



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Office of Rural Health

NC Office of Rural Health Quarterly Newsletter

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December 18, 2024

Welcome to the Service Area Team's Quarterly Newsletter from the North Carolina Office of Rural Health (ORH).

The ORH uses Service Area Teams (SATs) to facilitate collaboration across programs and provide strategic support to grantees and partners across the state.

SATs are comprised of members from all programs within ORH including Community Health, Medication Assistance, Rural Hospital Assistance, Rural Health Operations, Farmworker Health, Placement Services, Health Information Technology and Telehealth, Analytics & Innovations, and Business and Contracts.

We would love to hear from you! If you have a news story, comments, or questions for the upcoming Spring newsletter contact [Leslie Wolcott](#) or [Justin Kearley](#).



Holiday Greetings from the ORH Operations Team: Justin Kearley, Leslie Wolcott, Dorothea Brock, and Kimberly McNeil.

Grant Opportunities

The **ORH Community Health Grant RFA is open! It closes on December 20th at 5pm.** Use this link <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/grant-opportunities/rural-health-grant-opportunities/sfy-2026-community-health-grant-rfa> for additional information. For inquiries, please contact Nicole Fields-Pierre: nicole.fields-pierre@dhhs.nc.gov. For assistance with the application link, contact Sharema Williams: sharema.williams@dhhs.nc.gov.

ORH News and Deadlines

State Designated Rural Health Center Grant

The SFY 2026 Request for Applications (RFA) will open in January. Please read this year's RFA carefully as there will be several changes. Once available, you may access the RFA opportunity [here](#). Technical Assistance will be offered via a webinar [using this link](#) and is tentatively scheduled for Friday, January 24, 2025, 1-2:30 pm.

NC Medicaid News

1115 Waiver Approved for NC

In 2018, NCDHHS won approval from the Federal government to try an innovative approach to improving North Carolinians' health. Recognizing that health doesn't just happen at the doctor's office or in a hospital, the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS) under the first Trump Administration, gave NCDHHS the flexibility through an **1115 Medicaid waiver** to invest in housing, food, transportation and more for high-needs Medicaid recipients. The premise behind this was a simple one: people stay healthier, and the state saves money, in the long run.

The North Carolina General Assembly saw the value in this approach and has supported these efforts by funding the **Healthy Opportunity Pilot**.

Telehealth Grant RFA:

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/grant-opportunities/rural-health-grant-opportunities/telehealth-infrastructure-grant-program-wave-2>

Application closes January 31, 2025

New ORH Staff

Meet new staff members at the Office of Rural Health below.

Tanieka Williams, Contracts team

My name is Tanieka Williams. I am the joyful mother of three – a 14-year-old son, a 2-year-old son, and a 1-year-old daughter. Although I was born and raised in New York City, my husband and I currently reside in Smithfield, NC. Before transferring to the Office of Rural Health, I worked in several roles within State government for a little more than a decade. My first role was in the Department of Health and Human Services on the Communications Team for the NCTracks project. Since then, I have enjoyed roles in testing, training, and contract management with the Administrative Office of the Courts (also known as the North Carolina Judicial Center), the Division of Public Health, the Division of Social Services, and most recently the Division of Mental Health. I am a Journalism alum of North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University. AGGIE PRIDE!!! My favorite hobby is dancing but I also love good food, live music, sports and great adventures.

Kylee Bartlett (pictured below) has joined us as our new Health Professional Shortage Designation Specialist! Kylee comes to us all the way from Rochester, NY, bringing a wealth of experience focused on advancing health equity for families, children with special health care needs, and the I/DD community. We're thrilled to have her expertise and passion on board.



Regional News and Highlights

South Central News and Highlights

Earlier this year we got good news, **it's working**. Participants had fewer emergency department visits and fewer inpatient hospitalizations, and the state is spending about \$85 less in medical costs per participant per month. **And now, in recognition of these strong results, CMS has just approved a new 1115 waiver renewing the flexibilities behind this success and expanding more opportunities to build on these innovations.**

This approval is a necessary, but not a final, step to helping more North Carolinians stay healthy and further bending the healthcare cost curve for the state. With this approval, we now have a menu of options for North Carolina to potentially take advantage of. NCDHHS will meet with stakeholders, partners, and legislators, to discuss what opportunities are now available and how we may be able to come together to implement them. An overview of the key components of this new 1115 waiver approval are below:

- Allows for Healthy Opportunities Pilots that invest in non-medical drivers of health like food, transportation and housing to be taken statewide (beyond the current three regions),
- Opens up access for people who are incarcerated to get NC Medicaid health coverage up to 90 days prior to their release providing them critical health services and helping to break the expensive cycle of incarceration,
- Enables more behavioral health resources for North Carolinians and boosts the behavioral health workforce,
- Extends federal authority for North Carolina's successful Medicaid Managed Care program,
- Makes it possible for children to remain covered by NC Medicaid for longer periods of time, reducing burdensome paperwork for families and counties, and
- Continues availability to evidence-based substance use disorder treatments for Medicaid beneficiaries while they are in a qualifying facility.

Since the Healthy Opportunity Pilots launched in three rural regions in 2022, North Carolina has served more than 26,000 high-needs Medicaid enrollees to keep them healthier and prevent illness rather than waiting to treat it. And it's more cost-effective.

The community-based organizations that we worked with to implement the Healthy Opportunities Pilots have been essential and excellent partners, though none of this past success would have been possible without the support from the General Assembly. We're proud these shared accomplishments have improved lives and laid the foundation for us to partner again and make an even bigger impact.

Rural Health Clinic CY 2025 All-Inclusive Rate

National Rural Health Day 2024!

National Rural Health Day was held this year at Scotland Health Care System in Laurinburg, NC. Thanks to our excellent hosts and our partners at the North Carolina Rural Health Association for setting a new standard for the celebration. We had 207 attendees across all in person and virtual events!

We had so much fun that we've made a video with photos and music from the day! Please [click here to enjoy the video.](#)



CMS updated the rural health clinic (RHC) all-inclusive rate for CY 2025. The payment limit per visit for independent and provider-based RHCs in hospitals with 50 or more beds is \$152.00. The payment limit per visit for specified provider-based RHCs with an April 1, 2021, established payment limit that continue to meet the qualifications in section 1833(f)(3)(B) of the Social Security Act is the greater of these amounts:

1. Your payment limit per visit starting January 1, 2024, increased by 3.5%
2. The national statutory CY 2025 payment limit per visit of \$152.00

Learning Opportunities

Free CHW and Public Health Conference

The March of Dimes of NC has rescheduled a conference offered free of charge to Doulas, Community Health Workers, Nurse Midwives, Public Health Workers, Nurses, and other Providers. PLEASE JOIN US for a LIVE, IN-PERSON conference on how bias and stigma affect pregnant women by creating social isolation and barriers to treatment. March of Dimes will offer training on mitigating bias and stigma to improve access to care and treatment. Please join us for three FREE continuing education offerings:

- Beyond Labels: Reducing Stigma Related to Maternal Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder™
- Awareness to Action: Dismantling Bias in Maternal and Infant healthcare™
- Maternal Mental Health: It's Not Just Postpartum. It's Not Just Depression.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH, 2025

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM EST

Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC)
121 Hendersonville Road ASHEVILLE, NC 28803

REGISTER HERE:

https://marchofdimes.zoom.us/meeting/register/_JwkdOmrqj4tGdCAroD715AILuZYvTrwBgWY

Health Center Preparedness and Response

Forum: Patients with Access and Functional

Needs

Wednesday, December 18 | 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET

Registration page

National Training and Technical Assistance Partners (NTTAPs) are presenting a four-part webinar series for staff at health centers that serve special populations, such as agricultural workers, individuals experiencing homelessness, public housing residents, and other underserved groups. The second webinar in this series will focus on patients who might need extra support to access essential services in a crisis.

Primary Care Team E-Learning Series

Take your role and your practice to the next level! This free self-paced series includes eight online courses for medical assistants and primary care



Eastern SAT News and Highlights

In October, Congresswoman Deborah Ross (D-NC 2nd District) visited the Wake County Regional Smiles Clinic at the Eastern Regional Center in Zebulon to celebrate the impactful work made possible through the Smiles at Sunnybrook program. During her visit, she toured the clinic, met with staff and patients, and engaged with Wake County leadership to discuss the clinic's accomplishments and future plans. The congresswoman highlighted the importance of continued investment in public health initiatives and listened to insights on how further support could enhance dental care access for children in our community. The visit underscored the importance of collaboration between local leaders and federal representatives in addressing health disparities and ensuring equitable access to care for all.



Western SAT News and Highlights:

teams, which include:

PCT 1 – Improving Office Systems

PCT 2 – Introduction to Team-Based Care

PCT 3 – Chronic Condition Overview, Part 1: Hypertension and COPD

PCT 4 – Chronic Condition Overview, Part 2: Diabetes and Heart Failure

PCT 5 – Introduction to Motivational Interviewing (MI)

PCT 6 – Health Literacy & Patient Education: An Overview PCT 7 – Effective Tobacco Interventions

PCT 8 – Recovering Recovery in Mental Health, Substance Abuse & Chronic Illness

We hope you take advantage of this learning opportunity, offered in partnership with Piedmont AHEC. Click on the blue button below to register. We look forward to connecting with you!

[Register here](#)

Flu Information

It's flu season! Read updates from NCDHHS here <https://flu.ncdhhs.gov/>



Register to Attend the 2025 Rural Health Symposium hosted by East Carolina University and Eastern AHEC in Greenville on February 21 and 22! You can find more information and register here: <https://www.easternahec.net/courses-and-events/74214/rural-health-symposium>



Register to attend The 2025 Rural Summit hosted by the NC Rural Center in Raleigh on March 24 and 26! You can find more information and register here: <https://www.ncruralcenter.org/2024/09/save-the-date-for-rural-summit-2025-securing-our-rural-future-march-25-26-2025/>

Calling all department leaders!

[Register for 1 of 13 Remaining Slots](#)

The Rural Healthcare Provider Transition Project's upcoming Leadership Learning Collaborative, focused on Advancing Value-Based Care: Leading from the Middle, is designed to support middle



Western North Carolina Community Health Services (WNCCHS) held an Open House Breakfast at their new McDowell Health Center in Marion, NC. WNCCHS McDowell Health Center, the county's only community health center, comes with services including primary care, pharmacy, behavioral health and care management services, which will allow WNCCHS to provide comprehensive care under one roof. "This expansion at WNCCHS McDowell Health Center reflects our commitment to providing high-quality, accessible care to the communities we serve," said Kim Wagenaar, CEO of WNCCHS. "By integrating primary care, behavioral health, care management, and pharmacy services under one roof, we are removing barriers and making it easier for patients to get the comprehensive support they need to live healthier lives. This is an important step forward for McDowell County." ORH would like to extend congratulations to WNCCHS as they work to increase access to care in rural and underserved communities.



managers and other leaders in rural health care settings as they facilitate value-based care initiatives in their organizations and improve health outcomes in their communities.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this learning collaborative, participants will be able to:

- Describe value-based care (VBC) and understand your role in advancing VBC within your rural community.
- Apply change management concepts to effectively lead change initiatives to advance VBC.
- Empower individuals and teams to effectively and efficiently advance VBC while finding joy in their work.

Participation Requirements:

- Eligible attendees include small rural hospitals and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)-certified rural health clinics
- Participants will sign a memorandum of understanding committing to a total of 8-10 hours to this structured collaborative.
- Four hours to attend the live sessions
- 1-2 hours of additional time between sessions reviewing related materials

In order to receive a certification of course completion and 4 hours of American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) qualified credit, learning collaborative participants must:

- Complete a pre and post assessment
- Attend and actively participate in all four live sessions

RHPTP Leadership Learning Collaborative 2024-2025

Advancing Value-Based Care: Leading from the Middle

Speaker

Marleny Garber
Program Manager
Stratis Health

Speaker

Carrie Howard
Program Manager
Stratis Health

January 14 & 28, 2025
1 p.m. - 2 p.m. Central Time

February 11 & 25, 2025
1 p.m. - 2 p.m. Central Time

RHPTP
Rural Health Professional Transition Project
Partnership
Rural Health Professional Transition Project

About ORH

We would love to hear from you! If you have any comments, questions, or suggestions for specific programs within our office, please feel free to contact the Operations Specialist facilitating your region's SAT below!

ORH Programs

Provider Recruitment and Placement Program provides recruitment efforts for medical, dental and psychiatric health professionals to North Carolina's rural and underserved areas and offers incentives to eligible providers.

Provider Recruitment and Placement Program Profile

Rural Health Operations Program create access to health care for vulnerable populations by supporting

state designated rural health centers.

Rural Health Operations Program Profile

Community Health Program supports the primary care Safety Net system to increase access for vulnerable populations.

Community Health Program Profile

NC Farmworker Health Program provides medical, dental and enabling services to members of the North Carolina agricultural labor force and their families.

NC Farmworker Health Program Profile

NC Rural Hospital Assistance Program funds projects for the benefit of all critical access hospitals and eligible small rural hospitals in NC.

NC Rural Hospital Program Profile

Medication Assistance Program provides free and low-cost medications donated by pharmaceutical manufacturers to patients who cannot afford them.

Medication Assistance Program Profile

Statewide Telepsychiatry Program supports the psychiatric evaluation of patients through videoconferencing technology in emergency departments.

Statewide Telepsychiatry Program Profile

Analytics and Innovations Program assists ORH programs and grantees with using data and leveraging technologies in ways that help improve monitoring, evaluation efforts, and innovative strategies.

Health Professional Shortage Area Program Profile

Community Health Worker Program Profile

Rural Health Information Technology and Telehealth Program works directly with the North Carolina Safety Net to assess needs and provide technical assistance throughout the state to improve the use of Electronic Health Record (EHR) Systems and the use of NC HealthConnex, the state designated health information exchange

Rural Health Information Program Profile

SAT Facilitator Contact Information

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