KEY FINDINGS

PREVENTATIVE HEALTH

- Women 50-74 who reported receiving, within the recommended time interval, a mammogram or recommended colorectal cancer screening are exceeding the Healthy People 2020 targets.

- Sleep impairment is implicated as a contributing causal factor in many chronic illnesses that are leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide including depression, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic disorders. Given that only 21% of high school females and only 63% of women aged 50-75 report adequate sleep, interventions aimed at improving sleep for women would be expected to exert significant benefit for mood and overall medical well-being.

PERINATAL HEALTH

- More NC babies are born with a low birth weight (9.4%) than the Healthy People 2020 target of 7.8%. African American women are more likely than other ethnicities to experience premature birth and have babies with a lower birth weight. Preterm birth and low birth weight can have lifelong implications for the health and well-being of families.

- While the average number of NC women who reported smoking during pregnancy is about 9%, the highest rates were in Graham (30%), Clay (29%), and Swain (26%) counties, with a total of 13 counties reporting over 20%.

CHRONIC DISEASE

- After age 65, nearly half of North Carolina women are living with two or more chronic diseases. Chronic disease has a negative impact on the overall physical, mental, and financial well-being of women. Those with one chronic disease are at a higher risk of developing other chronic diseases.

- Heart disease is the number one killer of women. While it is a serious concern for women of all ages, rates of heart disease increase dramatically between age groups 55-64, 65-74, and 75+. Women should strive to maintain a healthy weight and diet while engaging in exercise – and refrain from smoking – to decrease their risk of heart disease.

- Diseases of the heart account for 19% of deaths (112,118 years of potential life lost per year), cerebrovascular diseases account for 6% of deaths (35,533 years of potential life lost per year), and chronic lower respiratory diseases account for 6% of deaths (42,589 years potential life lost per year).

OBESITY

- 63% of NC women are overweight or obese. Obesity plays an important role in the risk factors for chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and stroke. Particular attention to lifestyle factors such as diet and physical activity have been shown to have a positive impact on weight data.
Mental Health

One in four NC women has been diagnosed with a depressive disorder and, unlike other chronic conditions, the rate of depression does not increase with age. So, even among young women, almost a quarter have suffered from some form of depression. Stressful life events contribute to both mental and physical illness. Assessing current stressful events as part of a clinical history may improve the clinical care and outcomes for women in NC and beyond.

A quarter of NC women reported three or more adverse childhood experiences – higher than national averages – and should be an area to highlight for intervention efforts. Depression in later life is a common consequence of childhood adversity.

Cancer

Effective strategies exist to combat the four most prevalent cancers amongst the state’s women, including education on lifestyle, activities, HPV vaccination, and screenings for breast, colorectal, and cervical cancer. NC ranks 3rd in cervical cancer screenings but 30th in HPV vaccination.

Although the incidence rates are nearly identical, minority women are 25% more likely to die of breast cancer than Non-Hispanic White women and twice as likely to die of cervical or uterine cancer.

Cancer, more than any other cause, accounts for 20% of deaths (163,105 years of potential life lost annually). Breast cancer alone accounts for 3% (28,352 years of potential life lost annually).

Infectious Disease

At 46%, North Carolina continues to be well below the Healthy People 2020 goal of having 73.6% of all adolescents and adults tested for HIV, though still above the US average of 39%. African American women are much more likely to have been tested (63%) than Non-Hispanic White women (40%).

At the time of publication, the full impact of COVID-19 infections is not yet known. North Carolina has the 14th highest rate of cases in the country. Consistent with national data, the disease is disproportionately affecting African Americans in both incidence and mortality.

Emerging Issues

20% of NC women live in poverty with an additional 10% near poverty – a trend that has remained constant over the past 10 years. Consistent with national data, NC women of color are more likely to live in poverty.

1 in 5 women didn’t see a physician in the past year due to cost. African American women were 50% more likely to have not seen a doctor as Non-Hispanic White women yet 50% more likely to have accrued medical debt.