

NCPHA E-Newsletter

September 2021



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

Message from the President

– Mike Zelek



As you know, COVID-19 has once again affected our Fall Educational Conference plans. While we won't be able to come together in Asheville in October, I am excited to share that we have secured April 27-29, 2022 for our rescheduled conference. I am looking forward to seeing you all at the Crowne Plaza in Asheville this spring, with many of the same great speakers that were scheduled to present in October. Thanks to the hard work of our Planning Committee, I am confident it will be the best conference

yet! We are also working to host virtual training opportunities for NCPHA members this fall including an upcoming Lunch and Learn on September 24th focused on firearm injuries and prevention opportunities.

In addition, we will hold a half-day virtual meeting October 8th, during which we will present awards, scholarships, and NCPHA's slate of officers for 2021-22. This year, we are revising the elections process for NCPHA's Executive Committee to make it more open and transparent. Please take a few minutes to learn about the candidates for NCPHA executive committee positions and vote for the candidate you feel is the best fit for the role.

Finally, thank you. It has been an incredible honor to serve as NCPHA President during this critical moment for public health. As I transition to Past President, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to serve in this role as well as excitement about where NCPHA is headed under Leah Mayo's presidency. As many of you know, NCPHA has already benefited greatly from Leah's tireless efforts, and I am confident she will be an incredible President.

Mike Zelek, MPH
2020-2021 NCPHA President



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Single-Use Plastic Pollution and Health: It's Not Hopeless If We Move to Circularity

— Crystal Dreisbach, MPH, RPCV, Executive Director at Don't Waste Durham



Crystal Dreisbach (left) and Don't Waste Durham team

The opportunity to share my insights and knowledge with you on this topic is an honor. Health, environment, and economy are inextricably linked, and I believe my experience connects these sectors in a unique way. My story starts in 2010 when I was a Research Utilization Officer in reproductive health and family planning at a large public health research institute in Durham. My job at the time was to make sure that the best available research evidence would not sit on a dusty shelf somewhere, but rather truly be applied to policy, program, and practice. Gratifying work!

One day that year while dining out in Durham, I was handed a Styrofoam takeout box for my leftovers. My curiosity about the material led me to read some reports and papers, and I became concerned for the community's health. It was perplexing and unacceptable to me that despite the plentiful research evidence that clearly shows the negative health, environment, and economic impacts, Styrofoam is used everywhere as food and beverage packaging. Not just in restaurants, but in grocery stores, at family events, in staff break rooms, and more. I approached Durham's City/County Environmental Affairs Board (EAB)

Continued...Single-Use Plastic Pollution and Health: It's Not Hopeless If We Move to Circularity

to find out whether our town could pass an evidenced-based policy limiting the use of polystyrene foam. To work on this policy, the EAB and I established a subcommittee. This group quickly grew in numbers of people eager to get involved. I had unwittingly created a local waste-reduction movement full of people from all backgrounds.

In 2013, I founded the organization **Don't Waste Durham** (dontwastedurham.org) whose mission is to create solutions that prevent trash. Together our volunteer army developed and now operates innovations like GreenToGo, Bull City Boomerang Bag, and The ReCirculation Project. We continue our policy work at the local, state, and national levels.

I'd like to share why we should be concerned about single-use plastic pollution and what I believe are the most important parts of the solution.

Health. Our bodies and our environment are chronically buffeted by plastics and the chemicals inside them. And single-use plastics are pollutive in every aspect of their lifecycle – from manufacturing to disposal. Communities of color and low-income communities bear the greatest burdens from single-use plastic. The health disparities are in large part due to the proximity of low-income people's homes to geographic locations along the lifecycle of plastic. This includes sites of hydraulic fracking where oil and natural gas are extracted to create the plastic, resulting in negative birth outcomes including low-birth-weight babies, preterm birth, and congenital heart defects in the people who live there. Another big factor often unconsidered is these populations' exposure to air pollution from transporting those resources to refineries via pipelines. An example is "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana. This area is home to a Black community living with some of the highest air pollution levels and cancer rates in the U.S. Communities of color and low-income populations also bear the burden of negative health outcomes from proximity to landfills and incinerators. Durham County and Orange County trash, for example, is trucked daily on a 200-mile round trip journey to a landfill located in the poorer Sampson County.

We don't often think about the production stage of plastic. Manufacturing the plastic itself creates harmful work environments. Workers in Styrofoam manufacturing

plants for example have significant occupational exposure to chemicals that cause brain and learning problems, as well as damage to the liver, central nervous system, and eyes.

At the end of their short useful life, single-use plastics that are not trucked to recyclers, landfills, and incinerators end up in our streets and waterways. These plastics break down into microplastics which later make their way up the food chain into the food we eat and into our drinking water. The Haw River Assembly recently identified unhealthy levels of plastic beads and filaments in water samples from Jordan Lake, an important reservoir for drinking water in Durham. People consume about 5 grams of plastic every week, which is the equivalent of a credit card, according to a 2019 study by the University of Newcastle in Australia. And apparently we're inhaling plastic too. A 2019 study published in Environmental Science & Technology showed that air, bottled water, and seafood were the biggest sources for ingested microplastics.

Much of our plastic food and product packaging contains "forever chemicals" called PFAS, which have been linked to immune, thyroid, kidney, and reproductive health problems. New 2021 investigations by the EPA and Green Science Policy Institute reveal that PFAS are used much more ubiquitously in product packaging than previously thought.

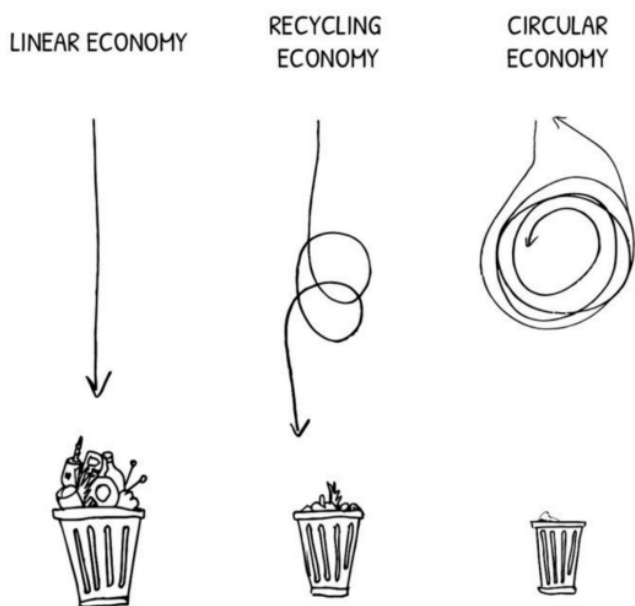
There are appropriate times and places for single-use. In medical settings, emergency circumstances, and among people with disabilities and mobility issues, there are obvious critical needs for single-use items. But the vast majority of us do not need to use plastic straws, plastic water bottles, and plastic grocery bags. If you can skip the straw and switch your bags, and if you live somewhere with clean, safe tap water, let's rely less on these items and support alternatives.

But what about recycling and composting? While compostable food packaging sounds like a better alternative to single-use plastic, the majority are extra costly, contain PFAS, end up in the landfill where they produce large amounts of methane gas, and are still only used once before disposal. Meanwhile, only nine percent of plastic actually gets recycled – actually downcycled,

Continued...Single-Use Plastic Pollution and Health: It's Not Hopeless If We Move to Circularity

losing its integrity and eventually becoming so flimsy that it can no longer be recycled. Recycling companies' most costly pain point is receiving the wrong materials, and not enough of the right materials, to be financially viable. It's important to know that recycling is a commodities marketplace, and a limited number of recyclable materials are worth recycling.

Single-use plastic has economic costs. Billions of dollars are lost to the recycling industry when facilities come to a halt to repair machinery tangled with plastic bags. The recycling companies pass these costs to the cities, and we see municipalities enacting bans on single-use plastic items sometimes to the detriment of businesses who have few affordable alternatives. NCDOT reports that they spend more \$10 million annually across the state addressing litter alone. Single-use also brings cities significant costs in landfill tipping fees and stormwater drain management.



Reuse systems as a healthy alternative. Manufacturing products over and over again that are designed to be used only once is a wasteful, unhealthy, pollutive practice. To disrupt the take-and-trash economy, alternative systems like circular reuse systems are needed. Circular reuse systems do not involve throw-away products, but rather durable goods which are (1) designed from the beginning for longevity, maximum material health, and recyclability, and (2) part of a system where they can be collected and sanitized to be reused again and again. The infrastructure to operate reuse systems are largely what's

missing yet straightforward to install – reusable products, technology for asset management, supply chain elements like collection points and transport, and sorting and wash facilities.

Circular reuse systems lead to healthy, resilient communities. Programs like the ones Don't Waste Durham operates make city-wide circulation of local resources possible while creating jobs, making positive health and environmental impacts including significantly lowering carbon emissions, strengthening the local economy, and requiring less dependence on unstable global markets.

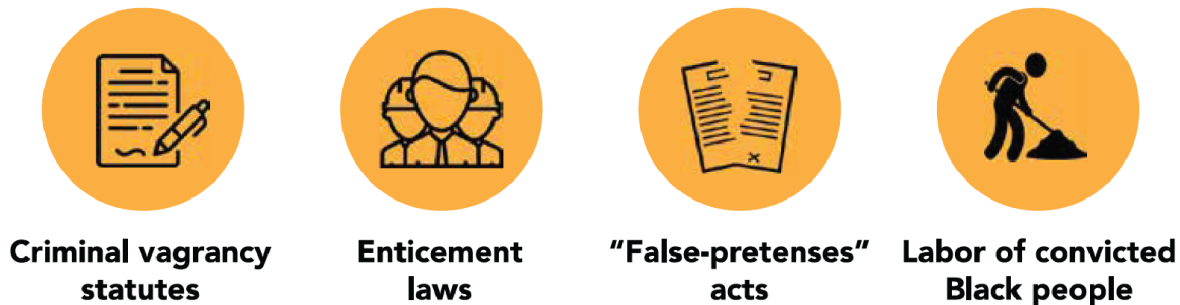
Corporate responsibility. Corporations have an opportunity to offset their negative impacts on a scale larger than could an individual. Corporations of any sector can commit energies and resources to facilitating shifts toward circularity by purchasing carbon credits from circular reuse systems and contributing funding to city and regional circularity initiatives. Circular Triangle is an example of an organization leading region-wide changes in the Triangle area and assembling stakeholder funding for shifts toward circularity.

Government has perhaps the most important role to play. I do in part mean passing policy and regulation to reduce sources of pollution, yes, but two other actions are equally important: (1) Restructuring local government. City solid waste management departments are long overdue to evolve. For decades trash and recycling have been their main services. Reuse as a municipal utility – waste prevention – should now be part of any evidence-based solid waste management strategy. (2) Allocation of funds specifically toward building the infrastructure that makes circular systems possible.

Finding solutions to single-use plastics and waste is too often assigned to the "environmental" realm, and this is far from the complete picture. The problems I've outlined are symptoms of a holistic condition. The reality is that every one of us and every entity has a relationship with the products we buy and use, and that relationship encompasses health and economy as much as the environment. I hope you'll join me in supporting change toward circularity, for all the reasons.

Task Force on Racial Equity in Criminal Justice

FIG 1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF RACE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE



Last summer, in the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the country’s outcry for justice, Governor Cooper created the Task Force on Racial Equity in Criminal Justice (TREC). Led by Attorney General Josh Stein and Supreme Court

Justice Anita Earls, TREC comprised 25 leaders from across the state and a range of professional disciplines – from victim advocates and prosecutors to elected judges, local officials, and law enforcement.

The task force set forth to study disparities in our state’s criminal justice system and recommend solutions to stop discriminatory law enforcement and criminal justice practices, hold public safety officers accountable, and create a criminal justice system that treats every person fairly.

Unlike many other states undertaking this work, North Carolina didn’t limit its review to police use of force, but focused on the wider criminal justice system. We recognized that we could not effectively suggest solutions without recognizing the history of race and criminal justice in the United States, and how decades of oppression have worsened racial trauma among people and communities of color. In December, [TREC made 125 recommendations](#) to make our state fairer, safer and more effective for all North Carolinians.

The TREC report itself has multiple public health implications. Some TREC recommendations are synonymous with public health principles and initiatives. For example, the TREC recommendation **to develop and provide funding to help communities build violence prevention programs** aligns with many public health efforts already underway in communities. A partnership between stakeholders in public health and

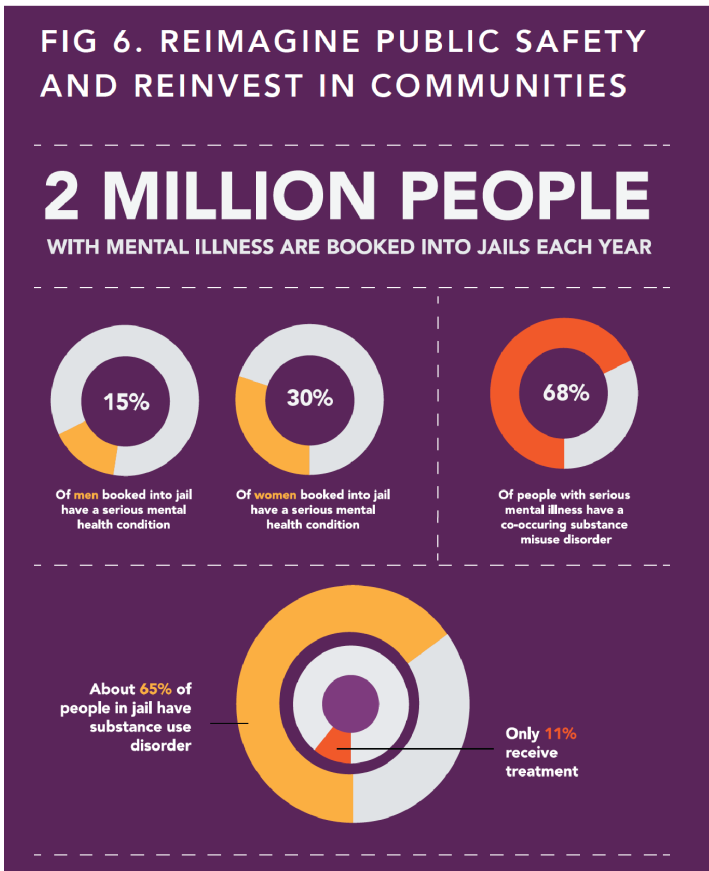
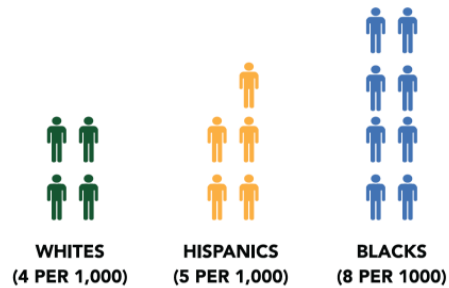


FIG 4. RATES OF VICTIMIZATION OF VIOLENT CRIME



Wellness Task Forces to examine public safety and wellness needs. TREC also recommends providing training and health-related resources to organizations that can promote positive health behaviors. By addressing health issues when they start – in school and in our communities – we can do more to help give people paths to address their challenges that help them get healthy, complete their education, and build successful futures, instead of being diverted into the criminal justice system and facing long-term harm.

public safety, working in sync with communities on this recommendation, both makes sense and can be even more impactful.

Several TREC recommendations promote diversion from the criminal justice system, including the recommendation to **respond more appropriately to situations concerning mental illness, autism, intellectual disabilities, substance abuse, homelessness, and other non-emergency situations.** This recommendation proposes alternative emergency responses to 911 crisis calls involving mental and behavioral health. Such redirection would both prevent incarceration and the negative health outcomes associated with incarceration, as well as increase the chances that people suffering from a behavioral or mental health crisis will receive more effective treatment and get healthier.

Some TREC recommendations encourage community involvement in solutions – a foundational principle of public health, such as **to form Community Safety and**

The American Public Health Association has recognized the systematic injustice of racism and its impact on health for people of color, ultimately declaring racism a public health crisis. Hundreds of communities, including several North Carolina counties and cities, followed with similar declarations. Many highlighted the importance of partners in the work of dismantling racism. TREC's proposed solutions align with these public health calls for racial equity.

Effective solutions to these complex challenges require partnerships across sectors. Public health leaders in North Carolina play a vital role in this effort to fundamentally reimagine public safety as TREC now works to make our recommendations a reality. If public health and public safety work together, we can improve the future quality of life for countless North Carolinians of color and their communities.

TWO SAVETHEDATES!

#1 NCPHA Fall Celebratory Virtual Event

Friday October 8, 2021

9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

NCPHA Business Meeting, plus Scholarships and Ann Wolfe Mini-Grant presentations, passing of the NCPHA Presidential Gavel, and a special message from Sec. Mandy Cohen!

All presented virtually! More information to come!

The virtual conference is free but you need to register.
To register, go here: www.ncpha.com



#2 NCPHA Spring Educational Conference

(aka the Postponed Fall Educational Conference)

April 27-29, 2022

Crowne Plaza Hotel and Golf Resort, Asheville, NC

Registration will open in February. If you were registered for the October dates, no need to register again.

Newsletter Survey



The Public Awareness Committee thanks you for your past responses in our Newsletter Survey. According to the June survey, walking was your favorite form of exercise. ***NCPHA member and walker, Yulonda McLean of Robeson County Health Department, was our June winner!*** Thanks to all of you who took part in the June survey!

Here's the link to the September survey. ***Complete the survey and you'll be eligible to win a \$25 gift card!*** Thanks in advance for your responses.

www.surveymonkey.com/r/NCPHASept2021



NCPHA Lunch Webinar & Learn



Firearm Injuries and Prevention Opportunities: An Expert Panel Discussion Friday, September 24 12:00 - 1:00 PM

In this hour-long webinar participants will learn about the latest surveillance and prevention activities occurring both statewide and at the local level. Experts will present on statewide trends; the CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means) intervention, an emergency department focused prevention program; development of county Gun Safety Teams working locally to encourage safe use and storage of firearms; and Bull City United, a local effort in Durham to intervene in the community to stop escalation of injuries after a violent event. Following the presentations, participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and learn from others in a moderated discussion.

Moderator:

Phillip Cook, Professor emeritus, Duke University, Sanford Public Policy

Panel:

Data Trends: Shana Geary, Epidemiologist, NC Division of Public Health, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch

CALM Prevention Initiative: Kurt Michael, Professor, Appalachian State University

Gun Safety Team Initiative: Sue Anne Pilgreen, Pitt County/Vidant Health

Bull City United: David Johnson

To **register** for the webinar, go to: ncpa.memberclicks.net/lunch-and-learn-webinar-series



NCPHA

Member

Introductions

This issue we meet Health Director, Bruce L. Robistow.



NCPHA Member Introductions



Bruce L. Robistow

Health Director

Halifax County Health Department

Hometown: Roanoke Rapids, N.C.

Education: Associate in Applied Sciences, Major in Respiratory Therapy, Hudson Valley Community College

Bachelors in Applied Sciences, Major in Business University of Mount Olive

Master of Public Health, UNC Chapel Hill

Veteran:

8 years Active Duty, serving both US Navy and US Marine Corps as Corpsman, Specialty: Combat Medic

How long have you worked in public health:

3 years. 43 years in primary Healthcare.

What do you like most about your job:

Working closely with the community and our awesome team of program coordinators on delivering evidence-based programming aimed at improving maternal and child health.

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

The overall impression of Public Health. Very few people know what it is, what we do, or how to use it.

FAVORITES:

Hobby: My wife and I are road warriors. Traveling either by car or motorcycle, we travel all over the country. Three rules apply: no plans, no interstates, no chain restaurants. End result is always a good time with no disappointments, never late, never early, and always something new. Try it!

Food: Sushi

Movie: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Song/Artist: Southern Cross, Crosby, Stills, and Nash

Sport/Team: Baseball, New York Yankees

Color: Orange

Book: *To Kill a Mockingbird*



Public Health Leaders Section

Pamela Brown, Chair



From my first job in public health through the excellent education I received in public health leadership at the Gillings School of Global Public Health to my current role as a health director, I have been curious about the qualities needed both for effective public health leaders and for public health to be a leader within the healthcare/local community system. Public health leaders have been in the spotlight during the pandemic, and public health practitioners have been thinking deeply lately about public health's role, needs, resources, and funding. I can appreciate that many of you are tired, overworked, and perhaps overwhelmed, but this might be a great time to carve out just a few minutes to think about your vision of public health where you work or study and to share that vision with those around you.

If you want to see how public health has grown and changed in one community, this article might be of interest to you:

Leadership in Public Health: New Competencies for the Future, Yphantides, Escoboza, Macchione

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4341427

Now to some business. In October (specific schedule to be determined), we will have the Leadership Section business meeting. Each year, we choose who will lead us.

These positions comprise the Leadership Section:

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

Please let me know by the end of September

- if you are currently in one of these roles and would like to remain in your position.
- if you would like to serve in one of these positions.
- the name of the person you nominate for any of these positions (please ensure that person is willing to serve).

I look forward to hearing from you regarding nominations, and if you have time to share some thoughts with me about your vision of public health leadership, I welcome those comments, too!

Thank you for the leader that you are every day and the difference that makes to so many. Be well.

Pamela Brown, Chair, pbrown@health.co.lenoir.nc.us



Social Work Section



The Social Work Section of NCPHA declares NO MORE BAKE SALES - PLEASE!!

The Social Work Section invites your help. We have the uncommon opportunity to provide an annual conference scholarship to emerging public health social workers to help them meet, learn and connect with their future colleagues as a start to their careers. The Section has been given a financial matching grant to start an endowment to support this scholarship every year...without a bake sale, potato sack race, or a raffle for a cheesy gift. Please help us spare you from our annual peddling!

As you may know, the scholarship was initiated in 2010 for baccalaureate and graduate level social work students to attend the annual North Carolina Public Health Association Fall Educational Conference. We presented our first award in 2011. Since inception we have offered nine awards. In the past, we have funded the scholarship through various fundraisers and your kind donations. Several years ago, we determined that if we established an endowment, the scholarship would eventually fund itself every year...and we could get out of the kitchen and not bake cookies to sell anymore! We approached the Shallow Ford Foundation (SFF) in Clemmons, NC to house and administer the fund. SFF was very interested in our work. The Foundation, after reviewing the purpose of our scholarship, took more than a casual interest and wanted to help. They

challenged us to raise \$6,000.00, which they would match dollar-for-dollar up to \$200.00 per individual donation. WOW!

Now, our challenge is to find at least 25 individuals who are willing to contribute \$200 (or more) to the endowment. These 25+ generous individuals will forever be our **Charter Contributors** and we will gratefully recognize them at every conference. We are excited to report that we have already met 62% of this goal!! The Social Work Section has also been challenged to have at least 75% of its members make a contribution of any size to this campaign. By meeting both of these targets, our section will receive the full matching grant of \$6,000.00. This funding will fund our scholarship every year. Over time, the fund's growth will allow additional opportunities to support the practice of public health social work. So, please help us get out of the kitchen, stop baking (and eating) cookies, and help us in this effort. To learn how, contact LaSonya Tuttle at 336 703-3189 (tuttlelm@forsyth.cc) or contact the Shallow Ford Foundation, Sandi Scannelli at 336 663-6794 or sandi@shallowfordfoundation.org. Or if you are already excited to help, you can donate TODAY online at sff.gives/socialwork. Our Section and our blood sugar levels thank you!

CALL FOR SUB MISS IONS

Submissions needed for
NCPHA appreciation video!

An appreciation video for NC's public health workforce is being created for the Spring Educational Conference and we need your help!

Use the following link to submit responses via Google Forms:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1nflIrd2K79W2vxmbTWq07TIDOUS3Ks9Pa4mOdwZlejY/edit>

Video responses are greatly appreciated but not required!

Submit here: bit.ly/NCPHAVIDEO

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