



Cleveland County Asthma Coalition History

The Cleveland County Health Department received a grant for Preventing and Controlling Childhood Asthma from the Asthma Program, Women and Children's Health Section, Division of Public Health, NC Department of Health and Human Services to develop an Asthma Coalition in the county in December 2001. The objective of the grant was to establish a community-based Childhood Asthma Coalition in the county that would develop a three-year Plan of Action to address childhood asthma through a variety of strategies.

To accomplish the objective of this award, Health Department officials began the planning process by identifying the major stakeholders in the community and invited their participation in the coalition. Stakeholders included individuals with asthma, parents of children diagnosed with asthma, representatives from private physician practices, the Cleveland County Partnership for Children, pharmaceutical companies, and local pharmacies, hospital education specialists, respiratory therapists, the director of the Alliance for Health (the county's Healthy Carolinians Task Force), the coordinator of Carolina Access II, and the local contact for Mothers of Asthmatics. Two physicians from the Shelby Children's Clinic agreed to serve as medical directors for the Coalition. Representatives from the Health Department included staff members from the Child Health Clinic, Child Service Coordination, and Health Education, school nurses, and the Child Care Health Consultant who works with child care providers. They contracted with a coordinator to head the strategic planning process and oversee the initial meetings and the completion of a plan.

Work began on this initiative with the identification of significant data points (Source: North Carolina School Asthma Survey) regarding asthma in Cleveland County:

- 9.7% of children in the county had diagnosed asthma (state average 10%)
- 14.4% of children in the county had undiagnosed wheezing (state average 17%)
- 12% of children reported missing school due to asthma
- 13% of children reported limiting activities due to asthma
- 11% of children reported sleep disturbances due to asthma
- 125 county residents were hospitalized for asthma related incidents
- 17.9% of middle school children in the county smoke, a prevalent asthma trigger
- 56% of middle school children in the county live with a smoker in the home.

Upon reviewing this data, members established work groups to address four areas: patient/family issues, health care provider issues, school and childcare issues and communication issues. The work groups for each issue identified existing resources in the county, selected strategies appropriate for Cleveland County, prioritized the strategies for planning purposes and identified the resources needed to accomplish the strategies. Work groups reported at the regular monthly coalition meetings to assure that all members had an opportunity to comment on the strategies and priorities. By June 2002 members of the Asthma Coalition had adopted a mission statement and four objectives for their work. The mission statement is "To increase community awareness of asthma in Cleveland County through a comprehensive public health approach." The four objectives adopted include:

1. Expand opportunities for parents, family members and diagnosed asthma patients to learn about asthma.
2. Expand opportunities for health care providers to enhance their understanding of asthma.
3. Develop and implement a community awareness campaign about asthma in Cleveland County.
4. Establish the Cleveland County Asthma Coalition as a permanent coalition.

While working on the strategic plan, members of the Coalition accomplished several initial outcomes: enhanced availability of materials for asthma education, provision of an initial workshop on asthma for child care providers, meetings between school nurses, school personnel and physicians to clarify plans for asthma treatment in the three local school systems and a work group to study the clear flow of information between physicians, parents and schools regarding asthma plans.

As the Cleveland County Asthma Coalition began its first full year of work in July 2002, the Cleveland County Health Department applied for and received additional grant funding of \$5,000.00 to

support the work of the Coalition. Members agreed on regular meeting dates – the fourth Wednesday of each month – and accepted assignment to four committees to carry out the work of the Coalition. With a limited budget and volunteer membership, the Coalition moved ahead on its mission to educate the communities in Cleveland County about asthma. Major accomplishments for 2002-2003 include:

- Establishing a basic Asthma Education Class for parents, family members and patients diagnosed with asthma, held at the family-friendly YMCA and staffed by physicians, nurse practitioners and respiratory therapists with Coalition members providing supporting roles;
- Providing asthma education materials to parents, family members and patients diagnosed with asthma in a variety of settings: Child Health Clinic, physician offices, Coalition meetings and activities;
- Creating and supporting an Asthma Resource and Referral Line, providing telephone contact for individuals seeking information about asthma and resources in the community; the line is supported by the Health Department and staffed by a volunteer member of the Coalition;
- Providing two physician education events involving Roy Pleasants, Pharm.D. from the Asthma Alliance of North Carolina and Spencer Atwater, MD from Mountain Allergy in Asheville;
- Providing training in collaboration with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in the Tools for Schools program for school maintenance personnel; teacher and administrator training is scheduled for August, 2003; Cleveland County's Cooperative Extension Office received grant funds from their state asthma initiative to support this training;
- Providing training for childcare providers with basic asthma information and coordinating annual updates to keep these individuals informed of the latest innovations in care and treatment;
- Providing training for frontline office staff representatives in Asthma 101 to ensure their understanding of asthma and its implications for patients and family members;
- Developing a media campaign to enhance community awareness about asthma;
- Celebrating World Asthma Day with an Asthma Expo on May 6, 2003, with 133 participants and multiple sponsors;
- Sharing information about locally available asthma day and overnight camps with families;
- Gaining acceptance as a standing committee for the county's Alliance for Health, a "virtual" organization which functions as the county's Healthy Carolinians Task Force and which promotes prevention/education initiatives in the county; this assured credibility for the Coalition and also provided opportunities to apply for funding through the Alliance for Health to support the Asthma Expo activities;
- Establishing a "loaner" program for nebulizers for families who could not afford the purchase of the equipment; administration of this program has now been assumed by staff at a local pharmacy which has been supportive of the Coalition's activities;

- Participating in the 2003 North Carolina Asthma Summit in June, one of two local coalitions selected to present their plans and accomplishments for modeling by other communities;
- Applying for and receiving grant funding from Youth United Way, a program of United Way of Cleveland County, for the purchase of a spirometer, software and computer to be housed at the Cleveland County Health Department but available to physicians across the county for their patients.

Members of the Coalition reviewed this work at a strategic planning update on May 13, 2003 and were energized by the accomplishments of the year. As they discussed their plans for the coming year, members focused on programs/activities to be maintained, programs/activities to be developed and implemented, and dreams for the future including establishing a Respiratory Center of Excellence in Cleveland County. Other ambitious strategies include delivering at least a quarterly Asthma Education Class specifically for Hispanics, developing an information package about asthma for patients discharged from the Emergency Department and local hospitals, developing a Coalition website with links to resources and a list serve for older children with asthma, continuing training events for targeted populations, producing a quarterly newsletter, and working on parent advocacy training so that parents can advocate for policy changes which may affect individuals with asthma.

Additional accomplishments of the Asthma Coalition in FY 2005-06 include the implementation of a successful Air Quality Indicator Flag project in schools, day cares and YMCAs throughout the county to alert residents of the air quality index information for Cleveland County. Another new project is the Coaches' Clipboard, a bright red clipboard printed with basic asthma information using the letters S.C.O.R.E. to guide the user in coaching children with asthma. The Coalition continues to sponsor an Asthma Expo in conjunction with the YMCA Healthy Kids Day in April annually and has sponsored two "NoWheeze" Asthma Day Camps, also in collaboration with the YMCA. A new venture this year included the sponsorship of the National Safety Council workshop on "Protecting Our Children's Environment: An Educational Outreach Guide on Asthma" to 30 participants.

As a part of the strategic planning update, members of the Cleveland County Asthma Coalition were asked to comment about why this particular Coalition has been successful in its initial year when so often coalitions falter, especially when the work depends on volunteers. Among the factors mentioned were strong leadership, vested membership, working from an established plan, working together, support from

established organizations including the Cleveland County Health Department, members sharing the spotlight and the responsibilities for activities, representation from many sectors of the community, strong physician support, mutual respect for others, connection with the Alliance for Health, assessing and using members' strengths and talents, and the ability to think creatively to arrive at solutions.