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# Statistical Brief



State Center for Health Statistics

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## Hospice Care in North Carolina

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Hospice care is becoming an increasingly important component of overall medical care in the United States and in North Carolina. In providing active care of patients with advanced, progressive, and incurable disease, hospice care:

- ◆ provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms;
- ◆ affirms life and regards dying as a normal process;
- ◆ does not intend to hasten or postpone death;
- ◆ incorporates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;
- ◆ uses a team approach to provide a support system for patients and their families;
- ◆ enhances quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness.

In most cases, hospice care is provided in the patient's own home. Hospice care can also be provided in freestanding hospice facilities, hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, and is available to persons of any age, religion, or race. Members of the hospice

team are physicians (including the patient's own physician), nurses, social workers, counselors, trained volunteers, and other therapists. This team makes regular visits to assess the patient and provide additional care or other services. Hospice staff is on-call for emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Bereavement care and counseling to surviving family and friends are also part of hospice care.

The first hospice program opened in North Carolina in 1979. There are now approximately 80 hospice programs providing hospice care in all 100 counties in the state. The increase in hospice providers is associated with a growing number of persons who die while in hospice care. The number of persons receiving hospice care at the time of their death has more than doubled, from 9,246 in 1994 to 18,725 in 2004. The percentage of those who die under the care of hospice has increased from 15 percent to 26 percent of all deaths during this period. Table 1 shows the data for each fiscal year from 1994 to 2004. (The fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 31.)



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**Table 1: Total Deaths of North Carolina Residents and the Number and Percentage Served by Hospice 1994-2004**

Year	Total Deaths	Hospice Patient Deaths	Percentage of Deaths Served by Hospice
1994	63,188	9,246	14.6%
1995	64,830	10,040	15.5%
1996	66,188	10,796	16.3%
1997	65,880	10,913	16.6%
1998	67,798	12,140	17.9%
1999	69,304	12,546	18.1%
2000	71,732	13,420	18.7%
2001	70,738	14,590	20.6%
2002	71,780	15,723	21.9%
2003	73,230	16,889	23.1%
2004	72,191	18,725	25.9%

Comparable county-level data for 2004 can be accessed at <http://carolinasendoflifecare.org/statistics2004.html> (see N.C. Deaths Served by Hospice). The percentage of 2004 resident deaths served by hospice ranged from 58 percent in Polk County to 0 percent in Hyde County.

Not all deaths in North Carolina are eligible or appropriate for hospice care, for example sudden death from heart disease or many of the deaths due to injury and violence. Cancer diagnoses accounted for approximately 50 percent of hospice admissions in 2004. The ratio of cancer to non-cancer admissions has steadily decreased since 1999, when nearly 70 percent of hospice admissions had cancer diagnoses. Today, approximately one-half of all hospice patients in North Carolina have diagnoses other than cancer. Table 2 shows the information on cancer and non-cancer admissions from 1994 to 2004.

**Table 2: 1994-2004 Cancer and Non-Cancer Hospice Admissions**

	Number of Non-Cancer Hospice Admissions	Number of Cancer Hospice Admissions	Percentage of Hospice Admissions with a Cancer Diagnosis
1994	4,168	8,509	67.1%
1995	4,420	9,187	67.5%
1996	3,822	10,414	73.2%
1997	4,135	10,488	71.7%
1998	4,476	10,612	70.3%
1999	5,106	11,235	68.8%
2000	6,349	11,148	63.7%
2001	7,589	11,672	60.6%
2002	8,274	10,542	56.0%
2003	9,476	10,746	53.1%
2004	11,228	11,117	49.8%

Table 3 shows the number and percentage of hospice patients in 2004 by admission diagnosis. Cancer was the leading diagnosis, followed by heart disease, debility (unspecified), and dementia.

Hospice care is covered under Medicare, Medicaid, most private insurance plans, HMOs, and other managed-care organizations. If a person does not have coverage through Medicare, Medicaid, or a private insurance company, hospices will work with the person and their family to ensure needed services can be provided. In North Carolina in 2004,

approximately 87 percent of the patients receiving hospice care had their care paid for by the Medicare Hospice Benefit. As shown in Figure 1, about 79 percent of hospice patients in North Carolina are age 65 and older, while 21 percent are under age 65.

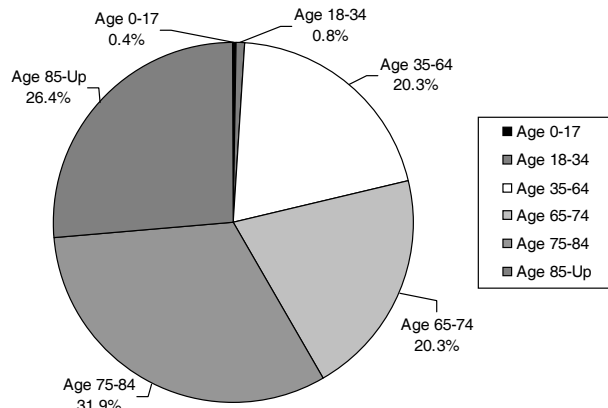
One of the greatest barriers to receiving hospice care is the fear of dying. However, what people fear most is reaching the end of life connected to machines, dying in pain, dying alone, and being a burden to family.<sup>1</sup> Lack of knowledge about hospice care and its support services contributes to the lack of use of these services. Few people want to die in a hospital, but most people do die there. In North Carolina, 57 percent of 2004 hospice deaths occurred at home and 8 percent occurred in a hospital (see Figure 2). In comparison, among all 2004 deaths in the state, 24 percent occurred at home and 48 percent occurred in a hospital.

As North Carolina’s population ages rapidly in the coming years, there will be an increasing interest and concern about end of life care. Health care professionals and the general public are increasingly choosing hospice care over other forms of health care delivery at the end of life. But with only one-fourth of persons who die in North Carolina currently receiving hospice care, much remains to be done to move end of life care and hospice to a more central position within the health care system.

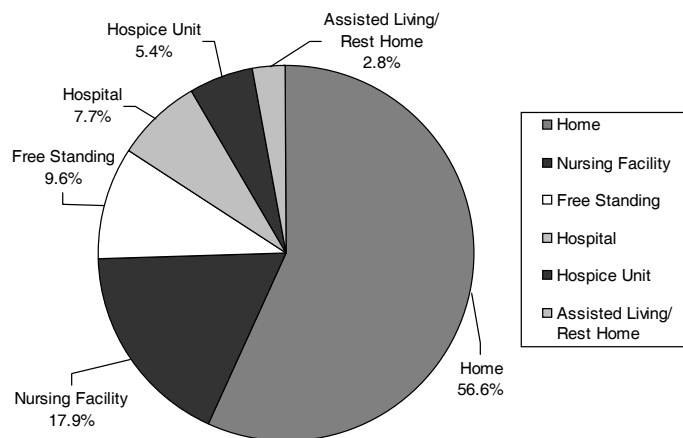
**Table 3: North Carolina Hospice Patients Admitted in 2004: Number and Percentage by Admission Diagnosis**

Diagnosis	Number of Patients	Percentage of Patients
Cancer	11,117	49.8%
Heart disease	2,484	11.1%
Unspecified debility	2,251	10.1%
Dementia	2,093	9.4%
Lung disease	1,754	7.9%
Kidney disease	625	2.8%
Stroke	519	2.3%
Other	444	2.0%
Liver disease	443	2.0%
Motor-neuron	437	2.0%
HIV/AIDS	178	0.8%
<b>Total patients</b>	<b>22,345</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Figure 1: North Carolina Hospice Patients Admitted in 2004, by Age**



**Figure 2: North Carolina Hospice Patient Deaths in 2004, by Location**



**Reference**

1. AARP North Carolina End of Life Care Survey, <http://carolinasendoflifecare.org/PublicAwarenessMaterials.html#AARP>.

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