NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Perceptions of Public Health in North Carolina

Wave III Statewide Research, 2026 Findings



Maintaining trust requires continued visibility, familiar voices and meaningful connections to everyday life.

A 2026 statewide survey of 760 North Carolina adults found that people continue to value public health, trust state and local public health more than federal institutions and have the strongest connections to its tangible impact on everyday life.

Key Findings

1 North Carolinians continue to value public health.

They recognize its role in protecting the health and well-being of their communities. Public health resonates most when people can see its tangible impact on their everyday lives, such as protecting food and water, preparing for emergencies and supporting healthy families.

81% Say NCDHHS' work is important to improving the health of North Carolinians.

65% Rate North Carolina's public health system as doing a good or excellent job protecting people from health threats and preventing illness.

Confidence in state and local public health systems remains stronger than confidence in the national public health system.

2 Familiarity continues to drive trust.

North Carolinians who are more familiar with NCDHHS report significantly higher levels of trust and confidence.

People who are very familiar with NCDHHS are more likely to:

- Trust the agency
- Rate its performance highly
- Believe its work is important
- Trust its health recommendations

3 Proactive communications make a measurable difference.

Recognition increased for NCDHHS responsibilities that were emphasized in outreach, such as disaster response, newborn screening and access to health services. In addition, more North Carolinians correctly identify several core public health responsibilities than in previous years, including:

- **76%** Alerting the public about disease outbreaks
- **72%** Controlling the spread of infectious disease
- **68%** Making sure everyone has access to health services
- **66%** Providing vaccines to prevent illnesses like the flu, COVID-19, measles and mumps
- **66%** Making sure restaurants meet health standards

4 Trust is built through local relationships.

Medical professionals and friends and family remain the most trusted sources of health and safety information. Local public health partners continue to play an important role in building credibility.

- **76%** Medical professionals
- **63%** Friends and family
- **55%** Local public health

5 Affordability and access remain significant barriers.

- **72%** Cost of prescription medicines
- **67%** Long waits to get medical appointments
- **64%** Difficulty finding affordable healthy food
- **64%** Cost of routine medical care

What This Means for Public Health Communications

Building Trust Through Visibility

Keep public health visible year-round and connect its work to the everyday lives of North Carolinians.

Show Public Health Through Everyday Impact

Demonstrate how public health protects food and water, prevents disease, supports families, improves access to care and prepares communities for emergencies.

Use Trusted Voices to Tell the Story

Equip medical professionals, local health departments and community partners with tools to show public health's local impact.