

NCPHA E-Newsletter

March 2022



Newsletter from the NC Public Health Association and the NCPHA Public Awareness Committee

Message from the President

– Leah Mayo



It is hard to believe we are already well into the first quarter of 2022 – and what a year it has already been. Although COVID-19 (and all of its variants) continues to impact us, our public health workforce stays fierce and resilient. Thank you for your continued efforts to vaccinate and boost while maintaining day-to-day operations to provide the opportunity for all to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. All of you – regardless of whether you are a front-line worker, public health partner, or advocate - you are nothing short of amazing!

If you ever need a reminder of how invaluable your work is, I encourage you to reflect on the revised (2020) [Essential Public Health Services](#). For many, if not all, this framework is second nature in our daily lives, and although not stated previously, equity has always been a core value of public health. As the premier public health association in North Carolina, NCPHA wants to model this by continuing to build an equitable association. Some recent initiatives include a new nomination process for NCPHA leadership and the formation of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Caucus. Stay tuned to learn more about the BIPOC Caucus and read about one of the co-founders in the Member Spotlight section.

As the weather gets warmer and we start to venture out more, I look forward to seeing and learning with you this spring. We are kicking off with a virtual lunch-n-learn, [Older Adult Falls and Related Traumatic Brain Injury: Overview, Prevention Strategies, and Statewide Resources](#). Closing out March and Social Work Month is the [North Carolina Public Health Social Work Conference](#). Finally, April and May will feature our “[Springish-Fall](#)” Educational Conference, the [2nd Annual Young Professionals Conference](#), and the [Public Health Leaders Conference](#). Keep reading and visit the website to learn more. Who is ready for non-virtual continuing education opportunities?

In addition to the many professional development opportunities, NCPHA tries to give back to the community. This year at our “[Springish-Fall](#)” Educational Conference, the Young Professionals, BIPOC Caucus, and Women’s and Children’s Health Section are partnering to host a service project to support an agency focusing on eliminating health disparities for women of reproductive age in western North Carolina. More details on how you can contribute are forthcoming.

Last but not least, NCPHA loves and values our public health social workers – HAPPY SOCIAL WORK MONTH!



INSIDE:

Message from the President
page 1

Public Health News
page 2

NCPHA Events
page 6

NCPHA Member Introductions
page 7

NCPHA Section News
page 11



Spoiler Alert: Mental Health IS Important, even for Public Health Professionals

— Deborah Smith, MSW, LCSW



Mental health. These two words have been popular lately as the world continues to grapple with natural disasters, wars, violence and a global pandemic that has caused fear, isolation and death. What exactly is mental health? Mental health includes our, “emotional, psychological and social well-being!” In short, our mental health determines how we react to situations, how we think and how we feel. Have you been snappy towards a loved one lately? Have you felt unmotivated to get any tasks completed? Are you struggling to stay asleep at night? Do you find yourself feeling physically sick with headaches or stomach pains? If any of these describe you, then it may be time to step back and assess your mental health. Does it mean you have a mental illness? No, but it does indicate that your mental health is suffering, and you need to respond in a healthy manner. If you had a broken leg, you would respond; your mental health is just as important as your physical health.

Mental health and mental illness are often simultaneously used; however, it is important to understand there is a significant difference between the two terms. All individuals have mental health, just as they have physical health, but not all individuals experience mental illness.

What comes to mind when you read the term, “mental illness?” Do you picture an asylum with patients wearing straight jackets or maybe you picture your family member who everyone describes as “crazy?” What should come to mind is the coach on the Little League team, the barista at the local coffee shop or your neighbor with the cute dog, because nearly 50 million American adults are experiencing a mental illness² (side note: this statistic is likely lower than reality due to underreporting; it is also from pre-COVID in 2019). There are over 300 different mental illnesses that range from mild to severe and situation-based to chronic³; therefore, whether you know it or not, you are likely interacting with an individual who is or has experienced a mental illness.

As public health professionals, we all educate on the importance of eating healthy, exercising and staying hydrated; we know physical health is important. As public health professionals, we also need to educate on the importance of protecting our mental health and help break the stigma of mental illness.

continued

Continued...Spoiler Alert: Mental Health IS Important, even for Public Health Professionals



Here are some tips to preserve your mental health:

- Leave work on time. There will be situations when you need to work later than expected or respond to an email after-hours; however, this should not be the norm. Stop making excuses for how busy you are and walk away from work at the designated time. You'll thank me later.
- Speaking of work, you are given PTO days for a reason. Use them. Also, don't work when you are on PTO FOR. ANY. REASON!
- Limit the amount of news, social media, etc. per day. There's rarely any positive stories and the constant negativity will impact your mental health. If you must stay connected to your phone, then I suggest viewing funny cat videos (or any funny animal video, really).
- Stay hydrated with water. Our bodies need water, and many of us do not drink enough of it. Start drinking the recommended amount of water per day consistently and you will notice a change in your energy levels and your overall mental health.
- Get outside. Many of us also do not get enough Vitamin D from sunshine, so head outside! Bring your phone with you and have that staff meeting while you take a walk or encourage group walks.
- Buy a notebook and each night write three good things that happened that day or three things you are thankful for in life. Each night, review the previous submissions and then add three more.
- Strive for one "big belly" laugh per day; the ones where tears stream down your face, and you can't catch your breath because you're laughing so hard.
- Be kind. You have no idea what others are experiencing. Be the person you would want to see if you were having a bad day.
- Talk to someone who specializes in this field. You wouldn't visit a dentist if you were experiencing toe pain; your mental health needs a specialist, too. There are a wide range of professionals who can provide therapy including Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW). Sessions are confidential (except in cases of harm to self or others), so be assured that whatever is said will be held in confidence.
- If you are experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression or another mental illness, remember there is nothing "wrong" with you. Even if you were to have a mental illness diagnosis, this does not imply that you are broken or are any less of a human than the next.
- The stigma surrounding mental health has deep historical roots; however, together we, as public health professionals, can work together to diminish and erase that stigma while promoting self-awareness and the importance of accessing care for our mental health in addition to physical health.

References:

¹ www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm

² www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america

³ www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm



Once a Social Worker...

— Deborah Hunter



Having recently retired, I've had some time to reflect over my chosen career. I decided I wanted to become a Social Worker at an early age. My decision came about by watching my mother assist neighbors and friends with her time and talents. I also started noticing that my peers were coming to me with their problems and concerns. It was about that time, that I started hearing the term "Social Work". As a child of the 60s, I realized that Social Workers were on the front lines of the civil unrest that was occurring in our country at that time. But being a restless teenager and living through my own family disfunction, I didn't do anything to pursue my dream.

Fast forward to my thirties. By now, I was in a troubled marriage with three children. I was working various factory jobs and the dream started nagging at me, partially due to people seeking me out for help. I began college at age 31 and excelled despite all the chaos that was happening elsewhere in my life. I was popular, engaged in extracurricular activities and my children were welcome on campus. While it was my original intention to just get a 2-year degree, I had a mentor who pushed me to go further. I finally graduated with my Bachelor's degree just after my 40th birthday. Along the way, I interned at a youth shelter, a mental health facility and a juvenile jail and completed countless volunteer hours. I finally landed

my first 'professional' Social Work job as a Child Protective Services Social Worker. It was hard but rewarding. My career continued as a Maternity Social Worker and finally as a supervisor a Care Coordination Unit. Over the years, I've had such joy and fulfillment in my work. What led me to retire a little earlier than I had planned was a loss of that joy and fulfillment. In taking a part time position, one of the interview questions led me to answer, "I want to do something that I don't have to use my big Social Work degree". What a joke! I still use it everyday as a front desk attendant at a local gym.

I recount part of my life story to let you know that "Once a Social Worker, always a Social Worker." I also want to share some insights I've learned along the way.

1. Follow your dreams no matter how long they take. I went on to earn a master's degree after the age of 50 and I continue to seek out continuing education opportunities.
2. Be open to asking for help when its needed. We lost our home in Hurricane Floyd in 1999 and it was so hard for me to ask for and receive help. After all, I was supposed to be the one helping, not the one needing help. I've also had to seek out professional counseling help, another difficult decision. However, it was well worth it.
3. Consider mentoring and volunteering. While you may never know what your time and efforts mean to those you touch, believe me, it will make a difference.
4. Self-care is crucial. Being the best **YOU** will help you to be the best Social Worker possible. It took me a long time to learn that one. You cannot pour out of an empty cup.

Now, go out and save the world!

Questions to Help You Scope Your Next Data Project

— Michael Arthur, Guilford County Chief Data Officer



Public Health Organizations have a lot of specializations - from physicians, to epidemiologists, to IT experts - all working together daily to solve tough problems that have a huge impact on the community. However, when it comes to modernizing data and analytics infrastructure, whether building a new analytics platform or data warehouse, this same group of people can struggle to achieve significant results. This often happens not because of technical challenges, but due to the challenges associated with **scoping** the project. Before any technical features are selected, the scoping is where the different stakeholders should come to a shared understanding of the purpose and impact of the project. Below are some questions that you can ask in scoping your next project to help you make the most of your effort.

Who will be involved in the scoping?

Participants in the scoping process should come from across the domains impacted by the project, including those who will be using the system, people who manage and understand what data is available, and any leadership who will act on the outputs of the system.

What is the problem we are solving?

Before you start defining the technical features of the project, make sure you have clearly defined the problem and its impact. This is not simple. The problem should be important enough to be a priority for the organization, but also something that can be addressed using data the

organization has or can access. To determine what is both important and doable, ask the planned future users of your modernized tool/platform to describe the problem they are currently facing, including who or what is affected by the problem, and how much they are affected (i.e., the magnitude of the problem). Finally, ask how is it being solved today? From there identify the specific gaps the new solution will fill.

How will we evaluate impact?

The objective here is to take the outcome we're trying to achieve and turn it into a goal that is measurable and achievable. The goal should be a concrete, specific, measurable aim or outcome that the organization will accomplish by addressing the problem. The technical solution is not itself the goal of a data infrastructure modernization project. Rather, the goal of the project should be to solve some policy or an operational problem that impacts the organization's mission.

Conclusion

Because of the size and complexity of different technical options, data infrastructure modernization projects can end up focused on the capabilities; what technology/vendor will we use, what features do we require? However, before you define the features and technical requirements, consider your answers to these questions to first make sure you are correctly defining the scope of the project.

References:

Data Science Project Scoping Guide – Data Science and Public Policy: www.datasciencepublicpolicy.org/our-work/tools-guides/data-science-project-scoping-guide
How to Do Data Analytics in Government: www.govtech.com/data/how-to-do-data-analytics-in-government.html



Upcoming NCPHA Events

Springish-Fall Educational Conference

April 27-29, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Asheville, NC

2022 Public Health Leaders' Conference

May 19-20, Raleigh, NC

For more information and to register go here:

ncpha.memberclicks.net/public-health-leader-s-conference

2022 NCPHA Young Professionals Spring Conference

May 18, Raleigh, NC

For more information and to register go here: ncpha.memberclicks.net/young-professionals-conference

2022 Fall Educational Conference

September 14-16, Wilmington, NC

Registration will open June 1.

National Public Health Week!

April 4-10, 2022

The theme this year is *Public Health is Where You Are.*

Don't forget: APHA has a whole toolkit with fact sheets, template blog posts and social media language, visuals to download and share and more.

If you're planning an event, please share it on APHA's calendar of events (throughout the whole month of April!): nphw.org/Events/Submit-an-Event

NCPHA

Member

Introductions

This issue we meet Kate Hughes, HR Specialist, NC Alliance for Public Health Agencies, Deirdre Moyer, PhD, NCPHA Membership Chair, and Michaela Penix, BS, MPH, NCPHA BIPOC Caucus Chair.



NCPHA Member Introductions



Kate Hughes

HR Specialist

NC Alliance of Public Health Agencies

Hometown: Arlington Heights, IL

Education: BS in Business Administration – University of Illinois Springfield

How long have you worked in public health:
Three months.

What do you like most about your job:
I enjoy interacting with people and making sure employees have a point of contact if they have any questions and my co-workers are awesome.

If you could have dinner with three people, who would they be:
Rosa Parks, Helen Keller, Princess Diana

If you could change one thing about public health, what would it be? (money is no object)
More available resources to the public and employees of the Health Departments.

FAVORITES:

Hobby: Anything crafty – knitting, making jewelry, making tee-shirts/coffee mugs

Food: Cheeseburgers

Movie: Kingsman: The Golden Circle

Song/Artist: Kip Moore/Jason Aldean

Sport/Team: Chicago Blackhawks, Cubs, Bears, and Bulls

Color: Purple

Book: Anything by Colleen Hoover

NCPHA Member Introductions



Deirdre Moyer, PhD

School Nutrition Director
Rockingham County Schools

Hometown: Eden, NC

Education: BS- Public Health Education, UNCG
MA-Health Education and Health Promotion, ECU
Core Public Health Leadership Certificate - UNC - Chapel Hill
PhD Public Health Education, Walden University

How long have you worked in public health:
12 almost 13 years

What do you like most about your job:
I am currently the School Nutrition Director and I love how Public Health affects the entire community and all of us have the opportunity to improve the lives of those in the communities we serve.

If you could have dinner with three people, who would they be:
My Mom (Betty Moyer), she passed away six years ago, Princess Diana, and Maya Angelou

If you could change one thing about public health, what would it be? (money is no object)
The public would better appreciate, understand, and respect the impact public health has on people's lives.

FAVORITES:

Hobby: Bodybuilding, Shopping, Travel, Exercising, Cooking

Food: Cake, Peanut Butter, Chick-Fila, Coffee

Movie: Wizard of Oz, E.T.

Song/Artist: Earth, Wind, and Fire

Sport/Team: Duke, Atlanta Braves

Color: Black

Book: To Kill A Mockingbird, The Shack

NCPHA Member Introductions



Michaela Penix, BS, MPH

NC Director, Maternal Infant Health
March of Dimes

Hometown: Fayetteville, NC

Education: BS, Biology; MPH

How long have you worked in public health:

14 years. I started in public health as a public health educator with Cumberland County Dept. of Public Health for 4 years, enjoyed building my public knowledge and experience at East Carolina University as a graduate student and graduate assistant for two years, flexed my new public health skills with the Twin Rivers YMCA for a year integrating health into their childcare programs, and fulfilled my dream of working with March of Dimes for the past seven years.

What do you like most about your job:

Bringing together traditional public health partners, hospitals, lay health people, and community members together to improve health for families,

If you could have dinner with three people, who would they be:

Dr. Camara Jones, Dr. Joycelyn Elders, and Stacey Abrams

If you could change one thing about public health, what would it be? (money is no object)

I would want public health to be viewed as a top priority, with funding to match.

FAVORITES:

Hobby: Anything crafty – wreaths, painting, sewing, music...you name it! Really – I'd love to try something new!

Food: Cake

Movie: Encanto

Song/Artist: Donald Lawrence

Sport/Team: Any NC-based or Atlanta-based team

Color: Glitter

Book: How to be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi

Public Health Leaders Section

— Pamela Brown, Chair of Leadership Section



I hope that you are beginning to feel a sense of refreshing, not only with the change in the season and number of daylight hours but also in the pandemic's impacts on your community and your teams! Thank you for the good work you do consistently to keep your communities safe!

If you are able, please join the PH Leaders Section Sessions at the Spring-ish Fall Conference April 27-29 in Asheville. These are a few highlights of some of the sessions:

- The Future of Public Health: Initiative Updates and Progress—Lisa Macon-Harrison, Stacie Turpin Saunders, and Brienne Lyda-McDonald
- Millennial Women in Public Health Leadership: Barriers and Successes in Modifying the System—Dr. Jennifer Green and Ashley Curtice
- Lessons Learned and Reflections on COVID-19 Response—Dr. Amanda Fuller-Moore
- Crisis Leadership II Training—Amy Belflower Thomas

As a reminder, at the October PHL Section virtual meeting, we decided to postpone the selection of new section officers until the spring conference in 2022. Please consider whether you would be interested in serving in one of these roles and let me know if you are interested:

Chair
Vice-Chair
Fall Educational Conference
Committee Representative
Advocacy Committee Representative
Secretary/Treasurer

Public Health leaders change the world by improving the opportunities for good health and quality of life right where they are. Thank you for your leadership, your work, your dedication, and the positive changes you bring!

I hope to see you at the conference. Take care!

Pamela Brown, Chair of Leadership Section
pam.brown@lenoircountync.gov
252-526-4212



Social Work Section



THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR SOCIAL WORK

March is National Social Work Month, a time to celebrate and promote the profession. These last couple of years with COVID-19 have been a challenge, yet public health continues to do the work of protecting and improving the lives of our citizens. Public health social workers have been a big part of that effort.

This year's national Social Work Month theme is ***"The Time is Right for Social Work."*** Is it ever! With all the focus on social determinants of health (our profession's area of expertise), the time is right for social workers to shine. We have the skill set to address the critical social factors that can make the difference between a client getting a referral and utilizing a referral, and between a client being informed about a needed health behavior change and the client successfully making that change. We make a demonstrable difference in the lives of our clients, and it shows.

If you're a social worker, then please celebrate the amazing profession that chose you! If you work with social workers, then please be sure to give them an elbow bump and thank them for their hard work and dedication to NC citizens.

Enjoy your month, social workers!

References:

^{1,2} nccdd.org/welcome/what-is-i-dd.html

^{3,4,5} governor.nc.gov/media/2967/open

Let's Celebrate: National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

For the last 35 years, March has been identified as National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. "The term "developmental disability" means a severe, chronic disability attributed to a mental/cognitive or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments diagnosed or that become obvious before the age of 22. The condition is likely to continue indefinitely and limits the individual in 3 or more of the following areas: Self-care; Receptive and expressive language; Learning; Mobility; Self-direction; Capacity for independent living; Economic self-sufficiency¹." In North Carolina, an individual who experiences a traumatic brain injury after the age of 22 is also classified as having a "developmental disability."² Within North Carolina, there are approximately 200,000 individuals living with intellectual and other developmental disabilities³.

On March 1, 2022, Governor Roy Cooper proclaimed our state would continue to support and recognize all 200,000 plus individuals and families via the formal proclamation that March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The proclamation charged the citizens of all 100 counties in North Carolina to "improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families through advocacy, capacity building and systems change⁴." Governor Cooper also reminded all that it is not the disability that holds individuals with disabilities from achieving their full potential, but rather it is "unjust societal barriers and attitudes⁵."

Let's take time this month to honor this extraordinary population!



Women and Children's Section



As public health professionals, we are well aware of how detrimental housing insecurity is; including its contribution to the well-being and health of women and children. The Women and Children's Health (WCH) section of the North Carolina Public Health Association (NCPHA) acknowledges that this is a monumental public health problem and through our section and various partnerships would like to highlight current and ongoing efforts to address this serious issue.

Nearly 22 million women living in the United States live in poverty. The data is very limited in what that number looks like for North Carolina, but many of us know without seeing the data, that housing insecurity is a significant issue. The WCH section is committed to championing equitable birthing experiences for all, which includes supporting optimal preconception and interconception health. Along with the March of Dimes, which works to support quantifying and ending homelessness in these vulnerable populations across the United States; we are also simultaneously supporting these individuals by linking our members to local resources, data, and continuing education opportunities in North Carolina.

Last November, the March of Dimes began an initiative called "Meals that Matter", with the first event at the Women's Center in Raleigh, a day shelter that offers at-risk and homeless women empowering tools and

support. They were able to provide a nutritious meal, along with a 90-day supply of multivitamins, and invited these guests to stay for a brief presentation about nutrition. The usage of multivitamins supports individual nutritional needs and their reproductive health, reducing their risk of having a baby born with a **neural tube birth** defect. While they didn't have many participants to complete a paper survey that was administered, they did have the privilege of hearing their stories. They also learned that while these women were grateful for the generosity of the shelter and the food that was provided, they felt as though they were often not presented with enough opportunities to enjoy nutritious food. If we think about the food that is generally provided to individuals who are experiencing homelessness or food insecurity, it is often food that will stretch...think ramen noodles and meatless spaghetti. In addition, according to these women, becoming pregnant while experiencing homelessness was a terrifying thought. However, these participants' preliminary focus was not birth control and they were not aware of no-cost birth control campaigns available to them.

"If you wish to move mountains tomorrow, you must start by lifting stones today".

We know that one organization alone cannot solve the issue of homelessness, equitable access to care, or undesirable birth outcomes like preterm birth or low birth weight. However, we do know that when we all work together to improve our communities by addressing social drivers of health, we can create an environment that fosters good health for all. A wise African proverb states, "If you wish to move mountains tomorrow, you must start by lifting stones today".

Let's work together to protect our most vulnerable populations. If you would like the WCH section to support your work around homelessness, please contact Michaela Penix at mpenix@marchofdimes.org or Dominique Buckenmeyer at dbuckenmeyer12@gmail.com



Academic Practice Based Research (APBR) Section

— Amy Belflower-Thomas

You're Invited!

Special Invitation!

The Academic & Practice-Based Research (APBR) Section invites everyone to attend the APBR Podium and Poster sessions at the NCPHA Education Conference in Asheville on Thursday, April 28th 2022. Podium presentations will begin at 9:00 a.m. and will run with a break for lunch until 3:00 p.m. The Poster Expo opens doors at 6:00 p.m. You won't want to miss this chance to connect with public health practitioners, researchers, and students from across the state!

Additionally, we are thrilled to announce we are accepting proposals for the late-breaking Open Forum Session! This session will run from 3:30-5:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 28th. If you missed our abstract process last summer or have something hot-off-the-presses to discuss, it is a great opportunity to discuss your current projects, processes, and findings with peers. Presenters will provide an overview of their topic for 5 minutes followed by an informal discussion with the audience. This session is intended for practitioners, academics and students to discuss and gain insight into ongoing projects, special topics, and emerging trends in public health. Please submit topics of discussion and two discussion questions to Laurel Booth at lcbooth@ad.unc.edu by March 18th, using **NCPHA Open Forum Session** in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you!

Contact Us

Executive Director: Katye Griffin
Kim Dittmann, Operations Officer, E-mail: kdittmann@ncapha.org
222 N. Person Street
Suite 208
Raleigh, NC 27601
Phone: 919-828-6201 Fax: 919-828-6203 Website: ncpha.memberclicks.net



Graphic Designer: Zannie Gunn, TypeColorShapes.com

