Emerging Issues

- Due to the emergence of H1N1, RCHD coordinated local efforts for the retrieval, storage and distribution of H1N1 vaccines and supplies. Additionally, RCHD provided the community with education for the prevention and spread of the virus.

New Initiatives

- Starting January 2, 2010 restaurants and bars in North Carolina and many lodging establishments became smoke-free, thanks to S.L 2009-27 (G.S. 130A-496), otherwise known as North Carolina’s Smoke-Free Restaurants and Bars Law.
- The Healthy Youth Act (GS115C -81) will be effective in the 2010-2011 school year. It will include comprehensive health education for grades 7-9 and ensure the usage of appropriate educational materials.
  
RCHD will coordinate efforts locally for new initiatives.

Fast Stats
(NC Justice Center and US Census Bureau)

- 129,123 Total Population
  - 38.0% Native American
  - 35.8% White
  - 24.1% African American
  - 8.6% Hispanic or Latino Origin
- 30.8% Poverty
  - Highest poverty rate in NC
- 4th poorest mid-size county in the nation
- 51.5% low income (incomes less than twice the federal poverty level)
- 22.8% without health insurance
- 12% unemployment
- 63% high school graduation rate
- DSS 2009-2010 budget is $326 million– an increase about 10 times during the past two decades

Purpose

The purpose of the State of the County Health (SOTCH) Report is to relate current information on the health status of the county. It is written in the three interim years that the county is not conducting a community assessment and serves as an update of yearly health concerns and the actions taken to address them.

Robeson County Department of Public Health (RCHD)
910-671-3200

The 2009 SOTCH Report can be retrieved from the RCHD Website: publichealth.southernregionalahec.org/Robeson
Chronic Disease—Over a 3 year period the Sparrow project have provided 4,213 African Americans with cardiovascular & stroke prevention education. The results of the program have been outstanding, with an increase in physical activity and nutrition and a decrease in blood pressure & weight. This year Sparrow received additional funding to implement Phase II of the project within a 13 county region for African Americans in faith-based settings.

- In 2009, free community health screenings were conducted throughout the county. The focus was to identify the risk factors for diabetes & heart disease. A total of 1,168 screened participants received individualized interpretations of their blood pressure, total cholesterol, HDL-cholesterol, glucose, and risk factor test results.

- In observance of Prostate Awareness Month, a two-part screen which involves a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test and a Digital Rectal Exam (DRE) was conducted for men age 40-70 in Robeson by Southeastern Regional Medical Center (SRMC). There were 411 PSAs and 367 DREs provided free of charge to the community.

- Robeson served as one of the 5 pilot counties in a HPV marketing campaign, conducted by the South Central Partnership for Public Health. The campaign encouraged residents in the target population to get vaccinated. The primary focus was cervical cancer prevention and health promotion.

- Project H.E.A.L.T.H. (Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyles for Tomorrow’s Health) is 1 of 21 youth obesity prevention projects that was initially funded throughout the state by the NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund. The project continues to function under SRMC’s Community Health Services. In 2009, Project H.E.A.L.T.H. reached a total of 25,188 students, parents, and teachers.

- The Nurse Family Partnership is an evidence based community program that transforms the lives of low income, first time mothers. The NFP has seen a dramatic decline in child abuse and neglect, child arrests, behavioral and intellectual problems at age 6, fewer emergency room visits, and fewer convictions of mothers. Robeson is currently in its second year of program implementation and has the capacity to serve up to 100 first time mothers.
Nearly 40,000 Robesonians currently live in poverty, and the county is one of 250 in the United States and one of 10 in the state that have suffered a poverty rate higher than 20 percent since the federal government began tracking it 50 years ago.

As factory and farm jobs disappeared, the service industry took advantage of Lumberton’s location on Interstate 95 to develop hotels and restaurants for people on their way to tourism destinations, such as Myrtle Beach, S.C or Orlando, Fla. Now this industry is a top employer in the county. During 2008, the service industry netted $118 million from travelers passing through who spent money at gas stations, restaurants and hotels. The recession is projected to cut that figure to $110 million this year, which equates to 1,120 jobs that cater to travelers.

These low-paying service jobs keep people employed at least part time, but don’t provide enough income to boost them over the poverty threshold. That population, the working poor, depends on social welfare to get by, so each year millions of government dollars goes toward Medicaid, food stamps, and other supportive services.

Robeson County Department of Social Service budget for 2009-2010 was nearly $326 million, a jump from $206 million seven years ago. At the end of November 2009, Robeson County’s Medicaid program included 41,146 people. From July 2009 to November 2009, the program spent $95 million of its 2009-2010 budget. The Medicaid budget is $283 million, up from $181 million in 2002.

The Robeson County Health Department assists up to 12,000 people annually and offer services on a sliding-fee scale based on poverty. The income level of the clients determines how much they pay, so at least 30 percent of the population is served for free. However, many clients can not afford to see a specialist when they are referred out. Therefore, clients get the basics but rarely obtain the additional care.

Food stamps are another indicator of poverty. As of the end of October, a total of 34,896 Robesonians were part of the program, up from 25,863 in 2004. The local program budget is $39 million this fiscal year, a nearly $10 million increase from last year. Most participants are elderly or children, and last year 40% of food stamps recipients lived in households with earnings.

**Socioeconomic, Educational & Environmental factors that impact Robeson County**

DSS 2009-2010 budget is $326 million– an increase about 10 times during the past two decades

Taken from: The Poverty Paradox-A two part article on poverty in Robeson County

By Sara Hottman 12/6/09 & 12/13/09
Solutions for socioeconomic, educational & environmental factors that impact Robeson County

In effort to adapt to the service industry, the county Board of Commissioners recently allocated money for a full-time tourism development director. The commissioners have also funded training and education programs to help displaced farming and manufacturing workers learn the technical skills they need in the new economy. At Robeson Community College, a workforce training building, nurse training courses, and the heavy equipment training program are supported by the county.

The Lumberton City Council in August took advantage of the workforce training programs to partner with Fort Bragg’s BRAC (Base Realignment And Closure) initiative, Robeson Community College and the county to apply for a $4 million federal grant that would make the Police Department’s renovation project energy efficient. This project is all about jobs, and getting young people and displaced workers trained and certified to make them as marketable as possible as “green” becomes standard across industries. Many building projects require eco-friendly standards, therefore contractors need a skilled workforce for these projects.

Technology jobs pay more than manufacturing and service jobs, but they require highly-skilled employees. Robeson County has a high dropout rate, which effects the county ability to attract business and industry. The high school graduation rate in the 2007–08 school year was 51.4 percent, and last school year was 63%, according to the Public Schools of Robeson County. At Robeson Community College, a lot of students have to take remedial courses before they can start on their degree.

A community’s education reflects on the value of the workforce, and health is also indicator. Robeson County has one of the highest obesity rates in the state. This is a deterrent for businesses locating in the community because they look at obesity rates as a surrogate measure of health care costs.

However, poverty has enormous implications on food consumption patterns and the quality and the amount of food available. The Robeson County Health Department has taken steps to curb obesity and promote health by promoting the WIC new food packages, exercise, healthy eating, and tobacco prevention programs. In Robeson County Public schools, whole milk is no longer an option in cafeterias, and elementary and middle schools do not serve fried food.

The Center for Community Action helps unemployed and underemployed women enter the skilled workforce with its Women’s Fund, a need-based scholarship program for women in college-level health care, mental health and education programs. Health care and education are among the markets that are growing despite a dismal economy, and organizations worldwide have developed programs that target women—a largely untapped pool in the workforce.

It is evident that the socioeconomic, educational & environmental factors in Robeson are linked. To improve the state of health in Robeson, awareness of these factors must be recognized and interventions and policies must be created in a variety of settings and levels to impact change.