DIDDY TRIAL TRUMP ADMIN POLITICS U.S. NEWS LOCAL WORLD SPORTS SHOPPING TIPLINE WATCH

1 dead, 6 wounded in shooting at a small North Carolina college

The shooting occurred in the center of Elizabeth City State University's campus following Yard Fest, the final event of the historically Black university's weeklong Viking Fest celebration, the school said.

Two women killed, five others injured in Cumberland County crash

LOCAL NEWS

19-year-old boy killed in crash near train tracks in Durham

Monday flew over a car that was damaged in a crash near train tracks in Durham.

Motorcyclist seriously injured in late-night crash at Fuquay-Varina intersection

NC Medical Examiner's autopsy rules hanging death of Illinois trucker in Vance County a suicide

Dashboards- scan now!



[NC Overdose
Epidemic Data](#)



[Alcohol Use & Harms](#)



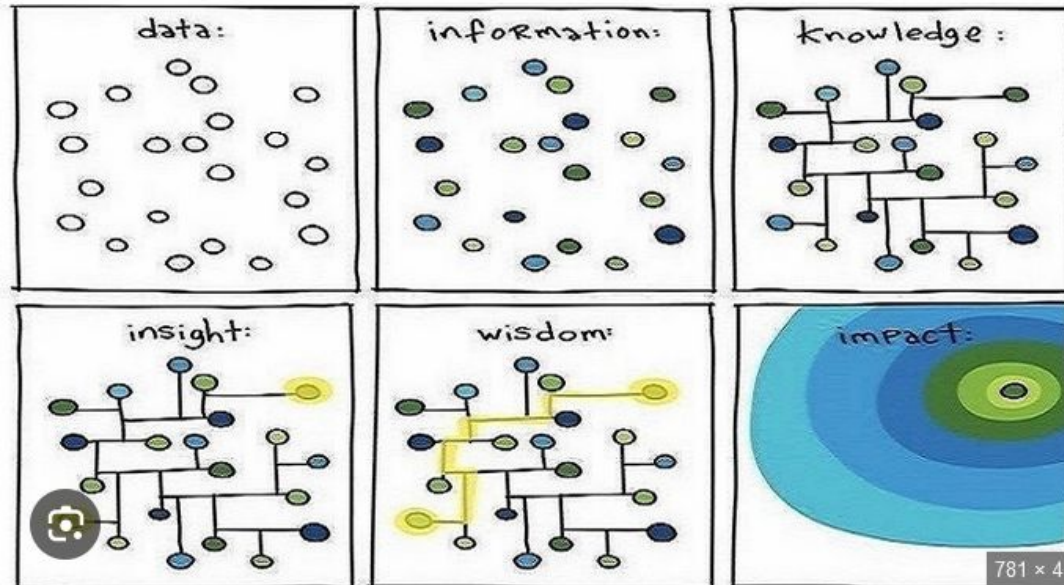
NORTH CAROLINA VIOLENT DEATH
NC VDRS
REPORTING SYSTEM

Injury Epidemiology, Surveillance & Informatics (ESI) Unit -- Mission and Core Functions

- Monitor the Injury Landscape
- Assure and Improve Data Quality
- Expand Injury Surveillance
- Disseminate Data
- Share and Act for Injury Prevention
- Assess and Act for Equity



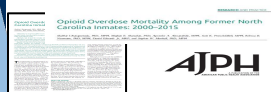
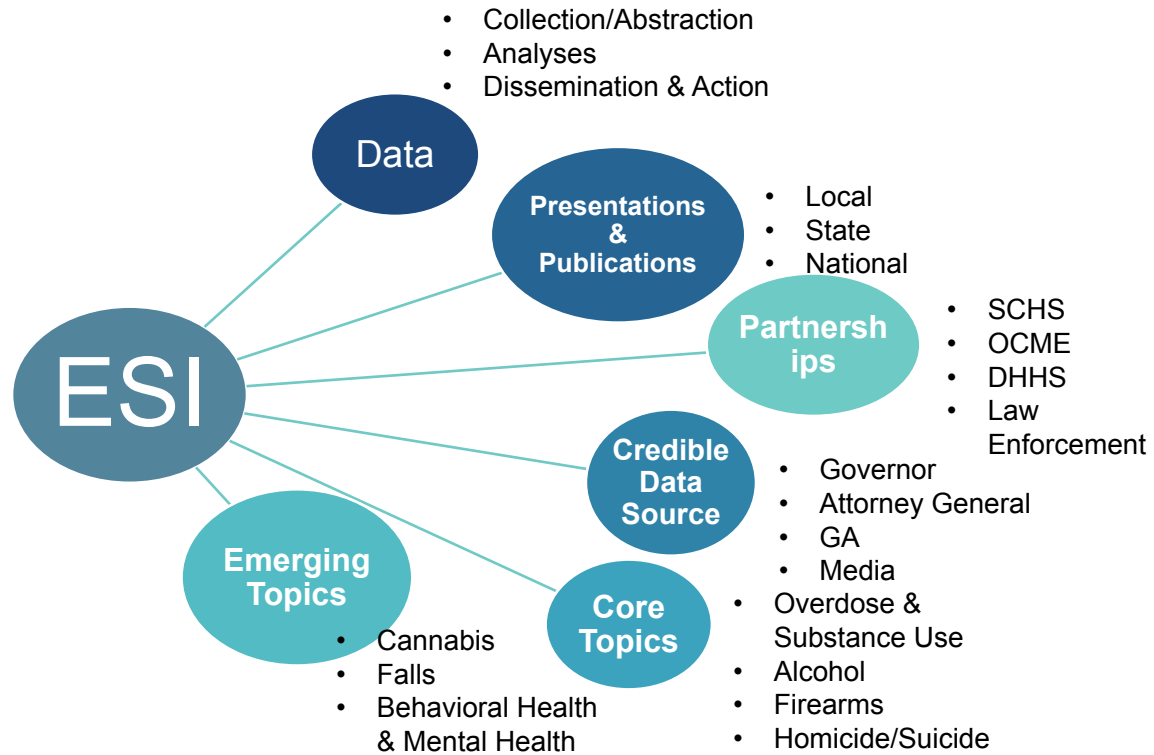
ESI..transforming data to impact. Connecting the dots from injury events to prevention



Injury Epidemiology, Surveillance & Informatics (ESI) Unit

... from Tiny to Small But Mighty!

2010 – 4 FTE
2025 – 21 FTE,
Temps, Fellows,
Interns/Residents



Injury Epi, Surv, Inform Team



ESI Core External Partners

- UNC-Injury Prevention Research Center (IPRC)
- NC DETECT
- State Center Health Statistics (SCHS)
- Office of Chief Medical Examiner(OCME)/OEMS
- Epi/Women's & Child's
- Local Health Dept
- NC Child Fatality Task Force (CFTF)
- Safe Kids NC
- Safe States (national)
- CSTE (state/local epis)
- CDC-Center for Injury
- States
- State Offices (DHHS, DOJ, Gov)

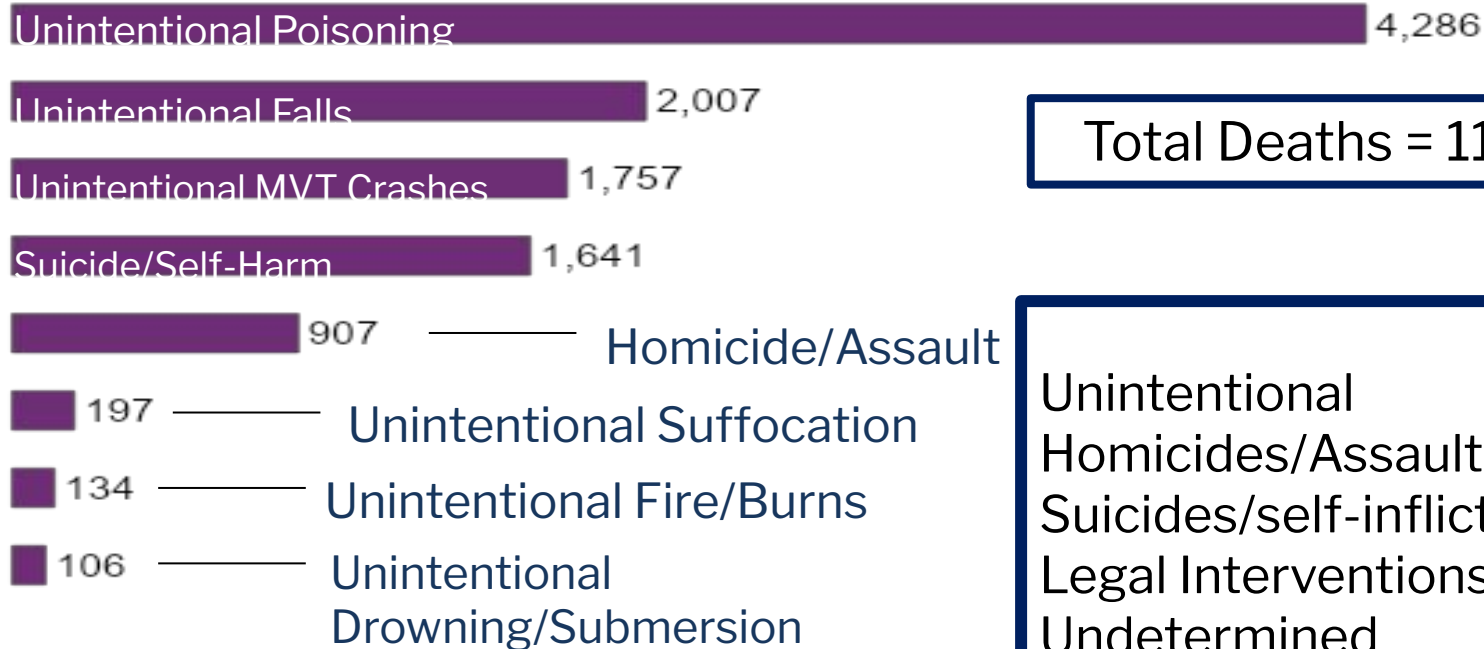
Injury and Violence Data

Leading Causes of Chronic Disease and Injury Death and Years of Life Lost: NC, 2023

Cause of Death	Total Deaths	Average Years of Life Lost *	Total Years of Life Lost *
Heart Disease	21,305	2.2	46,205
Cancer	20,927	2.4	49,850
Injury	11,814	18.4	216,985
Stroke	6,181	1.3	8,118
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (Asthma, COPD)	5,242	1.2	6,372
Alzheimer's disease	4,042	0.1	212
Diabetes Mellitus	3,448	3.5	12,065
COVID-19	1,716	1.3	2,343
Chronic Liver Disease	1,716	6.9	11,849
Hypertension	1,151	2.1	2,430
Total Deaths (all causes)	107,820	4.5	489,516
Chronic Disease Deaths	66,281	2.1	141,695

* Based on deaths that occurred prior to age 65
 Source: NC State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics-Deaths, 2023
 Analysis by SCHS

Leading Causes of Injury Death: NC Residents, 2023



Total Deaths = 11,705

Unintentional	9,024
Homicides/Assault	951
Suicides/self-inflicted	1,614
Legal Interventions	24
Undetermined	123


Limited to NC Residents occurring in NC

Source: NC State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Deaths (2023)

Analysis by the NC-DPH, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, Injury Epidemiology, Surveillance and Informatics Unit (EON) Unit

Data Requests and Presentations




State of North Carolina
ROY COOPER
 GOVERNOR

FALLS PREVENTION AWARENESS WEEK
2019

BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, it is estimated that 16 percent of North Carolinians are 65 years of age or older; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that one fourth of people age 65 and older will fall each year, and older adults who fall once are two to three times more likely to fall again; and

WHEREAS, according to the North Carolina Injury and Violence Prevention Branch of the N.C. Division of Public Health, falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among North Carolinians 65 and older, leading to 1,094 deaths, 18,771 hospitalizations and 78,799 emergency department visits in 2017; and

WHEREAS, falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) among North Carolinians 65 and older, with falls accounting for 60 percent of fatal TBI among older adults; and

WHEREAS, falls can lead to depression, loss of mobility and loss of functional independence; and

WHEREAS, the average hospitalization charge for an unintentional fall among North Carolinians ages 65 and older was \$45,000 in 2017; and



WHEREAS, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, medical costs for falls totaled more than \$50 billion in 2015, comprising 6 percent of the Medicare budget and 8 percent of the Medicaid budget; and

WHEREAS, injuries from falls are largely a preventable community health problem; and


WHEREAS, evidence-based programs reduce falls by utilizing cost-effective strategies, such as exercise programs to improve balance and strength, medication management, vision improvement, reduction of home hazards and fall prevention education; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Falls Prevention Coalition is working to increase awareness of this issue, promote multidisciplinary strategies to prevent falls and encourage citizens to take steps to protect those who are at increased risk of falling;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ROY COOPER, Governor of the State of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim September 23-27, 2019, as "FALLS PREVENTION AWARENESS WEEK" in North Carolina, and command its observance to all citizens.



 Roy Cooper
 Governor

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina at the Capitol in Raleigh this thirteenth day of September in the year of our Lord two thousand and nineteen and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-fourth.


 NC Department of Health and Human Services
Injury and COVID-19:
A data update
 Child Fatality Task Force
 Chase Green, MD, PhD

Read all of our joint coverage with The Charlotte Ledger here.

[Home](#) [About](#) [Contact](#) [Topics](#) [Series](#) [NCHA Videos](#) [Health Care Job Listings](#) [Connective](#) [En Español](#)

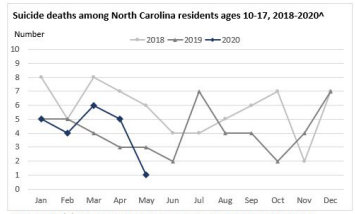
MENTAL HEALTH
Gun access, rural residency are key risk factors in N.C. suicide crisis
Prevention experts push for safety measures like lock boxes and secure off-site storage for firearms.

by **Jamie Bailey**
 February 29, 2020

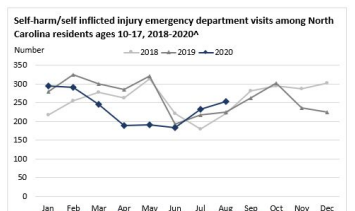
Suicide deaths among North Carolina residents ages 10-17, 2018-2020*

Month	2018		2019		2020	
	N	Rate per 100,000	N	Rate per 100,000	N	Rate per 100,000
January	6	6.8	4	4	4	4
February	5	5.6	4	4	3	3
March	4	4	2	2	5	5.6
April	4	4	3	3	4	4
May	4	4	2	2	1	1
June	4	4	2	2	2	2
July	4	4	4	4	1	1
August	5	5.6	3	3	4	4
September	4	4	4	4	0	0
October	5	5.6	2	2		
November	1	1	2	2		
December	6	6.8	2	2		
Total	52	4.9	34	3.2	20	1.9



Self-harm/self inflicted injury emergency department visits among North Carolina residents ages 10-17, 2018-2020*

Month	2018		2019		2020	
	N	Rate per 100,000	N	Rate per 100,000	N	Rate per 100,000
January	217	245.1	280	316.2	295	333.2
February	256	289.2	326	368.2	292	329.8
March	278	314.0	300	338.8	246	277.9
April	263	297.1	286	323.0	190	214.6
May	314	354.7	322	363.7	192	216.9
June	222	250.7	194	219.1	183	206.7
July	180	203.3	217	245.1	232	262.0
August	221	249.6	225	254.1	254	286.9
September	282	318.5	263	297.1		
October	295	333.2	303	342.2		
November	287	324.2	231	262.7		
December	302	341.1	225	254.1		
Total	3117	293.4	3178	299.1	1884	177.3



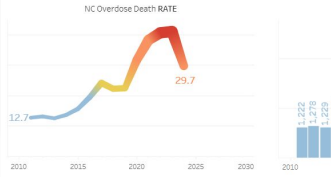
North Carolina Overdose Epidemic Data

Place: Metric:

CSRS: Patients Receiving Buprenorphine
 CSRS: Patients Receiving Opioids
 Death: Illicit Opioid Overdose
 Death: Overdose Death
 DHS: Treatment Services
 DSS: Foster Care due to Parental SU
 ED Visits: Overdose ED Visit

The estimated Overdose Death rate in NC is **29.7** (projected) **3,213** people who died of an overdose. Partial year: 1/1-1,072 at 4/12 months

Compare (Δ): This rate is among the **HIGH** rates in the US.
 Trend (→): This rate is a **-28%** change from the prior Year.



North Carolina Alcohol and Related Har

Place: Metric:

The Total alcohol-attributable death rate representing **5,828** people who died from chronic causes.

Compare (Δ): This rate is among the **HIGH** rates in the US.
 Trend (→): This rate is a **-3%** change from the prior Year.



IYPB Internal Injury Surveillance Dashboard

Region: Month and Year:

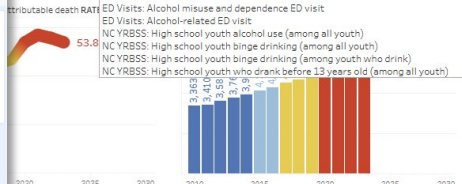
Map of Selected Regions

Number of ED Visits

Percentage and Number of ED Visits by Race/Ethnicity

Percentage and Number of ED Visits by Sex

Percentage and Number of ED Visits by Age Group



Overall Violent Death: Rates and Demographics

The map below shows the counties in North Carolina colored by rate of death per 100,000 residents. Use the place dropdown to change metrics to show a single county. Rates can be viewed as a single year metric or a 5 year rolling rate. Use the rate duration filter to change the metric displayed in the visuals and use the corresponding value slider to change the year or range.

Overall Metrics for North Carolina, 5-year Rate 2018-2022

Total Rate: **22.8 per 100,000**
 Total Count of Deaths: **11,978**

Place	Rate Duration	10-Year Rate	5-Year Rate	1-Year Rate Value
North Carolina	5 year Rate	2013-2022	2018-2022	22.8

North Carolina Overall Violent Death, 5-year Rate

Below is a breakdown of Overall Violent Death rates in North Carolina by demographic group.

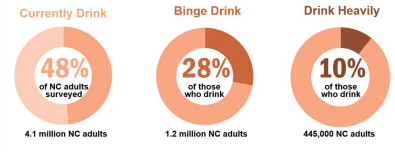
Demographic	Rate per 100,000
Male	36.6 (n=9,407)
Female	9.6 (n=2,571)
AJ/AN NH	36.8 (n=207)
Black NH	11.0 (n=1,548)
White NH	22.6 (n=7,376)
Hispanic	12.2 (n=645)
Asian NH	9.8 (n=166)
00-09	11.0 (n=95)
05-09	11.0
10-14	4.3 (n=144)
15-19	24.0 (n=837)
20-24	17.9 (n=1,129)
25-29	14.8 (n=2,493)
30-34	18.3 (n=1,787)
35-39	23.4 (n=1,584)
40-44	23.2 (n=601)
45-49	23.2
50-54	23.2
55-59	23.2
60-64	23.2
65-69	23.2
70-74	23.2
75-79	23.2
80-84	23.2
85-89	23.2
90-94	23.2
95-99	23.2

Overall Violent Death Trends, North Carolina

Year	Rate
2004	19.5
2022	24.4

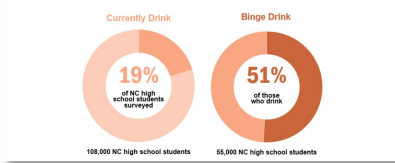
Adult Alcohol Use

Approximately 4.1 million adults in North Carolina drink alcohol, which is about 1 in 2 adults. Of those who drink, 1 in 4 adults binge drink and 1 in 10 adults drink heavily.*



Youth Alcohol Use

Approximately 168,000 high school students in North Carolina drink alcohol, which is about 1 in 5 students. Half of these students binge drink. Of those who drink, 2 in 5 usually get alcohol from someone, such as family or friends, giving it to them versus buying it for themselves.*

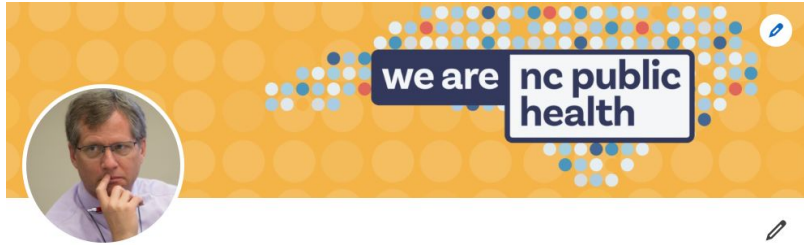


NCMJ Special Issue on Firearm Injury prevention and safety

- Guest Editors-
Proescholdbell/Dr. Steve
Marshall
- 15 articles including Cooper,
Tilson, Kinsley and Buffaloe,
plus subject matter experts
- Partnership UNC Injury
Prevention Research Center
(IPRC)
- Articles highlighting data from
NC-VDRS, NC-FASTER, and
work of IVPB and ESI



LinkedIn (social media)



Scott Proescholdbell He/Him
State Injury Epidemiologist at NC DPH and public health professional
Durham, North Carolina, United States · [Contact info](#)
500+ connections



Scott Proescholdbell · You
State Injury Epidemiologist at NC DPH and public health professional
2d ·

Excited to be at NC Data Summit and present on injury data informatics work from our Injury Epidemiology, Surveillance and Informatics (ESI) Unit at the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of ...more



One of my favorite days at NC Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health is the Epi/Eval Team's (EET) Poster Day. For 24 years, EET has shared public health data posters that have likely ...more

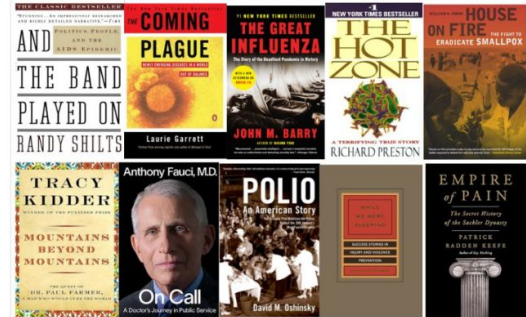


Hard to imagine but the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch team (9 staff) was all furloughed starting today due to stoppage of federal funding. Lead by two incredible public health leaders and legends with ...more



Feeling the need for a fun post today. So here it is...

What book(s) would you recommend? ...more



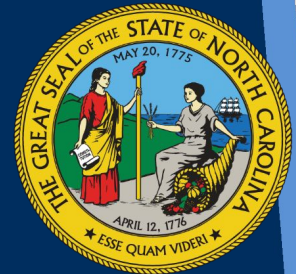
Join Our Listserv!

Sara.J.Smith@dhhs.nc.gov

Questions?

Scott Proescholdbell, MPH

Scott.Proescholdbell@dhhs.nc.gov



Working with News Media

Ameena Batada



Asheville-Citizen Times

Why Work with News Media?

- Share health information to influence health behaviors
- Remind public about public health resources
- Build trust in public health
- Others?

Why Work with News Media?

- Share health information to influence behavior change
- Remind public of resources
- **Build trust in public health**
- Others?

Working with the news media involves storytelling.

Working with News Media

Make Your Own News

Robeson County Department of Public Health
awarded reaccreditation



WFAA
Reaccreditation — The Robeson County Department of Public Health has been awarded reaccreditation by the North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation Board, following a successful multi-phase review ending May 5.

Send Flowers 1-800-FLOWERS
The distinction recognizes RCHDH's strong performance in meeting 242 of 247 benchmark activities. Carol Suzanne B. Jackson, RCHDH Robeson County Health Director. "Robeson County is the largest county by land mass and



Weather
LAMBERTON
62.6 °F
77° 87° 79° 82°



Working with News Media

Make Your Own News

Robeson County Department of Public Health awarded reaccreditation

11/11/2023

11/11/2023

LOCALS
Have Your Say

Southeastern Veterinary Hospital P.A.
Preventative Medicine

Phone: 910.228.4411
1115 W. 10th Street
1225 W. 10th St. Bldg. 200
Lumberton, NC 28088
www.sevvet.com

Weather

LAMBERTON
62.6 °F

77° 87° 79° 82°

REACT

REACT — The Robeson County Department of Public Health has been awarded reaccreditation by the North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation Board, following a successful multi-phase review ending May 5.

Send Flowers
1-800-FLOWERS

This distinction recognizes RCHDH's strong performance in meeting 142 of 147 benchmark activities. Carol Suzanne B. Johnson, RCHDH Robeson County Health Director. *Robeson County is the largest source by total usage and

Peg to Current Events

WCNC-TV Charlotte

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BREAKING NEWS Watch live local news, traffic and weather on WCNC-TV

HEALTH

Bird flu detected at Buncombe County park

Health officials said it's not common for H5N1 to transfer to humans, but it is possible.

Microscopic image showing a bird's head and a virus particle.

Common News Media Advocacy Approaches



Press Releases: Issuing press releases to announce new programs, initiatives, or public health interventions, providing journalists with relevant information and quotes from health officials.

Media Interviews: Allowing health experts and officials to participate in media interviews on television, radio, podcasts, or online platforms, providing expert commentary and information on current health topics.

Media Briefings: Hosting media briefings or press conferences to provide updates on public health issues, address concerns, and answer questions from journalists.

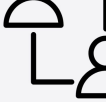




Op-Eds and Articles: Writing op-eds or articles for newspapers, magazines, or online publications to share insights, opinions, or research findings on health-related issues.

Pitching Story Ideas: Proactively pitching story ideas, news angles, or feature stories to journalists and media outlets to generate media coverage on relevant health issues or initiatives.

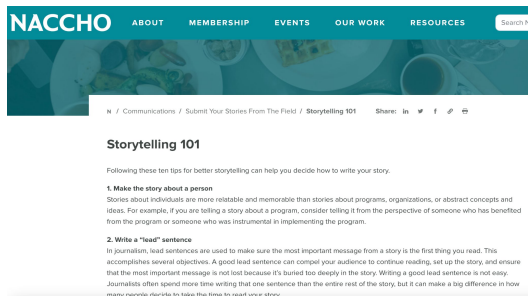


Telling Your (Public Health) Story in the News

5 Tips

1. Connect and build relationships with journalists. 
2. Make it local. 
3. In interviews, “hook”, “bridge”, and “flag”. 
4. Remember: Personal Stories and Structural Solutions. 
5. Use Asset-based Language. 

Resources



Take your media program to the next level on June 10, with communications and public health experts who will share how to:

- **Build** a culture of and an infrastructure for news response within your organization
- **Create** a media requests review, approval, and preparation process
- **Monitor** media to plan or pitch thought leadership opportunities
- **Identify** and prepare spokespeople
- **Develop** standing-ready talking points

Q&A Discussion



GILLINGS SCHOOL OF GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH
North Carolina Institute for Public Health



NCDHHS

Resources & Opportunities to Engage



GILLINGS SCHOOL OF GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH
North Carolina Institute for Public Health



NCDHHS

Opportunities to Engage



**Join us 12:30-2 PM on June 2nd for the kick-off of the
NC Collaborative Communication Network!**

Fill out the link in the chat to connect to register for our kickoff.

*Your participation helps build a stronger, more connected public health
infrastructure across our state.*

Closing



Please complete our evaluation survey to finalize your participation in the course.



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