

# Building on Our Success: Continuous Improvement Efforts Healthy Opportunities Pilots Year 1

NC Medicaid

## BACKGROUND

Over the past year, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (the Department) has tested the impacts of providing services to address non-medical drivers of health through its Healthy Opportunities Pilots. The Pilots represent an unprecedented opportunity to improve the lives of North Carolina residents who are hungry, have unstable housing, lack reliable transportation or who have experienced interpersonal violence. Through the Department’s innovative 1115 waiver, North Carolina is providing evidence-based, non-medical interventions to high-risk Medicaid enrollees and evaluating the impacts on their health outcomes and healthcare costs. The federal government authorized up to \$650 million in Medicaid funding to support housing, food, transportation and interpersonal safety services for high-need Medicaid enrollees during the waiver period. Over the past year of standing up these innovative Pilots, the Department has continually sought feedback from members and partners to improve participants’ experiences. This fact sheet discusses learnings from the first year of implementation and continuous Pilot improvement efforts by the Department.

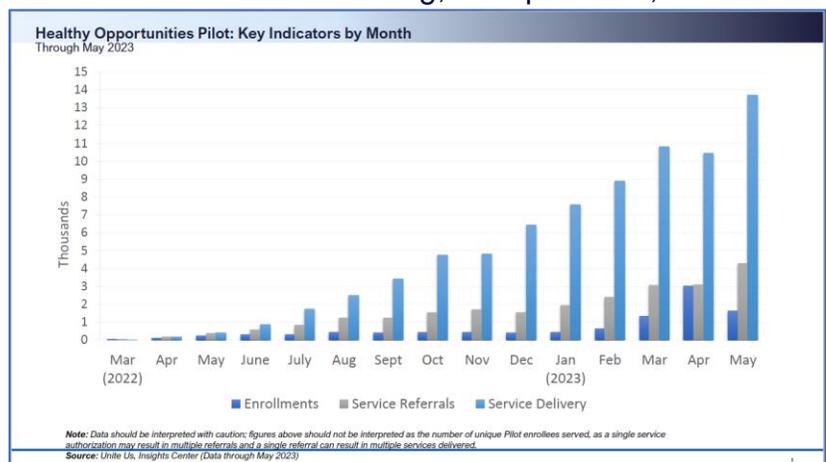


Healthy Opportunities Network Leads	
<b>Access East, Inc.</b>	Beaufort, Bertie, Chowan, Edgecombe, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Northampton, Pitt
<b>Community Care of the Lower Cape Fear</b>	Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender
<b>Impact Health</b>	Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Mecklenburg, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Yancey

## LAUNCH AND EARLY SUCCESS

The Pilots launched in March of 2022 with a limited scope and scale. In order to ensure system readiness, they first focused on food and nutrition services, supported by care managers who had received early training and supports. The phased approach allowed the Department to closely collaborate with a variety of partners, quickly respond to issues as they arose, and double down on emerging best practices, guaranteeing a successful launch. More housing, transportation, and toxic stress-related services were added over the following months, and a growing cadre of trained care managers joined the program. After working closely with the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence to ensure that individuals at risk of, or experiencing, interpersonal violence could receive Pilot services safely, services to address interpersonal violence became available in April 2023.

In the first year, the Pilots have already provided over 76,500 services in 33

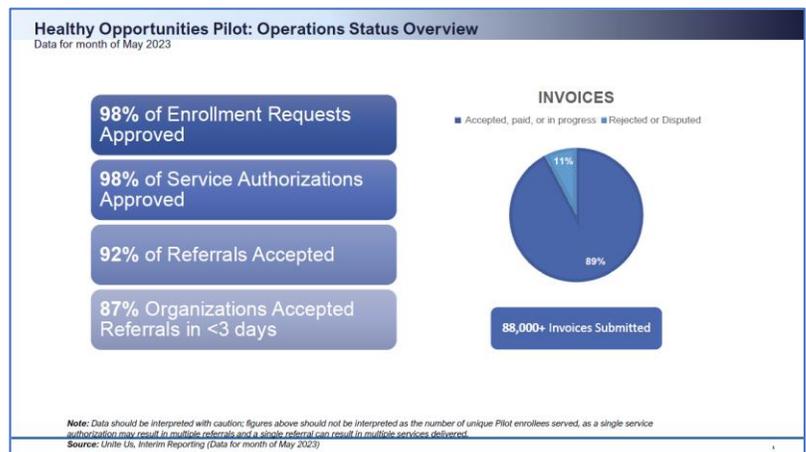


counties throughout three Pilot regions, significantly improving the lives of over 10,200 North Carolinians.

Receiving healthy food boxes through the Pilot has been a “total gamechanger” for one family, enabling them to enjoy healthy, nutritious foods and share meals together more frequently. One senior Pilot enrollee reported that receiving payment assistance with her utility bill helped reduce her financial burden and stress while keeping her safe and healthy at her home.<sup>1</sup>

## COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Central to the Pilot is the Department’s commitment to continuous improvement, transparency and learning. The Pilot is the first initiative of its kind, a large-scale undertaking reliant on partnerships between organizations with different cultures that have not historically collaborated. To foster an environment of shared learning and growth based on the real-world experiences of these organizations, continuous improvement is essential. The Department has developed robust monitoring and evaluation systems and processes that support productive collaborations between organizations as well as collective, continuous improvement. Some examples include:



- Gathering and analyzing real time data about Pilot enrollment, service delivery, and equity
- Providing transparent, regular updates on key metrics as part of the Pilots at Work webpage
- Convening regular group and one-on-one engagements with a range of key Pilot partners to troubleshoot, offer guidance and share lessons learned
- Facilitating interviews with Pilot stakeholders to gain a better understanding of key concerns, proposed improvements and best practices.

These strategies give the Department the flexibility to make real time modifications, ensuring that the Pilots are operating as effectively and efficiently as possible. In order to improve the Pilot experience for Medicaid members and Pilot-participating entities, as well as ensure that more people can access critical services, the Department is presently putting the coordinated measures outlined below into practice. These strategies are being implemented as a response to the experiences that Pilot partners have had on the ground, stakeholder interviews, and data gathered during the first year of service delivery.

<sup>1</sup> Visit the “[Healthy Opportunities Pilots at Work](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/healthy-opportunities/healthy-opportunities-pilots/healthy-opportunities-pilots-work)” webpage for more stories on the impact the Pilots have had on the lives of North Carolinians and key metrics on individuals served. <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/healthy-opportunities/healthy-opportunities-pilots/healthy-opportunities-pilots-work>



## KEY STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE MEMBER-CENTERED ACCESS TO SERVICES AND EFFICIENT OPERATIONS

The Department is committed to converting lessons learned through the first year of service delivery into actionable strategies that: (1) improve the Pilot experience for enrollees—ensuring all who are eligible have an easy route into the Pilots and access to needed services in a timely way by understanding their life circumstances and preferences, and (2) simplify Pilot operations in order to increase enrollment and revenue-generating referrals to HSOs, ensure meaningful evaluation of service impact and promote the long-term sustainability of newly-formed partnerships between healthcare and human service organizations.

## HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT OUTREACH AND ENROLLMENT

Pilot-participating Human Service Organizations (HSOs) are community-based organizations or social service agencies that deliver Pilot services to Pilot enrollees and other community members. Their trusted relationships and direct knowledge of clients' circumstances afford them the opportunity to play a more significant role in direct member engagement, particularly in increasing North Carolinians' awareness and understanding of the Pilots, serving as a resource for Pilot enrollment, advising members on how to access services, and engaging members in a longer-term relationship with the healthcare system.

Participating Pilot HSOs are eligible to receive extra funding through the first half of 2023 for activities such as creating and distributing materials that raise awareness of the Pilot, educating potentially eligible community members about the enrollment process, and facilitating referrals to members' PHPs and care managers. Strategies that support the HSOs' capacity to deliver results in this timeframe include:

- **Developing outreach and enrollment campaign materials** that HSOs may tailor and disseminate to their communities
- **Enabling HSO referrals**—The Department is enabling HSOs to initiate the Pilot enrollment process by referring a client who has expressed interest in and is potentially eligible for Pilot services to his/her Prepaid Health Plan (PHP). The PHP is responsible for finalizing the eligibility determination and connecting the individual to a care manager who will holistically manage the individual's health-related and social needs on an ongoing basis, reducing the risk of "self-dealing." Since launching this additional pathway, HSOs have sent over 1,200 referrals to Health Plans for processing.



## LEVERAGING A DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER EXPEDITED ENROLLMENT PROCESS

The Department has worked closely with Pilot partners to develop an innovative direct-to-consumer expedited enrollment process for the program. This new strategy reduces the burden on Care Managers to make initial outreach about the Pilot by allowing members to opt-in to participation via signing up for expedited enrollment services. This has allowed the Department to reach a large volume of members who were not previously aware of the Pilot and its benefits, and these members are now identified to be assessed for additional social needs. For the first phase of this effort, the Department worked with one HSO and one PHP to leverage existing Medicaid data to provide rapid access to the Pilot's Fruit and Vegetable Prescription service to members identified with food insecurity. Over 3,000 members have enrolled to receive the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription service through the expedited enrollment pathway since the initiative launched on 3/21/23. Due to the success of this first phase, the Department is currently working with partners to expand this option to more Pilot services, HSOs, and PHPs.

## OPTIMIZING PILOT ENROLLMENT TOOLS

Care managers provide a critical and trusted link between members, their Pilot services and the health care system. Using Department-standardized tools, care managers: 1) assess members for Pilot eligibility, 2) recommend appropriate Pilot services, and 3) coordinate approved services on an ongoing basis. Over the past months, the Department has refined the existing tools to make them easier for care managers to use and allow members to be enrolled more quickly and easily. Specifically, the Department has:

- **Simplified the form used to assess members for Pilot eligibility and services,**
- **Streamlined the Pilot consent process** to save time for care managers and Medicaid members, and
- **Automated the NCCARE360 Pilot enrollment and service authorization interface** to make it more user friendly.

These changes promote operational excellence across all Pilot participants and ensure members are able to access Pilot services in a timely way that best meets their needs.

## IMPROVING ADMINISTRATION OF HOUSING AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE SERVICES

In recognition of how critical timely access to needed Pilot services is, the Department is improving the delivery of housing and interpersonal violence related Pilot services, including by:

- Paying **HSOs additional fees** for the coordination of certain Pilot housing services in order to promote HSOs' sustainability and greater access to these services,
- **Streamlining documentation requirements**, ensuring members can quickly access Pilot housing services for which they are eligible, and



- **Ensuring privacy and security** for members accessing critical interpersonal violence services and training Pilot entities on privacy and security protocols prior to launching these vital sensitive services.

These changes promote member-centered service delivery to best serve Pilot enrollees.

## EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY FOR PILOT SERVICES

Currently, the 1115 waiver limits participation in the Pilots to those individuals enrolled in Medicaid managed care, living in one of the three Pilot regions, and have a limited set of qualifying medical and non-medical needs. The Department is working closely with its federal partners to expand eligibility criteria so that more North Carolinians may qualify for Pilot services. For example, the Department received federal approval to expand the list of chronic conditions that determine Pilot eligibility, which became effective in April 2023. It also is seeking approval to extend eligibility to a larger segment of the Medicaid population, including individuals not enrolled in managed care. These modifications are critical for supporting the greatest number of Medicaid members and extending Pilot services to more North Carolinians.

## A LOOK AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF THE HEALTHY OPPORTUNITIES PILOTS

In a short period of time, the Pilots have significantly impacted the lives of over 10,200 Medicaid members, mostly residing in rural North Carolina. They have also strengthened the sustainability of community-based organizations that are critical for serving community members. The Department is ready to do more.

Based on early Pilot successes as well as lessons learned, the Department remains committed to working with partners and the community to refine and maximize the impact of the Healthy Opportunities Pilots throughout the course of the program. To uphold this goal, the Department will continue to utilize rigorous, real-time continuous quality improvement and to continue to make improvements in response to feedback from the field. The Department will also continue to inform interested stakeholders with transparent, regular updates to interested stakeholders with regular updates on efforts to foster operational excellence and deliver member-centered services and care through open, regular communication.

To provide feedback about the Healthy Opportunities Pilots or the changes we are proposing, contact NC Medicaid: [Medicaid.NCEngagement@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:Medicaid.NCEngagement@dhhs.nc.gov).

