

Introduction

The majority of counties in southeastern North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina comprise a region that consists of an increased percentage of ethnic minorities, high unemployment rates and poverty levels, and high risk of life threatening diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, and hypertension. As a result, there exists a greater need for healthcare. With the exception of a few coastal cities, the communities are very small, rural areas that lack access to many of the resources needed to support the health care needs of their members. Therefore, many health disparities exist throughout the region.

A community health assessment is conducted periodically through the Coastal Carolinas Health Alliance with the help of its Community Health Improvement Team members and other community members and organizations. It allows for identification of the current health status of a community, the resources currently in place, the health care needs of the community that are not currently being met and the capacity for improvement. This assessment is a compilation of both primary data obtained from local residents via surveys, interviews, and health forums within the community, and secondary data obtained from data bases such as North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. The inclusion of primary data provides qualitative data that allows each assessment to be unique in focusing on what the residents view as strengths, weaknesses, and major health issues within the community. It also helps to set priorities for improving the health of the communities according to the members' concerns. The use of secondary data provides quantitative data used to assess disease prevalence within a particular county and allows for comparison to other counties within the region and to the states of North and South Carolina. This comparison allows for detection of the commonalities of disease disparities within an area and focuses attention on those concerns that require a greater amount of resources for improvement.

The community health assessment focuses on eliminating the health disparities by considering that is affected (race, age, and gender), how poor the community is (unemployment rates, poverty levels, use of food stamps, education) and where the highest health risk areas are. By identification of these factors, communities can focus their efforts on educating the community in prevention of the diseases, as well as how and where to get the health care necessary to treat the diseases. In order to achieve these goals, the community must have adequate funding to support such efforts. This funding is made possible through conducting community assessments and outlining the findings within applications for specific grants and endowments. The findings reflect the existence of disparities, the extent of the disparities and the measures necessary to correct them. This data compilation and analysis will increase the chances of obtaining adequate funding where appropriate to improve the general health of the communities.

Geographic service area

This assessment covers a total of ten counties in North and South Carolina. Nine of those counties are in North Carolina:

- Bladen County
- Brunswick County
- Columbus County
- Duplin County, NC
- New Hanover County
- Pender County
- Sampson County
- Scotland County
- Robeson County

One county included from South Carolina:

- Horry County