

# FEET ON THE GROUND

NCIPH serves communities  
and public health professionals



PHOTO BY JESSICA SOUTHWELL

Students, faculty members, Dean Rimer and Orange County Health Department staff members enjoyed the 2013 Practice Pathways Field Trip.

**For 14 years, the Gillings School's North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH) has bridged the gap between academics and practice in North Carolina and beyond. The NCIPH is a provider of information and training, a connector and go-to place for brokering needs and the people who can fulfill them. Its ultimate mission is to improve the health of North Carolinians.**

One of the NCIPH staff's most important tasks is to develop, deliver and support training for current public health workers. By partnering with other organizations, responding to the needs of those on the front lines of practice and contributing to others' efforts, NCIPH staff members made an impact upon nearly 25,000 people in fiscal year 2012, including more than 13,000 people in N.C.

Using a range of tools from brief, online instruction to in-depth continuing education programs and professional conferences, NCIPH staff members educated and prepared practitioners from all 100 N.C. counties, all 50 U.S. states and 177 countries.

"The Institute is committed to transforming the practice of public health," says Anna Schenck, PhD, the Gillings School's associate dean for public health practice and director of the School's NCIPH and Public Health Leadership Program. "We connect the School with public health practitioners in communities across the state and beyond. This two-way collaboration, with ideas and solutions flowing in both directions, helps to improve both the science and practice of public health."

Among the Institute's most requested services are training sessions for school health nurses (conducted annually) and a biennial conference on immunization, both of which draw hundreds of participants. Staff members lead online educational sessions in introductory public health and public health law and provide management and leadership training to hundreds of public health professionals every year.

Staff members also provide technical assistance to the public health practice community. One example is the Institute's administration of the local health department accreditation program ([sph.unc.edu/nciph/accred](http://sph.unc.edu/nciph/accred)) to improve the consistency and quality of local health services. To date, 79 local health departments in the state have received a four-year accreditation. Some of those evalu-

ated early in the program already have been reassessed.

"The Institute has been instrumental in the development and implementation of this statewide accreditation process, one of the first in the country, that assures that all local



**7,408 PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTITIONERS**

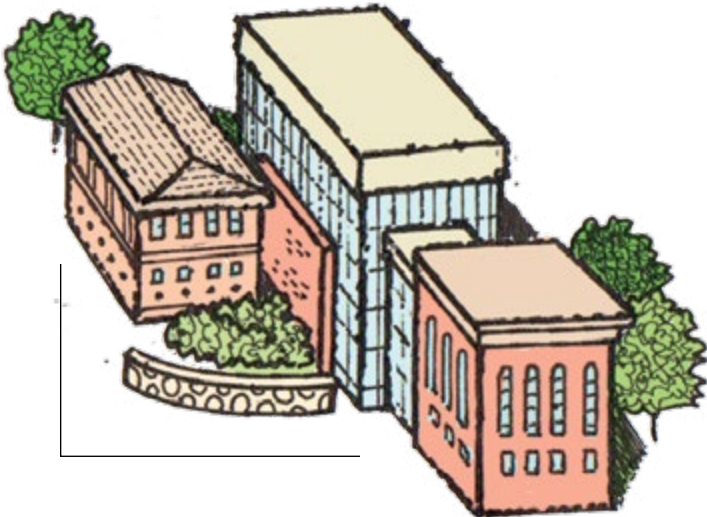
trained every year by the School's North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH)

health departments meet a minimum set of standards and that all residents of the State have access to credible, needed services," says Gibbie Harris, MSPH, BSN, RN, local health director in Buncombe County, N.C.

The innovative incubators program ([sph.unc.edu/nciph/incubator](http://sph.unc.edu/nciph/incubator)) managed by the Institute provides resources for local departments to collaborate and address common challenges. Over the last couple years, those common concerns have included ways to better communicate the value of public health and best practices for local departments under the new health care law.

The Institute also has a long history of assisting with mandatory community health assessments, which are part of periodic strategic planning in every county in the state.

In 2013, Wake County leaders selected Institute personnel to conduct their county's community health assessment. Wake County Human Services established an innovative and unprecedented partnership with three local hospitals (WakeMed Health and Hospitals,



## 1999 - 2013 ...AND BEYOND

The N.C. Institute for Public Health was established in August 1999 by founding director William Roper, MD, MPH, then dean of UNC's public health school. Roper said the Institute was envisioned in response to the Institute of Medicine's landmark 1989 report, "The Future of Public Health," which identified critical gaps in workforce capacities of public-health organizations to improve the public's health. A major point of the report was that the study of public health had become too distant from its practice.

"With the Institute, we hope to widen our circle of collaboration – to work closely with the public and private sectors, with government and business, with health-care providers, researchers, policy makers and others in the field," Roper said.

Duke Raleigh, and Rex Healthcare), Wake Health Services, United Way of the Greater Triangle, Wake County Medical Society and Urban Ministries to complete a joint assessment. More than 60 nonprofit, government, faith-based, education, media and business organizations participated to identify needs and priorities for the next three years. Among those priorities are poverty and unemployment, health care access and utilization, and mental health and substance use.

With Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding, NCIPH staff members analyze the impact of economic recession upon public health outcomes. They collected data showing significant variations in county public health department spending per capita. Now, the study focuses upon benefits resulting from these local health department

expenditures. When cost and benefits are assessed over time, officials can see more clearly the returns on an investment in public health. Counties that allot more of their budgets to public health programs, for example, have fewer reports of illness.

"These analyses will provide us with better tools to measure return on investment in public health," says Schenck, who leads the study.

NCIPH staff members also introduce Gillings School students to community public health issues and resources. Incoming public health students get insights into the realities and opportunities of practice through the annual Practice Pathways PHield Trip to the Orange County (N.C.) Health Department.

One of the School's most valuable training experiences for students is Team Epi-Aid, an Institute initiative. The award-winning volunteer group, established in 2003, matches graduate students with local and state health departments to assist with outbreak investigations and other short-term, applied public health projects. In its decade of fieldwork, Team Epi-Aid has involved more than 300 students in 70 activities requiring about 6,000 hours of service.

"We're so fortunate to have the Institute, with its commitment to local public health, right here in our backyard," says Colleen Bridger, PhD, Orange County Health Director. "The organization is a great partner for us and excels at bringing practitioners and academicians together to strengthen public health throughout the state."

—Ramona DuBose



Bill Gentry (see page 20) served as a survey team member in September when the Institute led a community health assessment in Durham County, N.C.

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