

# NC Minority Health Advisory Council Quarterly Meeting

Office of Minority Health &  
Health Disparities (OMHHD)

March 17, 2026



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**



# Welcome and Member Roll Call

**Florida Ahado**  
**Data and Evaluation Program Manager**




# Meeting Agenda

- 1. Welcome**
- 2. Health Portfolio Updates**
  - Debra Farrington, Deputy Secretary
- 3. Medicaid Updates**
  - LaQuana Palmer, Deputy Director  
Communications and Engagements
- 4. Office of Minority Health Updates**
  - Dr. Portia Pope, Director
  - DeNita Nash, Human Services Program  
Manager I, (Minority Diabetes Prevention  
Program/Community and Partner Engagement)
- 5. Questions / Closing Remarks**

- 1. Enable MHAC members to better understand how NCDHHS and OMHHD function to eliminate health disparities and serve the people of NC.**
- 2. Leverage the expertise of MHAC members to inform and support NCDHHS priorities related to addressing health disparities and provide a call to action for member involvement, feedback, and input.**

# Meeting Objectives

# Communication Considerations

 **Use the chat to ask questions.** A meeting facilitator will read your question aloud to the group if there is time after each presentation section. If there is not time, there is a dedicated discussion time reserved at the end.

 **Use the chat to provide insight or ideas during the presentation.** All feedback and comments are welcome as the speakers present.

 There is a dedicated **floor discussion** time later in this meeting.

 If you come off mute to speak, please **state your name and affiliation** for the group before sharing.

# NCDHHS and Health Portfolio Updates

**Debra Farrington, MSW, LCSW**  
**NCDHHS Deputy Secretary for Health**



# Communications & Engagement Updates

**LaQuana Palmer, MPA**  
**Division of Health Benefits (NC Medicaid)**  
**Deputy Director, Communications and Engagement**



# Office of Minority Health Updates

**Portia D. Pope, Ph.D., MPA, PMP, LSSGB, NCCM, IMH-E**  
**Director, Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities**



# Office of Minority Health Required Responsibilities

## NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program

- **Oversee and manage the North Carolina Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (NC MDPP) which aims to prevent diabetes through screenings and delivering evidence-based lifestyle change program.**
- **Since its inception (2016), NC MDPP has screened over 42,000 North Carolinians and enrolled over 6,000 participants.**
- **The program is implemented by contracted health departments and community organizations.**

## Data and Evaluation

- **Collect, analyze, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data to identify health disparities, monitor trends, and evaluate program effectiveness.**
- **Use findings to inform data-driven policy and funding decisions aimed at improving health outcomes.**
- **Develop and publish comprehensive reports, population profiles, briefs, and fact sheets**
- **Design and build dashboards to enhance data accessibility and transparency for public and stakeholder use.**

## Latinx Policy and Strategy

- **Lead Latinx policy and strategy efforts to ensure state policies and programs reflect and respond to the needs of Latinx communities.**
- **Advise government leaders.**
- **Engage communities directly.**
- **Improve access to health care and language services.**
- **Support the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs.**
- **Collaborate across departments.**
- **Coordinate Spanish-language media outreach to strengthen awareness of programs and services serving the state's 1.24 million Latinx residents.**

# Office of Minority Health Required Responsibilities

## Health Literacy, Promotion, and CLAS

- Provide statewide leadership in health literacy, promotion, messaging, and implementation of the National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards.
- Develop and disseminate health information through social media, website content, toolkits, one-pagers, fact sheets, data briefs, and published reports.
- Establish guidance, deliver training, and provide technical assistance to strengthen communication practices and support the adoption of CLAS standards across diverse populations statewide.

## Community and Partner Engagement

- Lead community-centered engagement efforts to build partnerships, coordinate resource sharing, and address health disparities across North Carolina, benefiting diverse populations statewide.
- Convene and support statewide initiatives to strengthen collaboration and expand access to health resources and services.

# Office of Minority Health Strategic Priorities

ACCESS TO CARE Priority Objective	Description	Initiatives
<p><b>Increase access to preventative health services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure effective administration and oversight of NC MDPP state appropriations through contract management, performance monitoring, and fiscal accountability.</li> <li>• Expand NC MDPP services into currently unserved counties by leveraging Rural Health Transformation (RHT) funds to increase program availability, access and participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statewide NC MDPP Implementation</li> <li>• Expansion services in 12 counties</li> <li>• Continuous quality improvement implementation for overall statewide services</li> </ul>
<p><b>Operational Excellence</b></p>	<p>Strengthen organizational performance by expanding staff training and professional development in data analytics, contract management, and system implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete workforce development initiative with UNC, AHEC, and NC State to build staff skills in data analytics, visualization, and storytelling.</li> <li>• Increase NCCM-certified staff from 1 to 4 to strengthen contract oversight.</li> <li>• Expand CDC-recognized lifestyle coach certifications to ensure fidelity in NC MDPP implementation.</li> <li>• Leverage ServiceNow CRM and Tableau to improve coordination and visibility of minority health community engagement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Data Collection and Dissemination</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen interdivisional collaboration to improve coordination, resource alignment, and program impact statewide.</li> <li>• Improving the quality of data on racial and ethnic minority populations to better monitor disparities and disseminate, actionable health information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full implementation of the MOA with Medicaid</li> <li>• Develop a data collection framework in preparation for the next NC Health Disparities Report, working with cross-divisional data teams.</li> </ul>

# Health Literacy

# Public Health Fact Sheets: Improving Health Outcomes Across Priority Populations

Informational Resources aimed to raise awareness and reduce disparities:

- African American Disparities Fact Sheet

## Focus on African American Health in North Carolina



The **2024 Health Disparities Analysis Report** provides a comprehensive overview of health disparities affecting African American communities in the state. This fact sheet highlights key findings from the report and relevant national data to underscore the pressing health challenges faced by African Americans in North Carolina.

### Understanding North Carolina African American Communities

African Americans are a vital part of North Carolina's cultural, economic and social fabric. However, the **2024 Health Disparities Analysis Report** from NCDHHS highlights persistent challenges that disproportionately impact Black communities across the state. Understanding these disparities is essential for creating targeted solutions that promote health care access for all and improve overall well-being.

### Understanding Unique Health Disparities & Concerns



#### ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

- Cost barriers particularly affect the African American community. In fact, Black Americans in North Carolina are more likely to forgo medical care due to cost concerns compared to their white counterparts.
- A significant portion of African Americans lack health insurance coverage, limiting access to preventive services and timely medical interventions. Among contributing factors, African Americans in North Carolina **face higher unemployment rates and lower wages**, which directly impact access to health care and housing stability.



#### CHRONIC DISEASES

- African Americans in North Carolina have a lower life expectancy than white residents, largely due to chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, which are leading causes of morbidity and mortality among African Americans in North Carolina.
- Heart disease and stroke mortality rates remain significantly higher among Black North Carolinians.



- African Americans have higher rates of diabetes-related complications, including amputations and kidney disease, partly due to barriers in preventive care.
- African American women are **1.4 times more likely** to die from breast cancer than white women, partly due to lower rates of early detection and access to advanced treatments.



#### MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

- African American women in North Carolina experience higher rates of pregnancy-related deaths compared to white women, highlighting significant disparities in maternal health outcomes. Moreover, they face a **2.9 times higher maternal mortality rate** than white women, a disparity linked to systemic inequities in maternal health care.
- Infants born to African American mothers have a higher likelihood of preterm birth and low birth within the first year of life, contributing to a **1.7 times higher infant mortality rate** compared to white infants living in the same state.

# NC WISEWOMAN

The North Carolina Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation (WISEWOMAN) Program helps women lower their risk for heart disease and other chronic health problems through free or affordable screenings and support.


## What Services Can You Get:

Through NC WISEWOMAN, you may receive:

- ❖ Heart disease risk factor testing
- ❖ Monitoring of:
  - ❖ Blood pressure
  - ❖ Cholesterol
  - ❖ Blood sugar
  - ❖ Height and weight (BMI)
- ❖ Healthy behavior support services like counseling, classes, and activities
- ❖ Referrals to health care providers and sources of affordable medications



**NCDHHS**  
Division of Public Health



### NC WISEWOMAN and The NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (NC MDPP)

**Take Charge of Your Heart**

- Heart Health is Women's Health. Celebrate Heart Health Month with facts, resources, and programs designed for women in North Carolina.

**The Big Picture: Heart Disease in NC**

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in North Carolina for both men and women.<sup>1</sup>
- Heart Disease is the #1 health threat for women, yet nearly 75% of cases are preventable.<sup>2</sup>
- 40% of women ages 20 and above are living with some form of heart disease.<sup>3</sup>
- African American and American Indian women in NC are up to 20% more likely to die from heart disease than White women.<sup>4</sup>

**Protect Your Heart**

Simple steps can make a big difference:

- Eat 4-5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Limit sweetened drinks and alcohol.
- Be more active! Adults should get 2 1/2 hours of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per more week.
- Quit tobacco or vaping.
- Get healthy sleep: Most adults need 7-9 hours each night.
- Manage stress with mindfulness, movement, and support.

**Know Your Risk**

- Updated blood pressure guidelines: High blood pressure begins at 130 over 80.
- Know your numbers: Get screened to find out your blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, and BMI.
- Why it matters: Early detection and healthy changes can lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, and other chronic conditions.
- The silent threat: You can have high blood pressure and not feel any symptoms.

References: 1. CDC, Stat of the States, 2023 | 2. American Health Association/American Stroke Association Fact Sheet 3. CDC, 2024 | 4. NCDHHS Office of Health Equity, Health Disparities Analysis Report, 2023

## Local Programs Designed for YOU



**NC WISEWOMAN Program**

For individuals ages 35-64 who meet criteria, this free program offers:


- Blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar screenings.
- Lifestyle counseling and goal setting.
- One-on-one support to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

**NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (NC MDPP)**

Up to 75% of adults with diabetes also have high blood pressure, it's important to manage both.<sup>5</sup> Unmanaged diabetes can lead to heart disease, kidney disease, and more. This program offers:

- Culturally relevant diabetes risk-reduction coaching.
- Tools to support long-term healthy living.
- Focused support for communities experiencing higher risk.


Reference: 5 National Library of Medicine, Comorbidities of Diabetes and Hypertension: Mechanisms and Approach to Target Organ Protection, 2015

 Managing blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol together is one of the most powerful ways to protect your heart.  
**These two programs work together to help you do just that.**

**Learn More or Get Connected**

NC WISEWOMAN Program • Division of Public Health

NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program

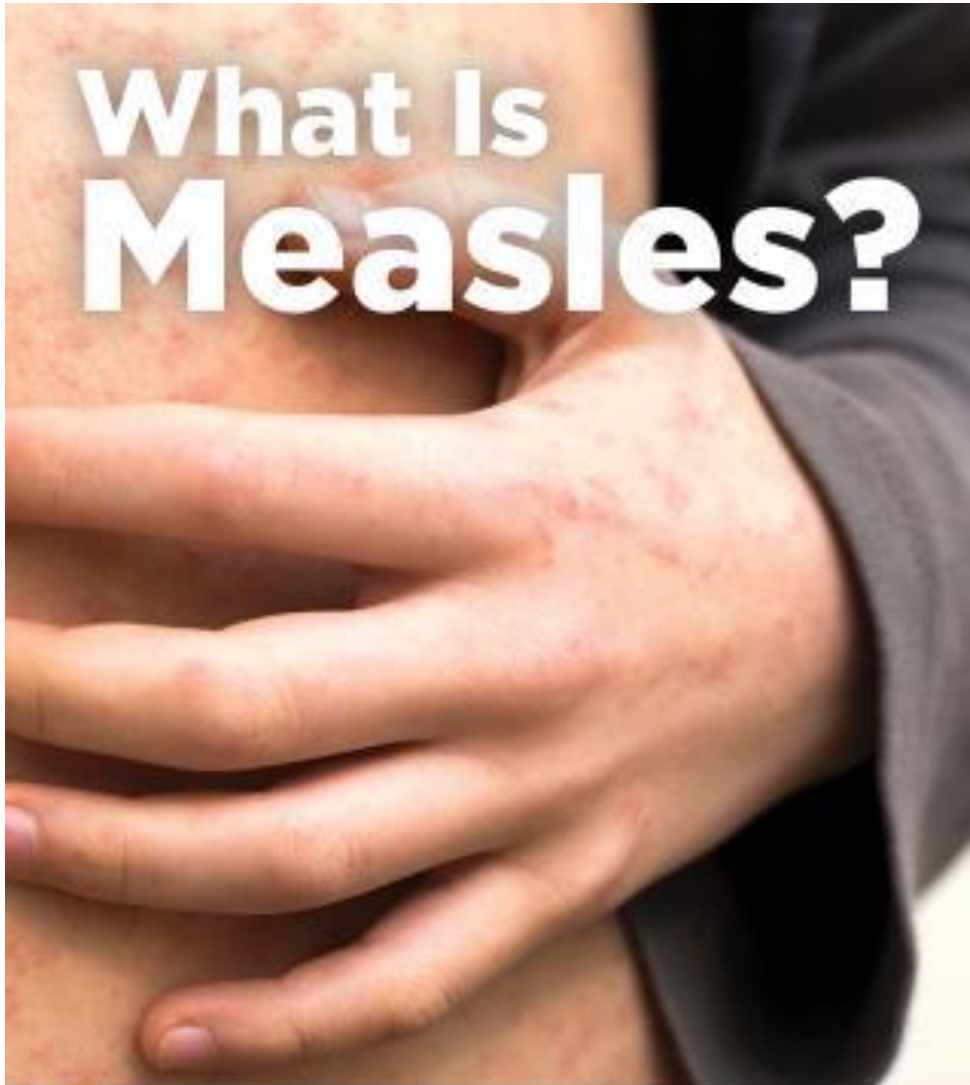
 **NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
Office of Minority and Health Disparities  
NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (NC MDPP)

 **WISEWOMAN**

www.ncdhhs.gov • NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. • 01/2026

[Learn more about the program here](#)

# MEASLES UPDATE – WHAT PARTNERS NEED TO KNOW



There were **24 confirmed measles cases in NC** since late December 2025 (as of March 6.)

**Families of infants 6-11 months** should talk with their health care provider about **early MMR vaccination** if they live in or routinely visit areas with community transmission

- Buncombe County
- Charlotte metro counties

**Any person with symptoms *should call ahead before visiting a health care provider to help prevent further spread.***

## **How you can help:**

- ✓ Share resources
- ✓ Encourage vaccination
- ✓ Direct communities to the updated dashboard, immunity checker tool, and vaccine access information at **[dph.ncdhhs.gov/measles](https://dph.ncdhhs.gov/measles)**.

# **Historically Marginalized Populations Connections Network (HMP)**

# Historically Marginalized Populations (HMP) Connections (January - March 2026)



480

ATTENDANTS IN TOTAL

## HMP Connections Meetings

Focuses on advancing health equity for historically marginalized populations

ASL Interpreters, CART Captioning, and English to Spanish Interpretations were provided.

5 PRESENTATIONS

MORE THAN 100 ATTENDANTS PER MEETING

## Topics & Featured Speakers

Dementia in NC: Data Disparities and Dementia-Capable

A CENTURY OF BLACK HISTORY: Celebrating Legacy, Resilience, and Advancing Health

PREVENTION IN ACTION: Protecting Kidney and Colorectal Health

**Heather G. Carter, DCM, MA, CDP, CSGF**  
Dementia Services Coordinator  
NCDHHS Division of Aging Service Operations

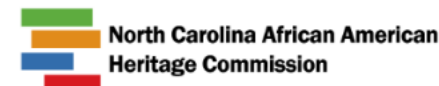
**Michelle Laws, PhD**  
CEO & Principal  
Consultant Symbiotic Strategies

**Adrienne Nirdé, M.A**  
Director  
N.C African American Heritage Commission

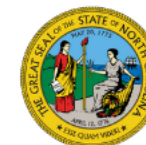
**Clarissa Diamantidis, MD, MHS, FNKF, FASN**  
Professor of Medicine  
Wake Forest University School of Medicine

**Christine Brannock, MSN, RN, OCN**  
Director  
Cone Health | Center for Health Equity and Oncology Community Outreach

## Organizations



NCDHHS: Aging And Adults Services



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities

# HMP Connections April Session – Minority Health Month

The anticipated 2026 theme centers on:

## REDUCING HEALTH DISPARITIES:

Addressing the unequal burden of premature death and illness among racial and ethnic minority communities.

## CULTURAL COMPETENCE:

Promoting culturally appropriate, tailored resources to strengthen health literacy and improve access to care.

## PREVENTIVE CARE:

Encouraging early management and prevention strategies for chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

Speakers	
<b>Maria Alejandra Combs, BS, OPN-CG, CCHW</b>	Manager, Community Outreach Office of Community Outreach & Engagement Comprehensive Cancer Center Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist
<b>Alicia Freeman, LCMHC, LCAS-A (Waccamaw Siouan Tribe)</b>	Mental Health First Aid Program Manager University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – School of Social Work
<b>Cornell P. Wright, MPA</b>	<a href="#">More details - DeNita</a>
<b>Willysha Jenkins, MS, CSM</b>	<a href="#">More details - DeNita</a>
<b>Gabriela Plasencia, MD, MAS</b>	<a href="#">Where? - DeNita</a> Associate Physician Policy Researcher Family Medicine Physician

# Community and Partner Engagement

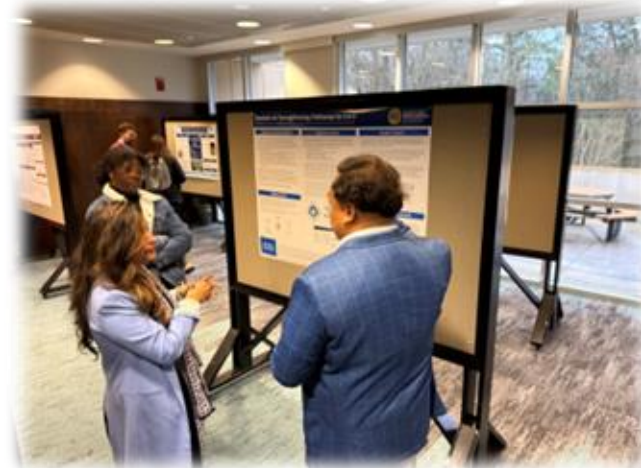
- ❖ Posters:
  - ❖ Sessions on Strengthening Pathways to Care
  - ❖ Strategic Stakeholder Engagement and Dissemination of Evidence-Informed Practice

**The 47th Annual Minority Health Conference**  
“Uniting Words and Worlds: Innovation in Health Communication”

Conference Date: February 27th, 2026



# 47th Annual Minority Health Conference



# NCDHHS Continuous Improvement and Innovation Expo



## ❖ Posters:

- ❖ Sessions on Strengthening Pathways to Care
- ❖ Strategic Stakeholder Engagement and Dissemination of Evidence-Informed Practice



**NCDHHS**

# 2026 MaryAnn Black Distinguished Health Equity Symposium



## ❖ Poster:

- ❖ Strengthening Pathways to access to care: Bridging Community, Systems and Practice



# 2026 Unity Conference Theme: American Indian Voices in the Revolutionary War

- ❖ For more than five decades, the American Indian Unity Conference has brought together tribal leaders, elders, youth, community members, educators, and advocates from across North Carolina.
- ❖ Hosted annually by the United Tribes of North Carolina, the conference serves as a space for cultural celebration, meaningful dialogue, professional development, and statewide collaboration.



# Governor's Advisory on Stronger NC

- The Advisory Committee for a Stronger NC is a comprehensive initiative launched by North Carolina Governor Josh Stein in 2025, focused on **fostering economic growth, advancing innovation, strengthening public safety**, and supporting recovery efforts across the state.
- The work focuses on key areas, including **workforce and economic development, education, health and well-being, public safety, constituent services, and community involvement**.
- Save the date: Next Quarterly Meeting to take place in **Western NC** on May 28, 2026



# Latinx Policy and Strategy

# *Raising Our Voices: Shaping Our Future*

*Date: March 23 – 24*

*Location: NCDHHS Headquarters*

## Collaboration with the Hispanic Federation

**NCDHHS will have a panel  
participation: Access to Care  
for Hispanic and Latino/x/e  
Communities: NCDHHS  
Cross-Divisional Perspectives**



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
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Office of Minority Health  
and Health Disparities



# NC Rural Health Transformation Presentation

## Governor's Advisory Council on Latino Affairs in Wayne County



**Partnership  
with  
Vital Records**

# Improving Access to Vital Record Amendments

## Cross Divisional Collaboration



**Vital Records has experienced longstanding challenges with birth certificate amendment processes.**

**Issues often stem from clerical or indexing errors and difficulties completing birth registration forms.**

**Language barriers and distinct naming conventions - especially among Spanish-speaking clients - have increased challenges.**

# Why This Matters

01

Inaccurate or delayed records create barriers for families.

02

Impacts include difficulty accessing health benefits, securing documentation for children, and processing dual citizenship.


03

In today's landscape, families may urgently need documentation due to travel, relocation, or emergency-related circumstances.



## **Collaborative Strategies leveraging Community Partner Engagement**

- ❖ **OMHHD and OLCA partnered with Vital Records to:**
- ❖ **Provide cultural and language expertise**
- ❖ **Improve recruitment and retention of bilingual staff**
- ❖ **Facilitate conversations with Latin American consulates**
- ❖ **Embed language access into forms and procedures**
- ❖ **Revise documentation for clarity, accuracy, and accessibility**



# Key Results

- ❖ **Developed a Spanish language interview assessment tailored to Vital Records terminology and case scenarios and supporting workforce development.**
- ❖ **Joint evaluation of Spanish language proficiency and cultural competency for candidates.**
- ❖ **Updated the Parent Birthing Worksheet based on feedback from Latin American consulates.**
- ❖ **Forms are being translated into Spanish to improve accessibility.**
- ❖ **Cross sector partner involvement to include local government, Consular Officials, and NCDHHS.**

# Strengthening Partnerships & Future Opportunities



Feedback from consular officials informed revisions and cultural considerations.



Strengthened relationships with Latin American consulates.



Opportunities emerging for trainings and informational sessions to improve the customer experience and feedback gathered from local/county government.



Ongoing work will include multilingual and ASL guidance for hospitals and partners to reduce barriers.

# NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (NC MDPP) Updates

***DeNita Gail Murdock Nash, M.Ed., NCCM***

Human Services Program Manager I

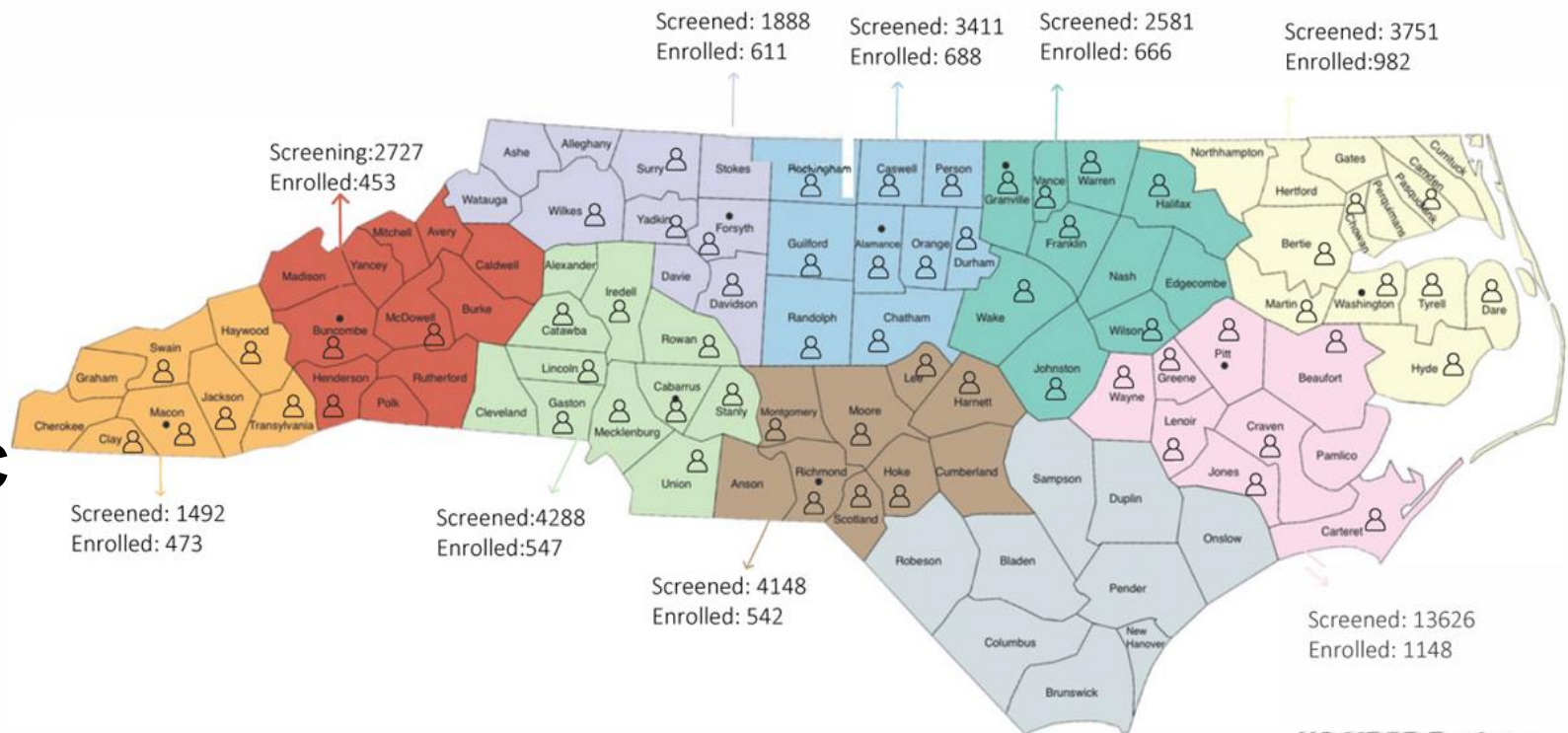
(Minority Diabetes Prevention Program/Community and Partner Engagement)



# NC MINORITY DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM (NC MDPP) SCOPE

❖ **Reinstatement of classes in Region 7 (Halifax and Warren Counties)**

❖ **Reestablishment of NC MDPP in Region 8**



**NC MDPP Regions**

<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Region 1	<span style="color: brown;">■</span> Region 6
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Region 2	<span style="color: teal;">■</span> Region 7
<span style="color: purple;">■</span> Region 3	<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Region 9
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Region 4	<span style="color: pink;">■</span> Region 10
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Region 5	<span style="color: black;">●</span> Lead Health Department



**NCDHHS**  
NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program (NC MDPP)

# Any Questions, Comments, or Feedback?

## Open Discussion



# Closing Remarks

## Contact Us:

- Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities:
  - [OMHHD@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:OMHHD@dhhs.nc.gov)
- Dr. Portia Pope, Deputy Director, OMHHD:
  - [Portia.D.Pope@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:Portia.D.Pope@dhhs.nc.gov)

## Resources:

- [Office of Minority Health & Health Disparities Website](#)
- [Health Portfolio Website](#)
- [Community & Partner Engagement \(CPE\) Website](#)
  - [CPE Resources Page](#)
- [MHAC Website](#)

NC Minority Health Advisory  
Council Post-Session Survey



[Link to survey](#)

# *Thank you!*

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