

2007 Community Health Assessment Macon County, NC Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Environmental Factors

1. Macon County is Beautiful

Macon County is located in Western North Carolina sharing borders with Georgia. Macon County is a part of the Appalachian Mountains, and provides the spectacular scenery associated with this mountain range, including the wonderful waterways, waterfalls, foliage, and steep terrain. Many different wild animals and plant species are found in Macon County.

Within Macon County, there are three distinct towns: Franklin, Highlands, and Nantahala. Franklin, the county seat, is the largest of the three. Highlands maintains a resort-like atmosphere, while Nantahala is a remote, rural community. The entire county has seen a steady increase of second-home owners, attracting those that are interested in nature and enjoying the great outdoors.

3. Macon County's Educational Factors

Macon County has a total of ten public schools. Two K-12 grade schools are located in the remote communities of Highlands and Nantahala. In Franklin, there are the following schools:

Cartoogechaye Elementary	Grades K-5
Cullasaja Elementary	Grades K-5
East Franklin Elementary	Grades K-5
South Macon Elementary	Grades K-5
Iotla Elementary	Grades K-2
Cowee Elementary	Grades 3-5
Macon Middle School	Grades 6-8
Franklin High School	Grades 9-12

The Adequate Yearly Progress Report for these schools can be found at <http://www.mcsk-12.org/ayp/index.html>. In addition, Macon County students have access to one private school, Trimont Christian Academy.

College courses are available through Southwestern Community College and Western Carolina University; both main campuses are located in Jackson County.

3. Macon County Is Growing

Figures available from the NC State Data Center show Macon County experienced a 20.8% increase in net migration from 2000-2010. This was the 19th highest net migration rate in the state, and the 2nd highest among the western counties.

The County's natural rate of growth during this period was negative — 550 more deaths than births — reflecting an older population. Combining the two figures gives Macon an overall growth rate of 18.9%. This was the 24th highest growth rate in the state and the 2nd highest in WNC.

The State projects continued growth in Macon. The county is a popular resort and retirement area, and should continue to attract new residents, particularly seniors. The State expects the present (2007 est.) 33,797 population to reach 38,358 by 2015 — an increase of 13.4%.

Source: 2007 Certified County Population Estimates, NC State Demographics

4. Macon County Population Is Aging

The NC State Data Center reports that Macon County now has a median age of 46.28, the third oldest in the state. The figure reflects the county's popularity as a retirement area as well as the continued drain of young people who leave home to seek better career opportunities. If present trends continue, the median age will reach 47.53 by the year 2015.

The elderly population is growing much faster than the population as a whole. Current and projected figures for the elderly population are:

Age	2003	2010	Projected Increase
65-74	4,033	5,208	29.1%
75-84	2,605	3,034	16.4%
85-94	886	1,091	23.1%
95+	79	117	48.1%
Total Macon Population	33,797	38,358	13.4%
Total NC Population	9,040,824	10,178,807	12.5%

5. Macon's Part-time Population: Large & Growing

According to figures compiled by Nantahala Power and Light, 31% of electric customers served by NP&L in Macon County have their bills sent outside the county (June 2000), compared with 24% in 1995. In the Highlands area, the figure approaches 50%.

6. Macon's Minority Populations: Small, Growing

The mountains of Western North Carolina have historically had a smaller black population than most of the South. The nonwhite population of Macon County (2000 Census) is estimated at only 738, or 2.1% of the population. At the same time, it appears the county is experiencing an influx of Hispanic residents, though no verifiable documentation exists on current numbers. Previously, much of the Hispanic population

was transient, responding to the seasonal nature of jobs. Many more Hispanics are permanently locating in Macon County. They are finding work in the construction and tourism industries. The 2000 Census counted 454 persons of Hispanic origin in Macon County, up from the 1990 Census count of 165.

7. Macon County's Economics

Macon County's economy is driven mostly by tourism and construction. The beautiful terrain and rich Appalachian culture lures tourists and second-home owners to this area. The service industry including accommodations, entertainment, and food responds to the seasonal flux in the population. However, more often visitors are deciding to become full-time residents. This creates a strain on public and health care services.

Despite a relatively low unemployment rate, poverty remains a problem in Macon County. It is particularly acute when contrasted with the extreme wealth found in some resort areas of the county. Unemployment in Macon County averaged just 3.9% in 2007 and remains very low today. However, many citizens are employed below their skill level and wage rates are generally below state averages. According to the N.C. Employment Security Commission, the average weekly wage rate in the county is 71.3% of the state average. The 2004 per capita income for Macon County was 83.6% of the NC average. In 2003, 13.2% of Macon residents fell below the poverty level, according to the US Census.

Sources: NC Employment Security Commission & US Census