

NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Mental Health,
Developmental Disabilities and
Substance Use Services

Side by Side with DMH/DD/SUS

Improving our system together.

NCDHHS Division of Mental Health,
Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services

March 9, 2026



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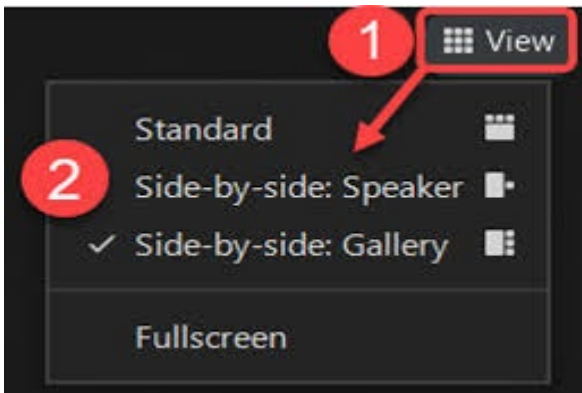
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Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Overview of Inclusion Connects Work Plan
3. Overview of TBI
4. Fireside Chat: I/DD and Brain Injury Awareness Month

Ginger Yarbrough, MPA, CPHQ, NADD-DDS

Chief Clinical Officer, IDD, TBI & Olmstead, DMH/DD/SUS



- 25 years in IDD/TBI & cooccurring diagnoses field
- Experience as a Direct Support Professional, Care Manager, and Quality Management
- DMH/DD/SUS since March 2023

Brain Injury Awareness Month

Governor **Josh Stein** has proclaimed **March 2026 as Brain Injury Awareness Month**, recognizing the impact brain injuries have on individuals, families, and communities.

Each year, **2.8 million Americans** experience a traumatic brain injury (TBI). In North Carolina, **more than 80,000 people** will sustain a TBI this year. Brain injuries can affect movement, communication, emotions, and cognition.

New resource

- The **NC TBI Dashboard** is now available, showing data on individuals with a TBI diagnosis who have accessed **Medicaid and state-funded services**
- Data is refreshed **every 6–12 months** to support planning and data-informed decision-making

Upcoming webinar

- **TBI Dashboard Overview**
- **March 16, 2026 | 3:00–4:00 p.m. [Register Today!](#)**

Get involved

- The **Brain Injury Advisory Council (BIAC)** is seeking applicants to help improve brain injury services across North Carolina. Contact Shannon Kuper at Shannon.Kuper@dhhs.nc.gov for more information.



Brain Injury Awareness Month Activity

Many activities and learning opportunities are occurring throughout the month such as informative webinars, summits, collaborative events with partner organizations, mask making/mask displays and more!

DMH/DD/SUS activity is being shared through Hot Topics while other activity sponsored by the Brain Injury Association of NC (BIANC) which can be found on the BIANC website at:

<https://www.bianc.net/biam2026/>

Some of these activities overlap with the I/DD community such as the Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Initiatives.

Join us as we raise awareness, build understanding, and support individuals and families affected by brain injury across the state.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

March is **Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month**, a time to celebrate people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and strengthen efforts to build more inclusive communities.

Gov Josh Stein has proclaimed March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, recognizing the more than **200,000 North Carolinians living with I/DD** and the importance of expanding access to employment, education, housing, health care, and community participation.

New data

- The [Innovations Waiver Waitlist Dashboard](#) now includes enhanced metrics, including the **average time individuals have been on the waitlist**
- Data is available by **county and Tailored Plan**, offering new insight into service gaps and helping inform planning and advocacy

Supporting inclusion

- [Inclusion Connects](#) helps individuals and families navigate services and resources across the lifespan
- [Inclusion Works](#) promotes **Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)** and supports inclusive workplaces

Together, these efforts help strengthen opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to live, work, and participate fully in their communities.

Celebrate Developmental Disabilities and Brain Injury Awareness Month with Us!

**March
5th**

**Olmstead and North Carolina's
Olmstead Plan**
[Register for the webinar](#)

**March
16th**

**From Numbers to Knowledge:
Introducing the TBI Dashboard**
[Register for the webinar](#)

**March
9th**

**Fireside Chat: I/DD and Brain
Injury Awareness Month**
[Register for the webinar](#)

**March
18th**

**Inclusion Works Lunch and
Learn**
[Register for the lunch & learn](#)

**March
11th**

**Intersection of Interpersonal
Violence: Supporting People
with I/DD and TBI**
[Register for the webinar](#)

**March
26th**

**Welcome to TULA: Trillium
Ultimate Living Assistant**
[Register for the webinar](#)

Celebrating 2026 Social Work Month

Governor **Josh Stein** has recognized the [2026 theme](#): “**Social Workers: Uplift. Defend. Transform.**”

Social workers support North Carolinians in many roles—from **mental health care and crisis response to child welfare, aging services, and community programs**. Their work strengthens families, improves access to care, and supports healthier communities statewide.

Why it matters

- **97 of North Carolina’s 100 counties** are designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas
- Workforce shortages limit access to care and delay treatment

Workforce investments

- [Public Service Leadership Program \(PSLP\)](#) launched with the UNC System and Social Work Coalition to build the next generation of leaders
- [Licensed Workforce Loan Repayment Program](#) offers up to **\$50,000** for providers serving in high-need rural areas
- [Qualified Professional eligibility expansion](#) for community college graduates with AAS degrees in Social and Human Services

This month, we recognize and thank social workers for their dedication to supporting individuals, families, and communities across North Carolina.



Inclusion Connects Background

Inclusion Connects is an NCDHHS program to connect people with I/DD to more choices and more access to services and supports. It is designed to help people with I/DD, regardless of age or ability level, and their families navigate the complex system of services from birth to the end of life.



Link to Inclusion Connects Website

Inclusion Connects Activities



Supporting the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce: Addresses workforce shortages and connects DSPs with providers and people with I/DD.



Promoting Access to Services: Focuses on providing access to necessary services, including those on the Innovations Waiver Waitlist.



Improving Housing Access: Enhances the housing options available for people with I/DD.



Strengthening Interpersonal Violence (IPV) Supports: Prevent IPV for people with I/DD and provide trauma-informed information and tools.



Inclusion Works: Expand support employment services and increase access to Competitive Integrated Employment



Inclusion Connects Work Plan

The Inclusion Connects Work Plan is North Carolina's strategy to improve services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD)

- Detailed descriptions of activities to improve access to services, more housing choices, and strengthening the workforce.
- Includes metrics and targets

The original workplan was posted in
March 2025.

Next update will occur in March 2026.









Visit [Inclusion Connects | NCDHHS](#) to read the full workplan.

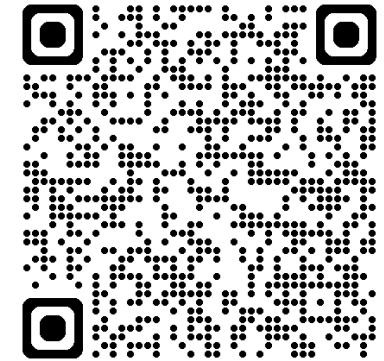
Inclusion Connects Workplan

The Inclusion Connects team has updated our public-facing Workplan for 2026 to reflect work over the past year and share priorities for the coming year with our community.

The workplan focuses on the following focus areas:

-  **Better Access to Services:** Promoting access to services for all people with I/DD in need of services, including those on the [Innovations Waiver](#) Waitlist.
-  **More Information about Housing:** Educating people with I/DD on their living options and improving access to housing settings of their choice.
-  **Strengthening the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce:** Addressing the DSP shortage through recruitment efforts and working to help ensure a well-trained workforce.
-  **Support in a Crisis:** Strengthening the crisis system in North Carolina to better meet the needs of people, including those with I/DD, in distress.
-  **Preventing Interpersonal Violence:** Preventing interpersonal violence (IPV) for people with I/DD through trauma-informed information and tools.
-  **Inclusion Works:** Expanding supported employment services and increasing access to Competitive Integrated Employment. Learn more at the [Inclusion Works website](#).

The workplan will soon be added to the [Inclusion Connects website](#).





Better Access to Services

Promoting access to services for all people with I/DD in need of services, including those on the [Innovations Waiver Waitlist](#).

✓ Completed and Ongoing Tasks

- Update the Innovations Waiver Waitlist Dashboard quarterly, adding new data elements
- Partner with people with lived experience, caregivers, Tailored Plans, and providers to improve waitlist management
- Educate families on accessing 1915(i) services through webinars, presentations, and print materials

■ Upcoming Tasks

- Contact people on the Innovations Waitlist who are likely eligible for other services while they wait
- Begin assessing the needs of people on the Innovations Waiver Waitlist.
- Create a tool to help people navigate I/DD services in NC.
- Update the waitlist dashboard to show the average time until a person on the waitlist is assigned an Innovations Waiver slot.



More Information about Housing

Educating people with I/DD on their living options and improving access to housing settings of their choice.

✓ Completed and Ongoing Tasks

- Track and report the number of people moving into the community every 3 months
- Create a list of statewide housing, funding, and support resources. Visit the [Community Living Guide](#) to explore resources
- Update the definition of diversion used in reporting to better understand and support those at risk of moving into institutions
- Work with state partners to request a remedial preference letter

■ Upcoming Tasks

- Create a Housing Term Glossary and add to the Community Living Guide
- Develop a housing preference and support assessment tool to support informed living choices
- Partner with LME/MCOs and community organizations to create an In-Reach toolkit on community living options for people in institutional settings



Strengthening the Direct Support Professional Workforce

Addressing the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce shortage through recruitment efforts and working to help ensure a well-trained workforce.

✓ Completed and Ongoing Tasks

- Release a statewide [DSP Workforce Plan](#) and update it annually.
- Conduct focus groups and surveys with DSPs to understand their needs
- Award the first round of recruitment and retention grants for DSPs
- Launch a second round of grants to attract more DSPs
- Start an advanced training course to help increase skills and knowledge of DSPs

■ Upcoming Tasks

- Award the second round of recruitment and retention grants
- Start a basic training course for participants to learn skills to work as a DSP
- Introduce a pilot program to provide a training bonus for DSPs that have the basic and advanced training
- Design state-wide networking opportunities for DSPs



Support in a Crisis

Strengthening the crisis system in North Carolina to better meet the needs of people, including those with I/DD, in distress.

✓ Completed and Ongoing Tasks

- Add information on 988, North Carolina Crisis Services, and NC Peer Warmline to the Inclusion Connects website
- Share crisis resources through presentations, the Inclusion Connects website, and community partnerships

■ Upcoming Tasks

- Provide I/DD specific training to staff working in crisis care spaces

**More information to come once training is finalized.*



Preventing Interpersonal Violence

Preventing interpersonal violence (IPV) for people with I/DD through trauma-informed information and tools.

✓ Completed and Ongoing Tasks

- Launch [Interpersonal Violence Resource Hub](#) on the Inclusion Connects webpage to provide training resources and ways for people with IDD/TBI
- Hold monthly IPV advisory committee workgroup meetings

■ Upcoming Tasks

- Provide training on Interpersonal violence to be included in DSP Core Competency Curriculum
- Update the IPV resource hub every 3 months to make sure people know what's available and can access helpful resources
- Provide information for the community to access future training opportunities on IPV



Inclusion Works

Expanding supported employment services and increasing access to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). Learn more at the [Inclusion Works website](#), including the [Inclusion Works Strategic Plan](#).

✓ Completed and Ongoing Tasks

- Create a clear process to help people make an informed choice about their work options
- Work with people to complete Employment Assessments and create Career Development Plans
- Offer opportunities for provider trainings and certifications
- Hold various monthly stakeholder meetings to share information and collaborate on tasks

■ Upcoming Tasks

- Launch the second round of Provider Innovation grants to 8 providers
- Launch a social media campaign to share information and increase awareness
- Work to address transportation barriers to increase access to employment opportunities



TBI Defined

- A TBI is generally defined as:
 - injury to the brain caused by an external force, such as a blow, bump, jolt to the head, or a penetrating injury
 - disrupts normal brain function.



Slips and Falls

- There are two definitions for TBI in NC statute.
 - One provides a detailed description of TBI for all age groups.
 - The second focuses on individuals who sustained their TBI prior to the age of 22 during which time the brain is still developing and therefore qualifies as a developmental disability.



Car accidents



Hits or strikes to the head

Common Challenges

Physical

- Coordination
- Hearing/Vision
- Sensory changes
- Mobility
- Headaches
- Seizures
- Fatigue

Cognitive

- Memory
- Attention
- Organization
- Planning
- Judgement
- Decision-making
- Processing Speed

Personality

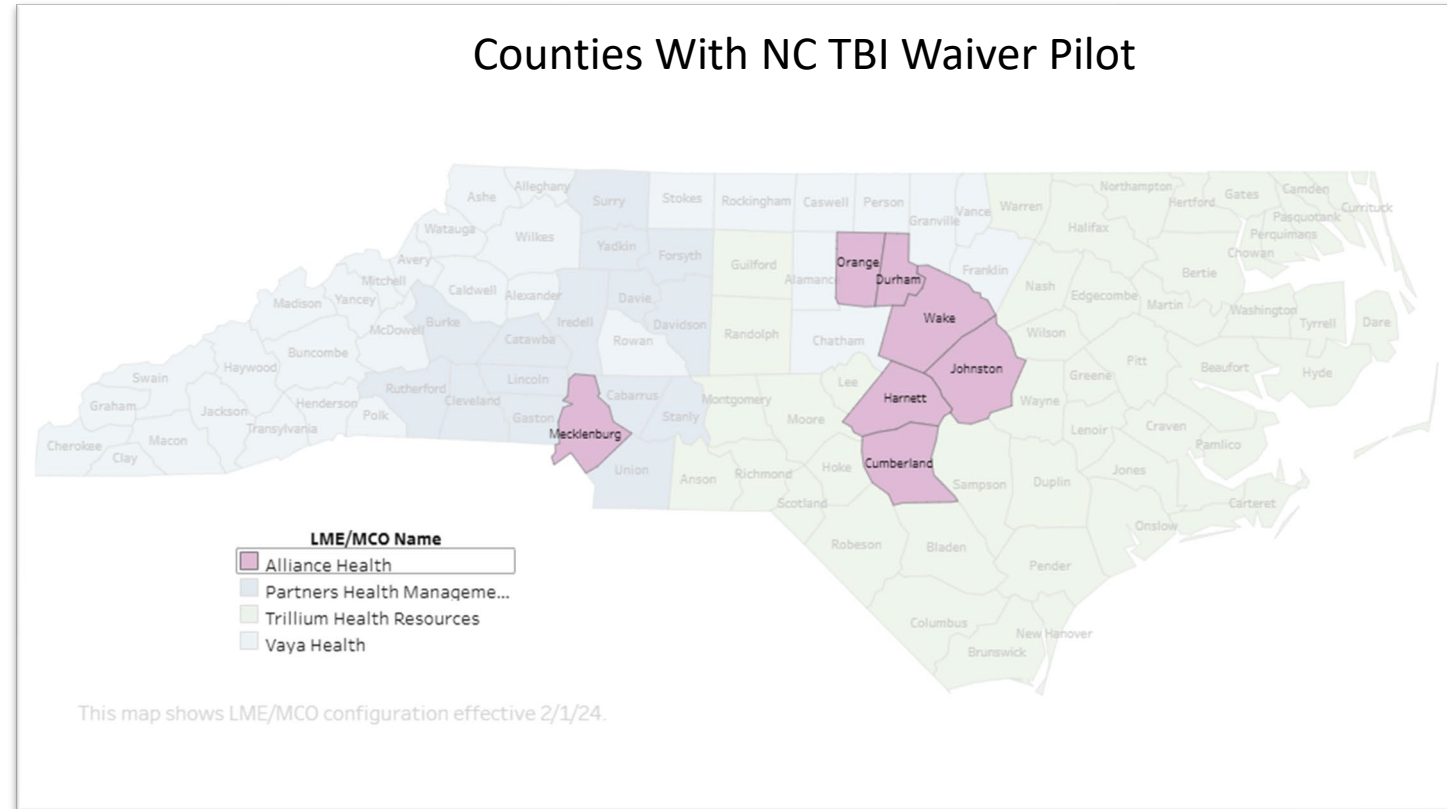
- Emotions
- Depression
- Understanding social cues
- Relating to others
- Forming relationships
- Anxiety

Other changes

- Communication
- Social Skills/Isolation
- Emotional
- Lifestyle
- Reduced Independence
- Employment challenges
- Mental Health

NC TBI Waiver Highlights

- NC TBI Waiver Pilot – currently operates as a pilot through Alliance Health Tailored Plan
 - Cumberland, Durham, Harnett, Johnston, Mecklenburg, Orange, & Wake Counties.
 - 107 Waiver Slots
- NC General Assembly has provided the authority to expand statewide but no funding or slots.
- Without a recurring appropriation, the TBI Waiver cannot be expanded.
- NCDHHS continues working with stakeholders and the Tailored Plans in preparation for both a Waiver amendment and expansion



Underdiagnosed, Stigma Reduction and Visibility Efforts

- Many individuals are misdiagnosed or undiagnosed
 - Mild TBI / Concussion Often Overlooked
 - Overlapping Symptoms with Other Conditions
 - Lack of Proper Screening
 - Delayed or Secondary Symptoms may not show up for days weeks or even months
 - Patient Factors

- Stigma Reduction and Visibility Efforts
 - Education and Awareness
 - Public education campaigns, **healthcare** and community-based provider training and media representation
 - Unmasking brain injury project
 - Language Matters
 - Use person first language
 - Strength-based narratives

- Policy and Advocacy - Your voice matters!



Opportunities For Growth and Service Expansion

- Individuals with TBI have historically faced significant barriers and limited access to North Carolina's public service system or have accessed services under other diagnoses.
- Service access based on TBI diagnosis has been increasing over the more recent past largely due to sustained education, advocacy, and screening efforts.
- Growing number of service opportunities:
 - ✓ TBI State Appropriated Funds Program
 - ✓ 1915(i) Services
 - ✓ TBI Waiver (pilot and future expansion)
 - ✓ Innovations, CAP/DA and CAP/C Waivers (for those who qualify)
 - ✓ Medicaid State Plan Benefits
 - ✓ Mental Health (MH) and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Services
 - ✓ Clinically Managed Population-Specific High-Intensity Residential Treatment Program (ASAM 3.3) – coming soon
 - ✓ Peer Support Program – coming soon
 - ✓ Screening efforts across multiple settings, including Transition Programs (TPs), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) pilot sites, and Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)

These opportunities—and others still in development—will be guided by our TBI State Action Plan – everyone is encouraged to review and provide feedback on the draft plan when posted later this month.

Fireside Chat Panel



Ginger Yarbrough

Chief Clinical Officer
IDD, TBI & Olmstead



Tina Barrett

Assistant Director
IDD Services



Scott Pokorny

Brain Injury
Team Lead



Lauren Spencer

IDD Consultant
DMH/DD/SUS



Stephanie Jones

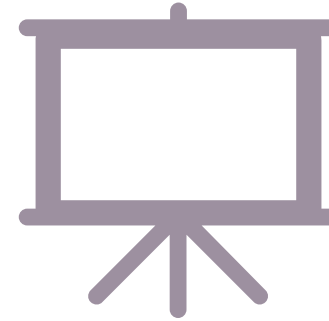
TBI Policy Consultant
DMH/DD/SUS



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Questions and feedback are welcome at
BHIDD.HelpCenter@dhhs.nc.gov.



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