

# State of the Community's Health

Alleghany County | 2021



Promote. Prevent. Empower.

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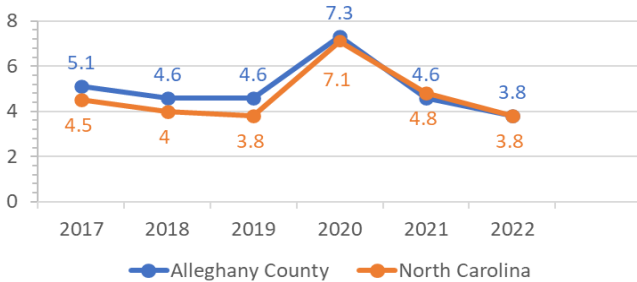
# Overview and Demographics

In North Carolina, each local health department conducts a **Community Health Assessment (CHA)** every four years. AppHealthCare recently published the CHA in January 2022. During the years between community health assessments, health departments submit a **State of the County's Health (SOTCH) report**. In Alleghany County, this report includes a summary of demographics, health indicators, and main causes of death. This report also contains updates on the community's top three health priorities, action plan projects, local initiatives and emerging trends.

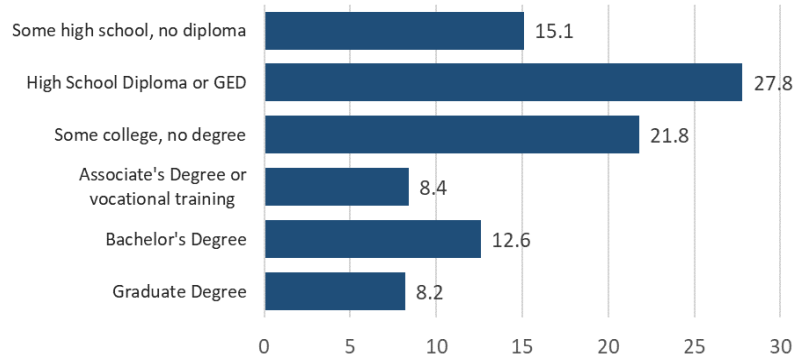


## Alleghany County Demographics Snapshot Total Population 11,049 (US Census, 2021)

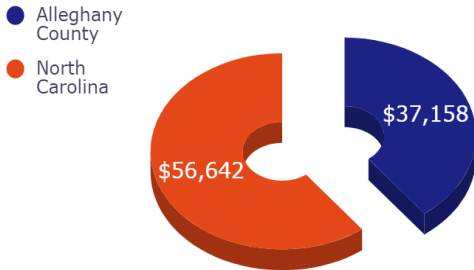
Unemployment Rate, by % (N.C. Department of Commerce, 2016 - Jan. 2022)



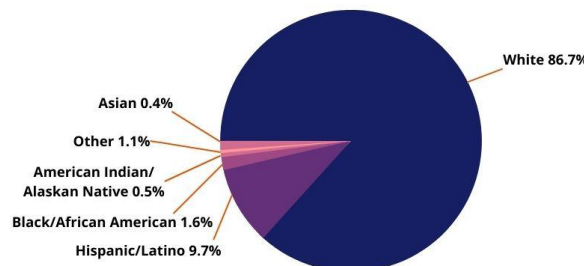
Educational Attainment, by % (U.S. Census Bureau 2020)



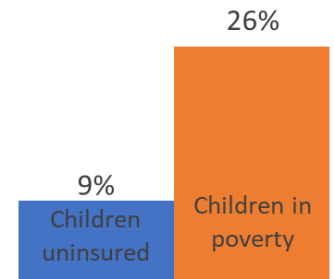
Median Household Income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)



Race Distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)



Poverty & the Uninsured, SAHIE County Health Rankings (2019)



### Leading Causes of Death

(North Carolina County Health Data Book, 2019)

1. Diseases of the Heart
2. Cancer
3. Alzheimer's Disease
4. Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases

### Leading Risk Factors

- Poor Nutrition
- Lack of Physical Activity
- Tobacco Use

### Sharing the State of the Community's Health

Copies of this report may be found at [www.apphealthcare.com](http://www.apphealthcare.com). The report will be presented to community leaders and groups during different events. To learn more, follow us on Facebook at [AppHealthCare](https://www.facebook.com/AppHealthCare), log on to our website, and check your local radio and newspapers. To request more information or to schedule a presentation of this information for your group, call our Alleghany County Health Center at 336.372.5641 or email [info@apphealth.com](mailto:info@apphealth.com).

## About Public Health: Reaching for Health Equity and Resilience

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AppHealthCare is committed to making sure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives.<sup>1</sup> In order to reach this vision of health equity, AppHealthCare is working to eliminate health disparities—differences in health outcomes among groups of people—that are created by social, economic, and environmental conditions. These conditions lead to behaviors such as smoking, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise, which affect our health.

## Public Health Priorities

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The Alleghany Wellness Coalition, which focuses on improving programs, strategies, services, or policies that build on strengths and meet the priority health and emerging needs of Alleghany County, selected the public health priorities in August 2021. These priorities were chosen based on the 2020 Alleghany County Community Health Assessment. The public health priorities identified for Alleghany County include mental and behavioral health, family and social support, substance use and misuse prevention.



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<sup>1</sup>Image source: <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/what-makes-us-healthy-vs-what-we-spend-on-being-healthy/>  
<https://healthequity.sfsu.edu/>

## Health Priority: Mental and Behavioral Health

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### Update to Local Community Objectives

#### *Integrated Behavioral Health*

Behavioral health describes the connection between behaviors and the wellbeing of the body, mind, and spirit. Behavioral health includes not only our mental health, but how our behaviors—such as eating habits or use of alcohol—impact our wellbeing. The number of adults with a serious mental illness in the U.S. has increased from 4.6 percent from 2017-2018 to 5.6 percent from 2019-2020. With the increase in mental illness, AppHealthCare’s Health Clinic in Alleghany County continues to improve access to counseling, referral services, case management, and crisis management. One way this has been accomplished is by establishing a full time onsite Behavioral Health Consultant to provide integrated behavioral health, including tobacco treatment.



Seeking primary healthcare is often the first step to accessing behavioral healthcare. Primary care providers are now moving toward a system of integrated care where both general and behavioral healthcare are provided. Integrating mental health and primary care services has been shown to produce the best outcomes for people with multiple healthcare needs. People with mental health and substance misuse disorders may die decades earlier than those without mental health or substance use disorders. This is mostly due to untreated and preventable chronic illnesses like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. Poor health habits such as lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, smoking, and substance misuse can worsen these chronic diseases. Trauma can also increase the risk of developing substance misuse, and substance misuse increases the likelihood that individuals will experience trauma. Building resilience in a community is a key strategy for addressing trauma and substance use.

#### *Farmworker Health Program and Behavioral Health*

The Farmworker Health Program (FHP) at AppHealthCare strives to improve the health of seasonal and migrant farmworkers in Ashe and Alleghany Counties. Farm work is a dangerous occupation as workers face threats to their physical and mental health. Farmworkers most times lack medical coverage, and face language and transportation barriers. Through the FHP, AppHealthCare works to address these barriers by providing translation and transportation services, as well as access and financial assistance for medical, dental, and behavioral health needs.

The Farmworker Health Program has been working on providing access to behavioral health services to farmworkers in Ashe and Alleghany Counties, and hopes to be able to provide a limited number of services internally in the coming months. Conversations continue around capacity of the behavioral health team to assist in providing services to both farmworkers and individuals with substance use disorders. Once a referral network is successfully established, we will track referrals served by the behavioral health team.

#### *School Based Behavioral Health*

AppHealthCare works with the Alleghany School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) around student health, including disseminating the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). YRBS results are provided to the SHAC team to help influence resources provided to students. The Assessment, Support, & Counseling (ASC) Center is a valuable program that supports Alleghany County School students in mental and behavioral health. As the school mental health program, the ASC Center works closely with schools and local partners to prevent suicide. According to the 2019 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 36.3% of high school students reported that

they felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in a row during the past 12 months, 18.9% of high school students considered attempting suicide, 15.4% of high school students and 16.3% of middle school students made a suicide plan, and 9.7% of high school students and 11.5% of middle school students attempted suicide. The table below outlines this data, collected in 2021, locally in Allegheny County. More information through the NC Institute of Medicine about Youth Suicide & Suicide Attempts Rising in U.S. and N.C. can be found [here](#).

Where	During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?	During the past 12 months, did you make a plan about how you would attempt suicide?	During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide? (one or more times)
<b>Allegheny High School 2021</b> (n= 361 survey respondents)	10.7%	7.4%	4.8%
<b>Allegheny High School 2019</b> (n= 288 survey respondents)	19.4%	18.5%	9.1%
<b>Allegheny High School 2017</b> (n= 291 survey respondents)	16.8%	15.1%	6.9%
<b>Allegheny High School 2015</b> (n= 313 survey respondents)	13.1%	11.6%	6.4%
<b>NC State Comparison (2019)</b>	18.9%	15.4%	9.7%
<b>National Comparison (2019)</b>	18.8%	15.7%	8.9%

Where	Seriously thought about killing yourself, EVER	Have you EVER made a plan to kill yourself	Have you EVER tried to kill yourself
<b>Allegheny Middle School 2021</b> (n= 189 survey respondents)	14.9%	9.1%	5.7%
<b>Allegheny Middle School 2019</b> (n= 225 survey respondents)	28.6%	17.3%	13.7%
<b>Allegheny Middle School 2017</b> (n= 570 survey respondents)	19.9%	16.7%	7.7%
<b>Allegheny Middle School 2015</b> (n= 294 survey respondents)	21.8%	15%	10.0%
<b>NC State Comparison (2019)</b>	23.4%	16.3%	11.5%

#### *Distribution of Resource Cards*

Allegheny Wellness Coalition has a subgroup focused on Mental and Behavioral Health. This subgroup understands that high doses of early adversity significantly increase an individual’s risk of suicide later in life. This group has discussed working with the School Health Advisory Council to distribute a Survive and Thrive resource card to ensure that Allegheny County citizens are aware of mental health services that are available to them. These cards outline signs of serious distress, helpful tips for reducing stress, and a list of local and national crisis resources.

#### *Allegheny Youth Task Force*

The Allegheny Youth Task Force is a group led by Western Youth Network that collaborates with organizations in the area to provide educational resources and promote programming that corresponds with different problem areas that youth face. Lately, mental health has been the main topic of these meetings. The members all have agreed to work with the Systems of Care grant through Vaya and will focus on family and youth engagement.

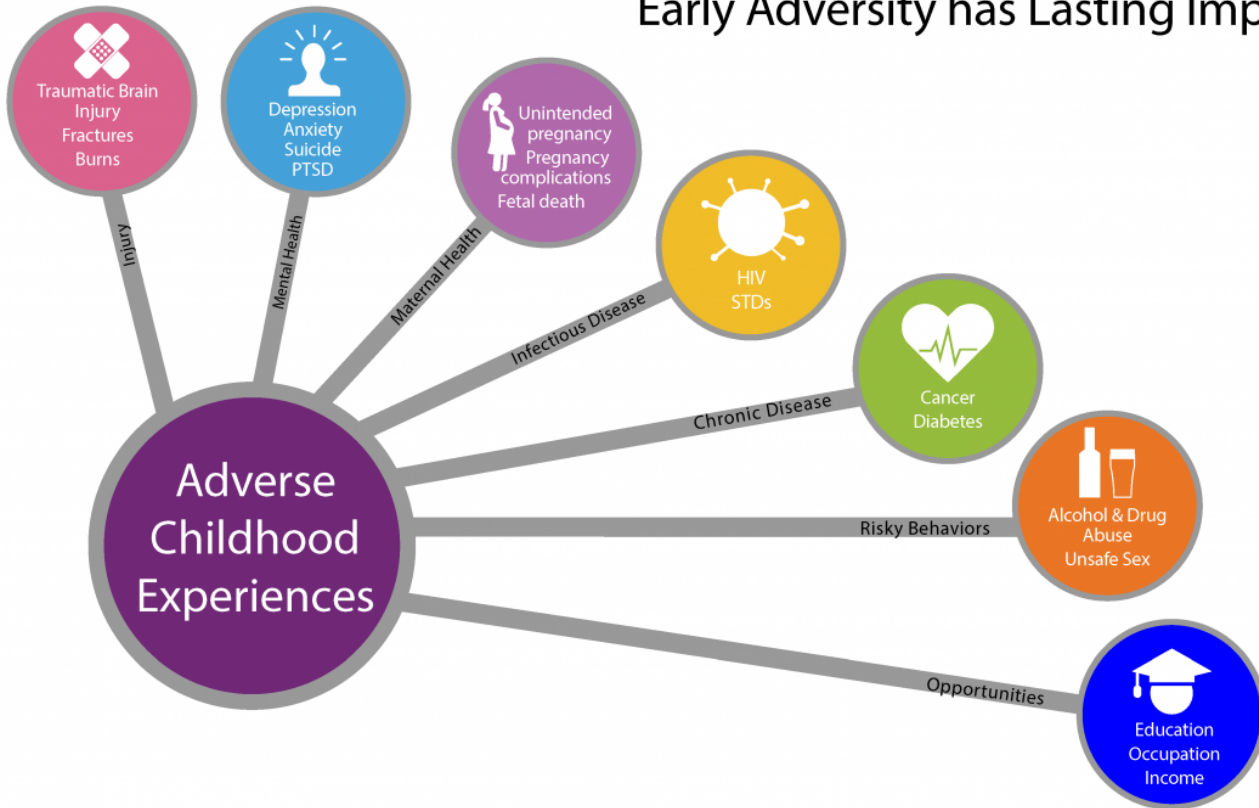
### *Mobile Crisis Management*

Daymark Recovery Services offers Mobile Crisis Management services that provide a comprehensive crisis intervention in the least restrictive environment with a team perspective to meet any individual's needs. The service operates year-round, seven days per week, twenty-four hours per day.

### *National Alliance on Mental Illness*

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI High Country, which includes Alleghany County representation, wants to make the High Country a safer space for those experiencing mental illness by ending the stigma associated with it. NAMI High Country wants to ensure that those who need help have access to affordable care and support. NAMI High Country is here to facilitate recovery and resiliency for families and individuals and ultimately empower those who join us to be able to serve their community.

## Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts

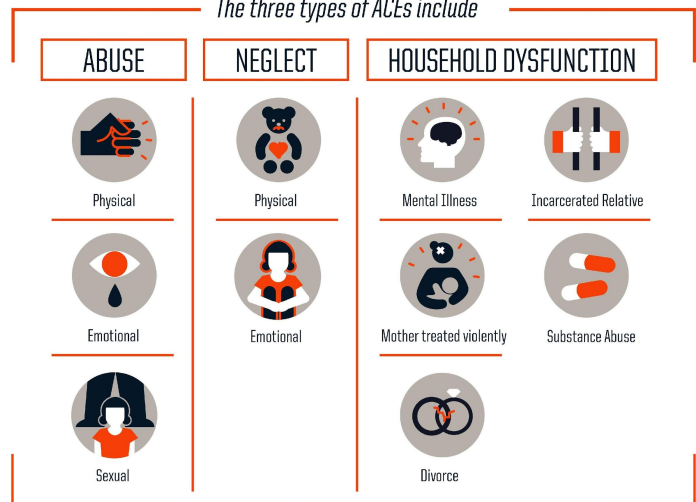


### Update to Local Community Objectives

#### Adverse Childhood Experiences

Many health disparities begin early in life with [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#). ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the imprisonment of a parent. Initiatives such as the Positive Parenting Program and other family interventions through the Allegheny Partnership for children and the Allegheny County Schools are successful at addressing these challenges because they address the whole person in the context of our relationships and local environment.

The three types of ACEs include



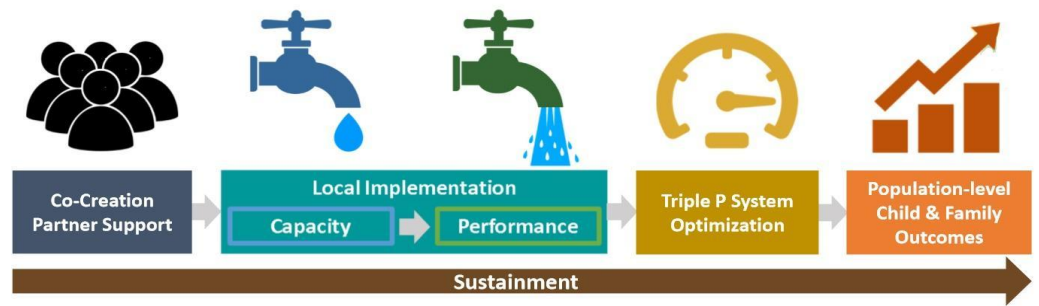
## WHAT IMPACT DO ACEs HAVE?



*Family Based Intervention: Positive Parenting Program*

Alleghany County practitioners continue to implement positive parenting strategies in hopes of reducing serious negative childhood outcomes. Healthy children equal healthy adults later in life. How do

we know that the Positive Parenting Program is working locally? The program is showing high approval scores from families. Improved child behavior and decreased parent stress is being reported based on Client Satisfaction Questionnaires received. The Triple P Team is working with partners and practitioners to consistently collect this data to ensure that important feedback loop is sustained.



## Health Priority: Substance Use and Misuse Prevention

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### Update to Local Community Objectives

#### *North Carolina Opioid Action Plan*

AppHealthCare has committed to the incorporation of the North Carolina Opioid Action Plan, evidence-based opioid and substance use prevention strategies, harm reduction tactics and methods, including safer syringe and naloxone distribution programs. These efforts are directly aligned with our mission and values to ensure the continuation of support for the identified Health Priority of Substance Use and Misuse Prevention determined through the Community Health Assessment and reviewed by coalitions within Alleghany County. The NC Opioid Action Plan Objectives align with Alleghany County's. These include the following:

#### Prevention

- Cutting supply of inappropriate prescriptions and illicit opioids
- Supporting youth through targeted programs to reduce youth misuse of the drugs
- Improving maternal and prenatal care for women battling substance abuse

#### Reducing Harm

- Making the naloxone kits more widely available to the most burdened communities

#### Connecting to Care

- Expanding access to treatment and recovery support
- Addressing the needs of justice-involved populations

A [data dashboard](#) developed by the NC Department of Health and Human Services helps to track and monitor the metrics in the Opioid Action Plan.

#### *Peer Support Specialists*

In 2019, AppHealthCare hired two, part-time, Peer Support Specialists (PSS) then applied for the Community Linkages to Care grant that, once received, allowed for the support of an additional (full-time) PSS to serve the district. There are three PSS that work across the district. The PSSs work as advocates for those struggling with substance use disorder by relating on a personal level through lived experience to promote trust among the people they serve. The PSSs work to serve the community through education, prevention measures, harm reduction, training, connecting individuals to care, working with justice-involved individuals, and helping with environmental and policy change work.

Current PSS initiatives are being captured and evaluated using a combination of pre- and post-test comparisons and follow up with program participants and agencies, as well as maintenance of data logs. The following are measures that are in place and have been tracked since February 2019 (when the NC CPSS program started):

- Board of Health resolution to support comprehensive strategies to address the opioid epidemic
- Total number of individuals served by NC Peer Support Specialists (PSS) across Alleghany, Ashe, and Watauga Counties: **591**
- Total syringes returned: **51,932** (8,340 of those in Alleghany County)
- Total naloxone kits distributed: **3504** (498 in Alleghany County)
- Number of unique justice-involved persons served: **281** (80 in Alleghany County)

- Number of justice-involved people and their families or loved ones educated on harm reduction strategies before release, including (but not limited to) training on how to recognize an overdose, how to administer naloxone, and how to prevent an overdose: **130**
- Number of justice-involved individuals reporting overdose reversals: **37**
- Percent of justice-involved individuals who are given access to naloxone upon release: **100% are offered - approximately 30% receive kits**
- Number of Narcan/Naloxone trainings in business and agencies: **13** (including ASU, community organizations, businesses, churches), **220 kits distributed to 184 participants**
- Number of average contacts with each individual served: **11**
- Number of individuals connected to medical, social services, emergency housing, transportation, food, treatment, behavioral health: **394**

#### *Post-Overdose Response Team*

Community collaboration is a key component of this strategy to provide direct service to community members who have experienced an opioid overdose. AppHealthCare's PSSs are called onto the location of the overdose or to the hospital to intervene with patients and family to provide support and resources. Initial conversations have begun with Alleghany Health (hospital) regarding the creation of a post-overdose response team.

#### *Medication-Assisted Treatment*

AppHealthCare has a physician certified to provide Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) services to patients with a diagnosis of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). In 2021, the Alleghany clinic (of AppHealthCare) developed this program, working with AppHealthCare's Peer Support Specialists. MAT is the use of medications in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies for the treatment of OUDs. This combination of therapies has shown to be effective in the treatment of OUD and can help some people to sustain recovery.

#### *E-Cigarette and Vaping Awareness in Schools*

Youth use of tobacco products—in any form, including electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) like e-cigarettes—is unsafe. Such products contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can harm the developing adolescent brain. Using nicotine in adolescence may also increase risk for future addiction to other drugs. AppHealthCare is working alongside Western Youth Network & the Regional Tobacco Prevention and Control Manager to initiate talks with Alleghany County Schools to implement the CATCH My Breath curriculum as well as to install vape detectors in school restrooms and locker rooms to further deter the use of electronic nicotine devices. Since the Spring of 2022, three counselors have been recently trained in CATCH My Breath with the Train the Trainer option. We hope to see this curriculum implemented during the 22-23 school year.

While the results of the YRBS reflect that the number of students who used a vape in the past 30 days has decreased, we are noticing an increased outreach by administrators that are looking for guidance around the increase in the amount of vaping use that they are currently witnessing in the schools. We are aiming to support ways to prevent and promote cessation with Alleghany County students.

#### *Medicaid Tobacco Free Policy*

Starting December 1, 2022, North Carolina Standard and Tailored Prepaid Health Plans serving Medicaid and uninsured patients will require contracted medical, behavioral health, and some intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD)/traumatic brain injury (TBI) organizations to provide a 100% tobacco-free campus. On September 7th, 2021, DHHS released a memo to providers advising them of the new tobacco-related policy requirements going into effect December 2022. Daymark Recovery has begun to implement their tobacco-free campus policy and is working to make tobacco cessation part of the standard of care.

#### *Live Vape Free NC*

A media campaign aimed to help push vaping cessation among youth launched in Spring 2022. The campaign is called Live Vape Free and is a digital campaign that will target youth. The ads will drive those who click on the ad to a webpage where they can sign up to start the cessation program. This campaign runs in a ten county region.

### *Quitline*

AppHealthCare staff is also able to offer Quitline services to clients by referring them through their online referral platform. QuitlineNC provides free cessation services to any North Carolina resident who needs help quitting commercial tobacco use, which includes all tobacco products offered for sale, not tobacco used for sacred and traditional ceremonies by many American Indian tribes and communities. Quit Coaching is available in different forms, which can be used separately or together, to help any tobacco user give up tobacco.

## Emerging Issues and Other Initiatives

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### **Food Access**

Under our Healthy Communities strategy our goal is to increase the number of new community venues providing access to healthy foods and/or the number of existing community venues providing enhanced access to healthy foods. This includes new efforts for implementation as a result of COVID-19. Healthy foods are defined by the USDA as nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups and are mentioned in the USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025. The Alleghany Farmer's Market, located in Sparta, NC, is a small but burgeoning seasonal, producer-only market in a county of approximately 11,000 residents. AppHealthcare is supporting the Cooperative Extension and the Farmer's Market with outreach efforts for the Double Up Food Buck program which matches your SNAP/EBT dollars so you get twice the amount of fruits and veggies. The program is set to begin in Spring 2022.

### **Physical Activity/Walkability**

#### *Crouse Park*

Crouse Park is close to the Alleghany Farmers Market, just a block from Main Street, and within walking distance from all of downtown Sparta. Crouse Park is a busy park, with a walking path, playground, picnic structures, skate park, and music stage. AppHealthcare is working with the Town of Sparta to support significant infrastructure changes and renovations to Crouse Park that will be taking place this spring/early summer. These improvements will bring more foot traffic and customers to the farmers market on Saturdays and the addition of a new splash pad that the citizens raised money for will significantly increase the number of children who frequent the park.

There has been interest from community activists that are associated with the Special Olympics for the installation of bocce ball courts. Bocce is an Italian game. The basic principle of the sport is to roll a bocce ball closest to the target ball, which is called a palina. Bocce as a Special Olympics sport provides people with special needs the opportunity to have social contact, develop physically and to gain self-confidence. Next to soccer and golf, bocce is the third most participated sport in the world.

#### *Sam Brown Park*

Sam Brown Park is located behind Alleghany High School. The park offers many different recreational opportunities including pavilion shelter, charcoal grills, playground equipment, outdoor basketball, hiking, and mountain biking. AppHealthcare is working with Parks and Recreation to support enhancement of various areas of the park, including the addition of more park benches as well as placing additional disc golf baskets and soccer goals on the property for citizens to utilize and enjoy. The disc golf course located at Sam Brown Park is free to the public and will be open from dawn till dusk daily. This course has plenty of parking across two parking lots. This disc golf course will be closed during Professional Disc Golf Tournaments, inclement weather, and at dusk daily. The amenities of the course are continuously being upgraded.

### **Drug Users Health Program**

In 2019, AppHealthCare's Recovery Peer Support Specialists started collaborating and volunteering with Olive Branch Ministry to provide harm reduction resources and services to Alleghany County residents and businesses. These resources and services include increased availability of Narcan/Naloxone and training, and safer supplies for drug users. AppHealthCare also collaborates with Olive Branch Ministry to receive TA and fulfill requirements of the Community Linkages to Care grant, which is a grant to help to increase access to care and working with justice-involved individuals.

**Advancing Equity Initiative**

In 2021, AppHealthCare received a new opportunity to focus efforts on health equity for Historically Marginalized Populations (or HMPs). Under this initiative, AppHealthCare staff have reconvened the Equity Performance Improvement Team (or PIT) to guide internal efforts to improve agency policies and practices towards health equity, particularly regarding COVID-19 prevention and mitigation. The Advancing Equity initiative will also involve external efforts to engage community partners to collaboratively improve COVID-19 infection outcomes and as well as other long-term outcomes that disproportionately impact HMPs.