

NORTH CAROLINA



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FOUNDATION

# 2025 Child Health Recognition Award Highlights





# LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## *Nominees*

Awards will be given to recognize local health departments that have developed an innovative program that has produced measurable, sustainable outcomes. All local health departments, as defined by NCGS 130A-2(5) are eligible for consideration. Up to three local health departments will receive awards consisting of monetary grants of up to \$10,000 to be used by the grantees for activities such as special projects, staff development or educational materials.

# **Cabarrus Health Alliance**

## ***Primary Care Clinic***

2025 Award Recipient



Cabarrus Health Alliance's has changed how it manages care at the Primary Care Clinic. The integrated primary care clinic offers medical, dental, and behavioral health treatments in one location. Patients can receive traditional medical visits, non-invasive dental treatments, and behavioral health support without leaving the clinic. This model has reduced treatment barriers, serving 632 dental patients (454 pediatric and 178 maternity) and 223 behavioral health pediatric patients last year.



# **Catawba County Public Health** *Community Health Workers* 2025 Award Recipient

The Catawba County Public Health Community Health Workers Program helps ensure that all families in Catawba County have opportunities that allow them to live long, healthy lives, regardless of their income, education, neighborhood or background. The Community Health Workers (CHWs) address Social Drivers of Health by linking families to available community services and resources. This includes housing support; utilities; food pantries and other nutrition programs; transportation; employment and vocational rehabilitation resources; navigation of clinical care systems, insurance and charity care; and assistance in filling out applications and forms required to receive these services. They also provide motivation and support and help people overcome language and health literacy barriers that stand in the way of accessing services.

# Cumberland County Department of Public Health

## *Back to School Immunizations*



Cumberland County had a lower percentage of kindergarten students fully immunized by day 30 of enrollment compared to the state average. Annually, the health department partners with Cumberland County Schools to offer on-campus back-to-school immunization clinics, and the health department offers monthly late-night clinics. A bag of fresh fruits and vegetables is offered to each family receiving immunizations. Staff also incorporates immunization clinics into other health department events, hosting an annual Fun in the Sun event and a twice-yearly Vax Yourself Vax Your Pet event. These efforts increased community-based immunizations administered with an average of 1400-1500 vaccines each month.



# Duplin County Health Department

## *Pediatrics*

The Duplin County Health Department ensures all new students have a physical health assessment before attending school. All students entering school for the first time must have a physical health assessment. If these requirements are not met, the student cannot attend school until the necessary health documentation is completed. Duplin County has a shortage of healthcare providers, and new students enroll throughout the school year, including newcomers from Honduras, Mexico, and Haiti. Students that face language barriers and cultural differences have hardships accessing healthcare. In partnership with Duplin County Schools the health department is closing healthcare gaps for students and ensuring compliance with state health requirements.

# Forsyth County Department of Public Health *Adolescent Health*



The Adolescent Health Program includes three youth programs (Flourish, Motivating Males on the Move, and Unify) and the Forsyth Adolescent Health Coalition. These programs offer health sessions for youth aged 9-18, covering topics like puberty, communication skills, healthy relationships, decision-making, pregnancy and STI prevention, and goal setting. The Coalition hosts workshops on higher education, financial literacy, career development, volunteering, and health and wellness for youth aged 9-19. The goal is to equip adolescents with essential life skills to help them lead healthy, successful lives.



# Forsyth County Department of Public Health

## *Forsyth WINS*

Forsyth County Department of Public Health spearheads the Forsyth Winston-Salem Interventions for Nonviolent Streets (Forsyth WINS) initiative, a community-based violence intervention program inspired by Cure Violence Global. Gun violence is a critical public health issue that significantly affects children's physical and mental well-being. In partnership with other organizations, Forsyth WINS provides trauma-informed mentoring, access to essential needs: transportation, hygiene items, and food, and opportunities for positive community experiences to support youth impacted by violence. Forsyth WINS empowers youth to break the cycle of violence and build safer, healthier futures.

# Forsyth County Department of Public Health

## *Maternal and Child Health*



Forsyth County Maternal and Child Health programs for Care Management includes High Risk Pregnancy (CMHRP), High Risk Pregnancy Coordination (clinic), At Risk Children (CMARC), Healthy Beginnings, and Nurse Family Partnership (NFP). Over the past year, these teams have served both urban and rural families through innovative approaches, providing vital support, supplies, and resources during pregnancy and early childhood. This team manages and focuses on early intervention and equitable access to resources to improve health outcomes and support long-term stability for vulnerable residents.



# Macon County Public Health *Child Services*

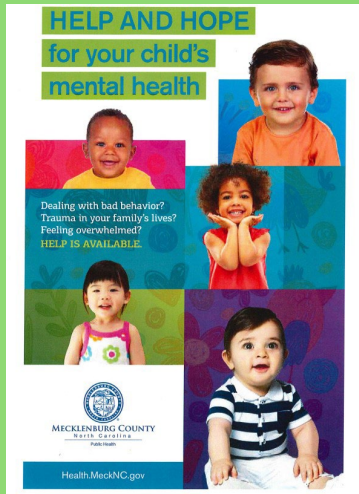
## 2025 Award Recipient

Macon County Public Health's child-focused initiatives-including the Molar Roller, School-Based Telehealth, Healthy Little Learners, Healthy Little Chefs, Macon Milk, and Vision Blitz-represent a comprehensive, innovative approach to reducing health disparities among children and families in a rural Appalachian community. These programs bring dental, medical, vision, early literacy, maternal wellness, and nutrition services directly to where families live and learn, overcoming geographic and financial barriers. With strong partnerships, dedicated staff, and a commitment to early intervention, the health department empowers families and improves long-term health outcomes, serving as a model for community-driven public health excellence.

# Martin-Tyrrell-Washington District Health Department *Hope Stands Harm Reduction*



The MTW District Health Department serves three rural counties in northeastern North Carolina: Martin, Tyrrell, and Washington. These counties are characterized by high poverty rates, transportation barriers, limited healthcare access, and elevated overdose risks. Hope Stands Harm Reduction Initiative addresses rising overdose rates in rural communities. Hope Stands offers 24/7 anonymous access to lifesaving supplies—naloxone, sterile syringes, fentanyl test strips, and more—through weatherproof kiosks placed in each of the district's three counties. In just six months, over 200 harm reduction items were distributed, with increased engagement in syringe services and in-person care. The initiative is replicable, sustainable, and rooted in compassion, equity, and evidence-based public health.



# Mecklenburg County Public Health

## *Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Program*

County Public Health clinicians provide comprehensive assessments and short-term (10-16 weeks) evidence-based services for children from birth to 3 years old, addressing early trauma, attachment, behavior concerns, and parenting support. Since Spring 2023, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Program clinicians have provided varying levels of therapeutic services weekly to over 125 families in the county. Through the program, parents work with clinicians to understand and address their child's needs and the impacts of trauma on their family. This program is unique and vital for emotional and behavioral support and regulation, familial stabilization, so children have a firm foundation to feel secure and to counteract the deep-seeded trauma many children experience at a young age.

# Rowan County Public Health Department

## *Farmers' Market SNAP Program*



The health department partnered with the Rowan County Food and Farm Network and the Salisbury-Rowan Farmers Market to begin offering SNAP benefits. This initiative made the Salisbury-Rowan Farmers Market the only farmers market in Rowan County to accept these benefits. The program expanded with the introduction of "double bucks," which are available on the third Saturday of each month, allowing SNAP users to double their purchasing power for fresh, local foods. By encouraging the use of SNAP at the farmers market, and offering "double bucks" incentives, the program helps ensure more food dollars benefit both consumers and local agricultural producers.



# Wake County Government *Dental Clinic*

The Dental Clinic is expanding access to dental care through various grant-funded programs. The Smiles at Sunnybrook and Regional Smiles initiatives provide free preventative dental care to uninsured children aged 0-20 years. Since October 2017, these programs have delivered nearly 7,500 free preventative visits. Additionally, the clinic offers free preventative services at four Regional Center locations monthly. Over 5,000 children have received dental screenings, and more than 20,000 children and 10,000 parents have received dental education.

# Wake County Government *WIC Program*



The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a USDA public health nutrition program. It provides nutrition education, healthy foods, breastfeeding support, and vital health and social service referrals to income-eligible pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5. Wake County WIC, became the first in North Carolina to offer 100% remote services, including certification visits, by leveraging technology and creative staffing solutions. This approach removed access barriers, boosted participant retention, and provided WIC services to 7,000 new child participants a month as of May 2025, an 83% growth from February 2020.

# Wake County Government

## *Child Health Clinic*



The Child Health Clinic has been part of the Reach Out and Read program since 2009. This program promotes early literacy and brain development during well-child visits by providing new, developmentally and culturally appropriate books to children from birth to age 5. Providers use these books to assess child development, inform about early brain development, and promote healthy family connections. The clinic also maintains a collection of gently used books for children and collaborates with literacy-focused nonprofits and libraries to link families with community resources and provide books for future learning and school success.

# **PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF**

## *Nominees*



Award will be given to an individual who is either a full-time or part-time employee or retiree of a local health department in recognition of outstanding service in preventive health activities in their local community. Awards will be made consisting of monetary grants of up to \$2,000 to be used by the grantee for activities such as special projects, personal development or educational materials.



# Krista Barbour, RN

## *Wake County Government*

Krista Barbour, RN, is the Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC) Supervisor at Wake County in the Maternal Child Health Section. With over 25 years of experience, Krista has been a key figure in maintaining and enhancing the CCHC program in Wake County since 2000. In her leadership role, she not only supervises other consultants but also provides crucial training on infant and toddler safe sleep practices, SIDS prevention, and emergency preparedness in childcare settings. For more than a decade, Krista has been delivering these life-saving trainings to the Wake County childcare community, ensuring safer environments for the county's youngest residents.



# Sonja Bohannon-Thacker, MSW, LCSW

## *Cabarrus Health Alliance*

Sonja Bohannon-Thacker, MSW, LCSW, is the Behavioral Health Director at Cabarrus Health Alliance. She is nominated for her extraordinary leadership and lifelong dedication to behavioral health. Sonja is a relentless advocate for improving mental health services. Sonja has championed preventive approaches to well-being, ensuring that behavioral health is not treated as an afterthought but as a vital component of overall health. Her visionary work has led to the seamless integration of behavioral health services in school systems and pediatric clinics, breaking down traditional silos and making care accessible and less stigmatized. Whether it's through early intervention models, trauma-informed care, or community partnerships, she consistently drives forward initiatives that are innovative and compassionate.



# Nathan Greene

## *Buncombe County Health & Human Services*

As the Public Health Preparedness Coordinator at Buncombe County Health & Human Services, he plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of preparedness through the Incident Command System. In 2024, he united a diverse network of stakeholders, including the regional Public Health Preparedness and Response, local colleges, and training partners, to implement a public health-focused exercise aimed at building a strong Public Health Incident Management Team. During a crisis involving landslides and debris that caused the loss of water, power, and communications, Nathan led, addressing critical issues, ensuring the safety and well-being of those sheltering in place. His efforts were crucial in Buncombe County's response to Hurricane Helene, as they tackled the urgent challenge of providing life-sustaining services to isolated and severely impacted communities.

# Brenda Lee Lillard, RD, MHS, CDCES

## *Jackson County Department of Public Health*



Lee Lillard, Registered Dietitian and Director, WIC/Nutrition Program at Jackson County Department of Public Health has been advancing preventive health within our community. For over 26 years, Lee has demonstrated unwavering commitment, compassion, and a dedication that exemplifies the mission of public health: “Feed them babies” for over 26 years. This guiding principle not only characterizes her professional contributions but also reflects her personal resolve to promote equitable access to nutritious foods. She was instrumental in developing and implementing their Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) and Diabetes Self-Management Education (DSME) programs. Under her leadership, the DSME program achieved American Diabetes Association recognition in 2009, expanding evidence-based care to hundreds of individuals managing chronic diseases.

# **Vickey Manning**

## ***MTW District Health Department***



Vickey Manning, a retired public health professional from the MTW District Health Department, spent her career working in child safety and injury prevention through her role with Safe Kids Riverbend. She is recognized for her involvement in health education and continued participation in child safety outreach after her retirement. Her work has included organizing car seat checks, distributing helmets, collaborating with first responders, and providing education to families. Manning's career has focused on preventive health activities serving families in northeastern North Carolina, especially in the rural tri-county region of Martin, Tyrrell, and Washington counties.

**Shruti Shastri, DDS, MHA**  
**Rockingham County**  
*Division of Public Health*  
**2025 Award Recipient**



Shruti Shastri, DDS is the Dental Director who significantly improved access to dental care for children in Rockingham County. Before Dr. Shastri's arrival in 2018, our in-house Dental Clinic served 432 children, in 2024 over 650 children were seen. Dr. Shastri played a pivotal role in launching the Mobile Dental Unit (MDU) program in 2023, which provides on-site dental care at elementary schools for children who meet income requirements and do not have a dentist. Dr. Shastri has also overseen other projects, including the redecoration of the Dental Clinic in 2020 and organizing events in 2022 and 2025 to provide dental care and educational activities for children without dental insurance.



# **Tiffany Ward**

## ***Montgomery County Department of Health***

Tiffany Ward has been serving as a Health Educator II at the Montgomery County Department of Health in Troy, NC, since October 2022. She manages program reporting, collaborates with community partners to assess needs and implement strategies to improve health outcomes, and provides current educational resources to the community. She is a member of the Montgomery County Opioid Action Coalition, where she helps build a diverse network of services and community partnerships to address substance use and expand access to care in the rural community. The Coalition brings together community stakeholders to address substance use and opioid misuse. By expanding access to prevention, treatment, and recovery resources, the coalition aims to create a sustainable network of care tailored to the county's rural communities.

# INDIVIDUAL RECOGNITION

## *Nominees*

Award will be given to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to improving children's health services through a single effort. The award will consist of a monetary grant of up to \$4,000 to be given to the state public health association for scholarship in the name of the award recipient.



# **Raydiance Swanston, MPH, CHES®**

## ***Mecklenburg County Public Health***

### **2025 Award Recipient**



Raydiance Swanston, MPH, CHES, is the Senior Program Health Manager of Dental Services at Mecklenburg County Public Health. She oversees a clinic that provides pediatric dental services to over 2,300 uninsured or underinsured children. Raydiance initiated the Save a Smile pilot program, which covers the cost of in-office sedation and treatment at the County's contracted Pediatric Dental Office. She started Give Kids a Smile Day in 2023, where 30 patients received dental care. By 2025, the event had grown to serve over 357 children. Raydiance manages the new mobile dental unit, which served 808 students and 100 preschool children from February to June 2025. She supervises a staff of 14 at the brick-and-mortar clinic and has secured \$2 million in grant funding to support dental programs, ensuring access to dental services for uninsured or underinsured children.



## **Susan Wells, ADN, RN, CPHN, ERRN** ***Warren County Health Department***

Susan Wells is a pivotal figure in child health services in Warren County. She began her career as a Child Health Nurse at the Warren County Health Department in 2003 and has consistently worked to improve the quality of care for children. As a nursing supervisor, Susan leads a comprehensive Child Health Program that offers accessible, high-quality services such as wellness exams, immunizations, screenings, and parent education. Her efforts have significantly impacted the lives of numerous children and families in Warren, and neighboring counties, including Franklin, Vance, and Halifax. These areas are predominantly rural with limited access to pediatric healthcare services. The clinic is one of only three medical offices in the region dedicated to child health services.

# LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT *Nominee*

Award will be given to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to improving children's health services through a series of achievements over a period of



The award will consist of a monetary grant of up to \$4,000 to be given to the state public health association for scholarship in the name of the award recipient.

# **Gerri L. Mattson, MD, MSPH, FAAP**

## **2025 Award Recipient**



Dr. Mattson is nominated for her outstanding contributions to public health and children in our state. Dr. Mattson has served key roles in state and national efforts related to prenatal health, early childhood and development, mental health, children and youth with special health care needs, immunizations, and social determinants of health. Dr. Mattson's more than 20 years of leadership roles in the NC Department of Health and Human Services have contributed to improved evidenced based pediatric services, access to care, and linkage to needed services for venerable communities.

***Congratulations!***



**We appreciate all the nominators taking time to  
submit nominations for the Child Health  
Recognition Awards**