

North Carolina Institute of Medicine



SHAPING POLICY FOR  
A HEALTHIER STATE

2021  
ANNUAL  
REPORT



## SHAPING POLICY FOR A HEALTHIER STATE

The NCIOM is an independent organization focused on improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians by

Providing analysis on the health and well-being of North Carolinians

Identifying solutions to the health issues facing our state

Building consensus toward evidence-based solutions

Informing health policy at the state and local level

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AND OTHER PROJECTS, VISIT  
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## DEAR FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, AND PARTNERS,

Over this past year, I have been listening carefully to understand what the NCIOM means to you, its many supporters, champions, and stakeholders. This crystallized for me one afternoon when an agency leader asked me to help pull together a small group to discuss a delicate and controversial issue. He called me, he explained, “because people trust the NCIOM.”

At a time when cooperation, honesty, and trust can feel so elusive, the NCIOM has put a stake in the ground for these values. People trust the NCIOM to listen, tell the truth, do our research, and try our hardest. You know that an NCIOM task force report represents the thoughtful deliberations of North Carolinians who come together to examine current research, explore the impact of potential solutions, and find common ground – often across considerable differences.

That’s why the policy recommendations in our task forces are also highly actionable. They reflect the consensus of North Carolinians with deep knowledge of the issues and their insights into which policies will be most effective in North Carolina. This year, we’ve been pleased to see task force recommendations reflected in policies on access to care, telehealth, advance care planning, and maternal health in the North Carolina General Assembly.

While each task force has a different and specific animating question, the fundamental core that drives all our endeavors at the NCIOM is: “How can we, working together, best improve the health and well-being of all North Carolinians?”

We’ve been busy answering that question this year. Over 400 of you joined us for our [2021 Annual Meeting](#), “Community, Resilience, and Hope: Achieving Healthy NC 2030 Behavioral Health Goals.” Keynotes and panels focused attention on our mental well-being and on the lessons of the [Healthy NC 2030](#) Task Force: working across sectors to improve social drivers of health, measuring and improving health equity, and promoting the living conditions that foster well-being and a sense of dignity. In 2022, the [North Carolina Medical Journal](#) will highlight local and state efforts to realize Healthy NC 2030’s vision of whole-person health.

### 2022 will also bring new ideas from task forces that are among the most ambitious ever launched by the NCIOM:

- The [Task Force on Maternal Health](#) is identifying changes to improve maternal well-being; enhance mental health before, during, and after pregnancy; and bring new resolve to eliminating persistent racial disparities.
- With the South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health, we are examining the health, education, social stability, and equity lessons learned from the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic through the [Carolinas Task Force on Pandemic Preparedness](#).
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed both the incredible strength and the concerning fragility of our local public health infrastructure, and our [Task Force on the Future of Local Public Health](#) is addressing that head-on, seeking consensus on a vision for a thriving local public health infrastructure to address the needs of all 10.5 million North Carolinians.

We will also launch two additional task forces in 2022 focused on improving infrastructure and services for older adults and on oral health services.

In closing, I want to share the deep gratitude of the entire NCIOM team for the frontline workers and leaders in public health, health care, and human services across our state who have given so much heart, spirit, and caring in the long fight against COVID-19. You have healed us, counseled us, vaccinated us, listened to us, worked late into the night and woken up early to get right back to this important, life-sustaining work. It’s an honor to work alongside you.



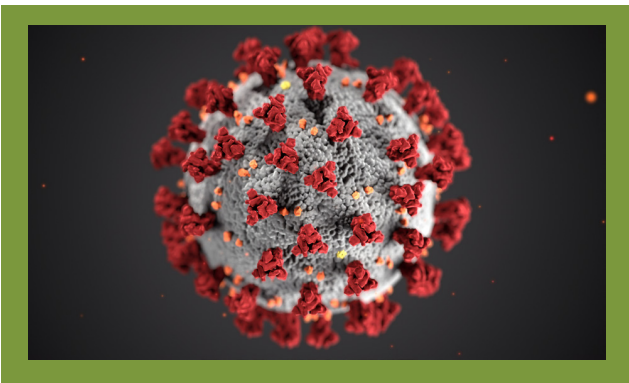
Kathleen Colville, MSW, MSPH  
President & CEO, NCIOM

## The NCIOM aims to be nonpartisan, evidence-based, solution-focused, consensus-driven, and equity-centered.

*I marvel at the ability of the NCIOM staff to maintain a “Switzerland” attitude about things they care deeply about. And at the same time they are not so “Switzerland” that they can’t get anything done. It’s hard to be balanced and fearless at the same time. They are balanced because the recommendations are based on evidence, but they are not afraid to call out gaps and opportunities based on that strong evidence. The NCIOM has not isolated itself from people who don’t agree with each other or don’t agree with you. This is a much-needed quality in our society today.*

*– Task Force participant*

### COVID-19 VACCINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE & SCARCE RESOURCES PLANNING



The [North Carolina COVID-19 Advisory Committee](#) began meeting in Fall 2020 to provide feedback and guidance to NC DHHS on its developing plans for vaccine prioritization, distribution, and communications. This group is comprised of stakeholders including public health experts, health care providers, advocacy organization leaders, and representatives of essential workers and at-risk populations. The Advisory Committee met regularly through the first half of 2021 to continue to provide guidance and disseminate information to stakeholder groups as NC DHHS implemented its vaccination plans. The Advisory Committee reconvened in October 2021 to discuss the developing guidance on booster doses and vaccines for younger children.

In March 2020, the NCIOM, the NC Medical Society, and the NC Healthcare Association convened a Scarce Critical Care Resource Allocation Advisory Group to raise awareness, obtain stakeholder input, and synthesize feedback on a draft revised protocol for allocating scarce inpatient critical care resources during the crisis stage of a pandemic. Representatives from NCIOM, NCMS, and NCHA revised the draft proposal in January 2021 at the request of, and in partnership with, the US DHHS Office of Civil Rights. On January 14, NC DHHS adopted the protocol and it has been incorporated into the NCEM NC Emergency Operations Plan. The protocol was developed in extensive consultation with state experts in intensive care, pediatrics, palliative care, and other clinical specialties, as well as experts in nursing, law, public health, ethics, and spiritual care. Advisors also included representatives from community and advocacy groups representing vulnerable populations.

### ADVANCE CARE PLANNING

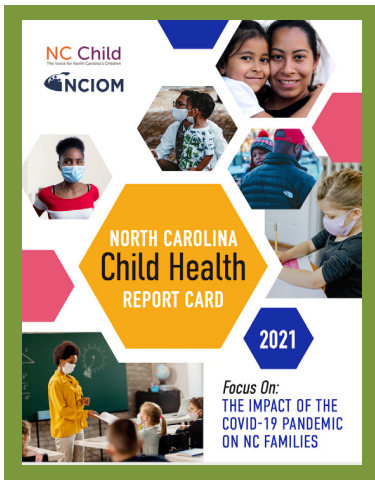
In Spring 2021 the NCIOM collaborated with the NC Serious Illness Coalition, which was created to oversee implementation of recommendations from the [NCIOM Serious Illness Task Force](#), to produce an issue brief to inform legislators of priority issues for advance care planning modernization. The issue brief focuses on signature requirements that were temporarily changed due to COVID-19 and necessary steps to allow for electronic transfer of ACP documents to and from the Secretary of State’s Advance Directive Registry. The NC Serious Illness Coalition is working with advocacy partners to move legislation forward in 2022.

### COUNTY HEALTH DATA

NCIOM offers [county health data profiles](#) on our website. Data includes county-level demographics and data on education, access to care, healthy eating/active living, tobacco & substance use, mental health, maternal & child health, oral health, chronic disease, and community well-being. Updated this year, data reflect the most recently available as of January 2021. NCIOM provides county-level data to legislators and other stakeholders to inform health policy decisions for their communities.

## LEGISLATIVE HEALTH POLICY FELLOWS

A new cohort of legislators began participating in the NCIOM [Legislative Health Policy Fellows program](#) in October 2021. The program encourages participants to build relationships across the aisle and engage in discussion about health policy topics. This year, 15 legislators representing the North Carolina General Assembly House of Representatives and Senate will be learning about health issues facing North Carolina, the state's priorities for health care delivery, and challenges and opportunities for improving the health of all North Carolinians. The program also introduces participants to the variety of data and resources available to them through the NCIOM and other health and health care entities in the state.



## CHILD HEALTH REPORT CARD

The NCIOM, in collaboration with NC Child, produces the bi-annual North Carolina [Child Health Report \(CHRC\)](#). The CHRC tracks four critical indicators of the health and well-being of children across North Carolina: healthy births, access to care, secure homes and neighborhoods, and health risk factors. The report provides data on health concerns and risk factors such as child abuse and neglect, asthma, teen births, infant mortality, poverty, and child deaths. The 2021 CHRC was published in February 2021 and included a special focus on the impact of COVID-19 on drivers of health for children and families.

## ESSENTIALS FOR CHILDHOOD

Since 2016, the NCIOM has served as the backbone organization supporting the implementation of the 2015 [Essentials for Childhood](#) Task Force recommendations by coordinating aligned work across subcontractors/partners, convening a series of work groups, and participating in several other statewide initiatives to ensure the recommendations are included in new and ongoing work. In 2021, Essentials for Childhood partners NCDHHS, Prevent Child Abuse NC, MomsRising, NC Child, and the NC Early Childhood Foundation have continued to prioritize strategies to promote family-friendly workplace policies with the goal of strengthening economic stability and promoting child and family well-being. The NCIOM convened two learning collaborative events focused on connecting and aligning our partners with the North Carolina Serious Illness Coalition, Coalition on Aging, and other caregiver partners around their shared work to promote family-friendly workplace policies and caregiver supports.



## FUTURE OF LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH

The vital role of local public health in supporting North Carolina communities has never been more evident. Yet huge challenges exist in this sector, including per capita funding for public health in North Carolina decreasing by 27% in the past decade; nearly half the US public health workforce planning to retire or quit within the next five years; and a national survey of public health workers finding that 53% were experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and/or suicidal ideation.

The [Task Force on the Future of Local Public Health in North Carolina](#) is developing a vision for the future. This group, acknowledged in December by CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, is investigating what is currently working and what could be improved through discussion of health equity, funding, workforce, data, and other needs. Building a strong base of local public health will help to improve all North Carolinians' access to opportunities to live healthy lives, and provide a strong foundation for economic development in our communities. The task force began meeting in August 2021 and will conclude in April 2022. At its conclusion, the NCIOM will publish a final report with recommendations to local and state policy makers and other stakeholder groups on needed actions and next steps.



## CAROLINAS PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS TASK FORCE

The challenges of illness, job loss, isolation, economic distress, and educational interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need to develop consensus-driven, actionable recommendations to support timely, coordinated response efforts and address community resilience in the Carolinas. In response, the NCIOM launched the [Carolinas Pandemic Preparedness Task Force](#) in partnership with the South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health (IMPH) in July 2021. The task force is addressing health and human services, including health care, social services, aging services, and educational systems; infrastructure needs; ensuring economic stability for communities, including businesses, individual employees, and families to mitigate against economic impacts; expediting access to essential pandemic response services in rural communities; and building resilience in communities across the state. Once the task force meetings conclude in April 2022, each state will publish a report with state-specific recommendations and a chapter that includes cross-cutting recommendations applicable in both states, while also working together on dissemination and communication strategies to ensure maximum reach.



## TASK FORCE ON MATERNAL HEALTH

NCIOM and NC DHHS established the [Task Force on Maternal Health](#) to bring together stakeholders and experts from across North Carolina for a 5-year period to identify evidence-based solutions to best improve maternal health outcomes and to guide and develop a Maternal Health Strategic Plan for the state. The task force builds on the work of the NCIOM Perinatal Systems of Care Task Force and will align with the state's Perinatal Health Strategic and Early Childhood Action plans. NCIOM and NC DHHS staff submitted an initial maternal health strategic plan to the US Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration in September 2021. As of October 2021, there is pending legislation in the North Carolina General Assembly to expand Medicaid coverage for postpartum care to one year post-birth, a key recommendation from both the Task Force on Maternal Health and the Task Force on Risk-Appropriate Perinatal System of Care.

NCIOM conducted background research on resources, barriers, and potential administrative/legislative/system changes needed to develop and establish maternal levels of care in North Carolina. NCIOM conducted background research on resources; barriers; and potential administrative, legislative, and system changes needed to develop and establish maternal levels of care in North Carolina.

## COVID-19 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE BRIEFS

Through the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCIOM and South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health partnered to produce four [issue briefs](#) detailing the status of the pandemic in the Carolinas and its impact on the two states' populations. Two briefs were produced in 2021 that detail the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, state actions to address these issues, and federal legislation to provide funding to states and temporary policy changes to alleviate some burden on affected populations.



## MULTI-SECTOR PLANNING TO ADDRESS ADDICTION AND OVERDOSE

The NCIOM is working to support [county and regional multi-sector planning](#) to develop and implement strategies for addressing the addiction and overdose crisis in North Carolina using opioid settlement funds.

Starting in July 2021, the NCIOM has been engaged in several activities, including the development of a learning collaborative process that will bring county-level stakeholders together to connect and align around needs, challenges, and opportunities; preparing to conduct key perspective interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions to ensure inclusivity and understanding of the impacts of addiction and overdose in communities across the state; and convening the leaders of several workstreams related to the opioid settlement. In addition to our learning collaborative process, these workstreams include an information hub/dashboard that will offer resources to counties and support progress tracking, a coaching corps that will provide technical assistance to counties in implementing strategies, and regional planning to support coordination.

In our work, the NCIOM plans to focus on the inclusion of directly impacted people in developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies for addressing addiction and overdose and reducing opioid and substance-related harms, the social drivers of health as they relate to addiction and substance use, and the disproportionate impacts of the addiction and overdose crisis on historically marginalized populations. The planning phase of this project extends through June 2022, and the NCIOM plans to publish a report that includes identified best practices as counties move forward with opioid settlement-related strategies.



## NORTH CAROLINA MEDICAL JOURNAL: INFORMING HEALTH POLICY

The [NCMJ](#) reaches nearly 170,000 readers by email and about 4,000 in print with each issue. In addition to original research relevant to North Carolina health policy, recent issues included policy analysis on COVID-19 and the drivers of health, immunizations, 50 years of successes and challenges in public health, innovations born of COVID-19, and how COVID-19 has changed North Carolina's health workforce. The Nov/Dec 2021 issue will focus on American Indian health in North Carolina. In 2022, the NCMJ will highlight HNC 2030 health indicators and levers for change.

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