



Office of Minority Health & Health Disparities

NC Minority Health Advisory Council Meeting Minutes Monday, September 14th, 2026, at 5:00 pm

The quarterly scheduled meeting of the North Carolina Minority Health Advisory Council (MHAC) was called to order on Monday, September 14th, 2026, at 5:00 pm virtually on Microsoft Teams with Portia Pope, Director, NCDHHS (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services) Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, presiding. The following people were in attendance for the meeting.

Attendee	Present on June 16, 2026, Meeting
MHAC Members	
Dr. Gary R. Gunderson	
Dr. Gabriela Marie Plasencia	
Dr. Cherry Maynor Beasley	
Dr. Ronny A. Bell	
Dr. Natasha Adams-Denny	
Dr. Lawrence R. Wu	
The Honorable Donna M. White	X
The Honorable Carla D. Cunningham	
Dr. Chere M. Gregory	X
The Honorable Donyel Barber	X
Dr. Sankar N. Adusumilli	
The Honorable Gladys A. Robinson	
Ms. Brenda J. Smith	
Dr. Olugbemiga E. Jegede	X
Vacant	
Guests	
Paige Wyrick supporting Dr. Chere Gregory	X
Nicole Smith, representing Rep. Donna White	X
NCDHHS Meeting Speakers and Facilitators	
Debra Farrington, Deputy Secretary, NCDHHS Health Portfolio	X
Dr. Portia Pope, Director, NCDHHS OMHHD	X
Rupa Gopi, Deputy Director, NCDHHS OMHHD	X



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Attendee	Present on June 16, 2026, Meeting
Sandie Leathers, Health Literacy, Promotion, and Communication Specialist, NCDHHS OMHHD	X
DeNita Nash, Human Services Program Manager, NCDHHS OMHHD	X
Carolina Silceo Perez, Senior Strategy and Community Partner Engagement Manager, NCDHHS OMHHD	X
NCDHHS OMHHD Guests (if any)	

Meeting Notes

I. Preliminary Matters

(1) Dr. Portia Pope welcomed and thanked Council members, presenters, and guests to the September 2026 Minority Health Advisory Council meeting. She thanked members for completing a scheduling survey that resulted in moving Council meetings to the evening to better accommodate members' professional responsibilities, including clinical practice and legislative service.

(2) Sandie Leathers conducted a roll call for MHAC members and asked any guests or other partners to put their names and affiliations in the chat. Additional participants joining after roll call were acknowledged through the participant list.

(3) Dr. Pope reviewed the meeting agenda, noting that the Council would receive updates on legislative and budget priorities, Rural Health Transformation, Medicaid policy changes, and ongoing Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities initiatives. She introduced Deputy Secretary Debra Farrington to provide the Health Portfolio update.

II. Presentation Content

(1) Health Portfolio Update - Debra Farrington, Deputy Secretary, NCDHHS Health Portfolio

Deputy Secretary Farrington provided an update on legislative and budget changes affecting DHHS, including the transfer of the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities from central management into the Division of Public Health. She discussed approximately \$35 million in departmental reductions and explained that eliminating vacant positions could affect temporary staffing supported through salary savings. The office had no vacant positions requiring elimination, but its staffing included three permanent positions and



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temporary staff supported by other funding arrangements. DHHS was updating budgets, communicating changes, and assessing program impacts.

She also reviewed public health concerns, including declining cyclosporiasis cases, potential rabies exposures associated with a traveling petting zoo, and seasonal flu and COVID activity. Her Rural Health Transformation Program update included a \$213 million federal award, submission of the first annual report to CMS, establishment of an advisory committee, and grants supporting rural communities. She noted that the department had submitted its year-two application and hoped to receive comparable or increased funding.

(2) MHAC Committee Meeting Update - Dr. Portia Pope, Director, Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities

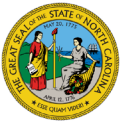
Dr. Pope outlined proposed steps to update the Council's bylaws and elect officers. Members were asked to review the existing bylaws and recommend revisions. Proposed changes would be circulated in November for consideration before the December meeting, when adoption and officer nominations and elections were anticipated. She explained the use of Robert's Rules of Order and agreed to include introductory parliamentary procedure training during the planned December orientation.

Dr. Pope emphasized the Council's role in providing findings and policy recommendations to the Governor and DHHS Secretary. Members were invited to contribute relevant data from their organizations, with staff available to support the reporting process.

She reviewed the office's collaboration with Medicaid and other DHHS divisions, staff training in data analytics and contract management, diabetes prevention workforce preparation, and development of public-facing dashboards. She highlighted Juan Ortiz's culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) training across health departments, health care organizations, community and faith organizations, and academic settings. She also discussed opportunities to apply CLAS training to maternal health and described community engagement informed by residents' input and geographic data.

During closing updates, Dr. Pope announced a DHHS Continuous Improvement and Innovation award recognizing the office's Hurricane Helene response, which involved 40 partners and reached approximately 136,000 individuals. She highlighted upcoming conferences addressing Latine maternal and infant health, Black maternal and infant health, and LGBTQIA+ health. The next Council meeting was identified as December 14, 2026, and Sandie Leathers was asked to poll members about meeting in person at DHHS and possible alternative meeting times.

(3) NC Medicaid Update - Carolina Siliceo Perez, Senior Strategy and Community Partner Engagement Manager, NCDHHS OMHHD



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Carolina Siliceo Perez reported that the office completed 514 community and partner engagements during the previous fiscal year. She reviewed resources to help communities understand Medicaid changes, including English and Spanish virtual town halls, downloadable outreach materials, and information available through the Medicaid website.

She encouraged members to distribute resources through community settings and participate in train-the-trainer opportunities addressing H.R. 1. Participants were asked to attend the entire training to support accurate communication. She also highlighted the Medicaid speaker request process, provider webinars, virtual office hours, and a provider playbook.

(4) NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program Updates - DeNita Nash, Human Services Program Manager, NCDHHS OMHHD

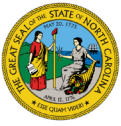
Denita Nash reported that the NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program received \$90,000 from the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors to expand services to individuals enrolled in both Medicare and Medicaid. Participating regions had been identified, with services expected to begin within the following weeks.

She described the August 14 Screen Across NC event at DHHS headquarters, where 46 employees received free, confidential A1C screenings. Frankie Sanchez provided diabetes prevention education that encouraged additional attendees to participate in screening. Ms. Nash also shared updated regional coordination information supporting program coverage across all 100 counties, including coordination through the YMCA of Southeastern North Carolina.

During discussion, Dr. Larry Wu requested three-month participation data in addition to program completion information. Dr. Olu Jegede asked about long-term outcomes, progression to diabetes, and potential life expectancy benefits. Dr. Pope described plans to examine sustained behavior changes and health measures among program graduates. Staff were asked to document the requested data for follow-up. Ms. Nash also shared a participant testimonial illustrating changes in eating habits following program participation.

III. Discussion / Open Floor

Following Denita Nash's presentation, Dr. Larry Wu requested information on participation at three months, in addition to program completion, and highlighted the financial burden of diabetes. Dr. Olu Jegede asked about tracking participants over time to assess sustained behavior changes, progression to diabetes, and potential life expectancy benefits. Dr. Pope explained that staff were beginning to examine longer-term outcomes among program graduates, including behavior changes and A1C levels. Staff were asked to document members' data requests for follow-up.



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Ms. Nash shared a participant testimonial illustrating changes in eating habits. Dr. Pope emphasized the potential for diabetes prevention to help older adults maintain their health and independence. She also announced recognition of the office's Hurricane Helene response and highlighted upcoming conferences addressing maternal and infant health and LGBTQIA+ health.

Dr. Catherine Evans shared news of an award from the Association of North Carolina Boards of Health and described a collaboration with NCDHHS that provided free oral health services to 51 children. Services included dental screenings, sealants, and fluoride varnish; 92% of the children served were described as underserved.

IV. Closing Matters

Before closing, Dr. Pope discussed the December 14, 2026, Council meeting and the possibility of meeting in person at DHHS. Sandie Leathers was asked to poll members about their interest and preferred meeting times. Dr. Pope thanked members for their participation and service and concluded the meeting.

V. Next Steps and Action Items

Staff were asked to document and follow up on Council members' requests for NC Minority Diabetes Prevention Program data, including three-month participation, program completion, sustained behavior changes, and A1C outcomes. The chat identified a sustainability data update for the next meeting and included an offer to explore potential life expectancy benefits using program alumni outcomes. Staff also indicated that updated regional coordination and directory information, and conference registration links would be shared.

Sandie Leathers was asked to poll members about holding the December 14, 2026 meeting in person at DHHS and to gather preferences for alternative meeting times. Council members were asked to provide feedback on the existing bylaws, with proposed revisions to be circulated in November for review before consideration in December. Additional planned activities included officer nominations and elections, new-member orientation, and introductory training on Robert's Rules of Order. Staff indicated that reference books would be ordered for the Chair and Vice Chair following their election.