



the CONVERSATION

Policy to Patients:

Reshaping NC Healthcare Access

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

The Friday Conference Center

Grumman Auditorium

UNC Chapel Hill

Presented by



AmeriHealth *Caritas*



NC MedAssist | Our Programs

NC MedAssist improves access to essential medications through two primary programs: the Free Pharmacy Program and the Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine Program. Together, these programs help individuals across North Carolina with limited resources access the medications and support they need to manage and stabilize their health.

Free Pharmacy Program

The NC MedAssist Free Pharmacy Program provides eligible uninsured North Carolinians with free prescription medications for acute and chronic conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, asthma, behavioral health, and more. By removing the financial barrier to essential medications, the program helps individuals better manage their health, remain consistent with treatment, and reduce the risk of preventable complications and costly healthcare utilization. Medications are delivered directly to patients in all 100 North Carolina counties. To qualify, individuals must be uninsured and have a household income at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine Program

The NC MedAssist Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine Program provides free over-the-counter medications, health supplies, and other health-related products to individuals and families across North Carolina. Through statewide clinics, safety-net partnerships, community outreach initiatives, and other direct distribution efforts, NC MedAssist reaches communities in ways that respond to local needs while connecting individuals to additional healthcare resources and NC MedAssist's Free Pharmacy Program.

Access to these everyday health essentials helps people manage common health needs safely at home, prevent conditions from worsening, and reduce unnecessary doctor, urgent care, and emergency department visits. **Key OTC initiatives include:**

Gerhart Health Hub (COMING SOON)

NC MedAssist's Health Hub serves as a statewide community resource that connects individuals to NC MedAssist programs and other critical healthcare and safety-net resources, including health products, screenings, education, community services, and other resources that support better health. The Health Hub also serves as a place for volunteers to support statewide initiatives that expand medication access in North Carolina communities where access to healthcare and medications is limited.

Mobile Free Pharmacy (OTC Distribution Events)

The programs bring free over-the-counter medications and other health-related products directly to communities across North Carolina through distribution events held nearly every week. Events are developed in partnership with local organizations and volunteers and connect participants with additional health and safety-net resources in their area. As NC MedAssist's largest outreach program, The Mobile Free Pharmacy also provides an important opportunity to identify individuals who may qualify for NC MedAssist's free prescription program.



**Ask about how
you can join us in
making an impact.**

Brenda Vass | CEO

Jordan Fletcher, CFRE | Chief Development Officer

Dustin Allen, PharmD, MBA | Chief Operating Officer

Nicole Stanfield, MHA | Chief Program Officer

Derek Page | Marketing & Communications Director

Rebecca Galloway, MBA | Partner Relations Director

Lisa Szabo | Mobile Free Pharmacy Program

bvass@medassist.org

jfletcher@medassist.org

dallen@medassist.org

ncstanfield@medassist.org

dpage@medassist.org

rgalloway@medassist.org

lszabo@medassist.org



Melanie Bush

MPAff

Deputy Secretary
NC Medicaid

PANELIST

Melanie Bush is Deputy Secretary of Medicaid for the North Carolina Division of Health Benefits (DHB), also known as NC Medicaid. In this role, she provides leadership, strategic direction, operational oversight, and managed care supervision for the North Carolina Medicaid program, which serves more than 3 million North Carolinians who cannot afford health care.

As Assistant Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, Melanie led teams through managed care transformation, the unwinding of continuous coverage for the COVID-19 public health emergency, and Medicaid expansion, extending access to care to more than 700,000 additional North Carolinians.

Melanie also serves as a Governor's appointee to the Board of Trustees for the North Carolina State Health Plan. Prior to joining NC Medicaid, Melanie was the Medicaid Fiscal Analyst for the Fiscal Research Division of the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA), where she led the Health and Human Services budget team.

Her previous roles also include Senior Policy Analyst for Medicaid at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and Policy Analyst for the Center for Community Change in Washington, DC.

Melanie holds a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service from Georgetown University and a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Texas at Austin.



Laura Gerald **MD, MPH**

President
Kate B. Reynolds
Charitable Trust

PANELIST

Dr. Laura Gerald is president of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, one of North Carolina's largest private foundations. A pediatrician who was born and raised in rural North Carolina, she has decades of leadership experience in health care delivery, rural health, philanthropy, and public health.

Under Dr. Gerald's leadership, the Trust has deepened its commitment to racial equity and systems change and announced in 2022 it will divest from tobacco and invest \$100 million of the foundation's corpus in socially responsible funds supporting North Carolina residents.

Prior to joining the Trust, she served in critical roles focused on statewide health improvement including serving as the North Carolina State Health Director.

Dr. Gerald holds a bachelor's degree from Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges, a medical degree from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, and a Master of Public Health degree from Harvard University School of Public Health.

She currently is the Board Chair of Grantmakers in Health, on the Board of Trustees for Winston-Salem State University, and adjunct faculty at UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. Dr. Gerald is a board-certified pediatrician and fellow in American Academy of Pediatrics.



David L. Pope
DrPH, JD, MHA

President & CEO
Scotland Health
Care Group

PANELIST

David Pope is the President and CEO of Scotland Health Care System. He has spent his career improving health for those living in rural areas and small towns.

David grew up in Union County, North Carolina and attended college as a Morehead Scholar at UNC. He holds master's and doctoral degrees from the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. His dissertation studied community-based mental health services in rural North Carolina. David also holds a law degree from Wake Forest University.

David served as a judge advocate in the Marine Corps from 2005 to 2009 and deployed to Iraq with Second Battalion, Second Marines. David and his family moved to Laurinburg in 2019 when he was hired as the Chief Operating Officer at Scotland Health.

In 2025 David was honored as North Carolina's Community Star by the North Carolina Office of Rural Health. In 2025 he was also awarded the Dr. Collie Coleman Spirit of Unity Award by the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 2026, David was named Richmond Community College's Citizen of the Year.

David currently serves as the Chair of the Laurinburg/Scotland County Area Chamber of Commerce.



Rep. Heather H. Rhyne, RPh

NC House of
Representatives
District 97

PANELIST

Heather Rhyne, a lifelong North Carolinian, represents Lincoln County in the North Carolina House of Representatives.

Originally from Cherryville, she earned her Pharmacy degree from UNC-Chapel Hill and serves as a retail pharmacist for several independent pharmacies. Before joining the legislature, Heather spent eight years on the Lincoln County Board of Education, including three as Chairwoman, where she championed quality education and built strong community relationships.

Elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives, Heather quickly distinguished herself by being chosen as Freshman Leader of the new member class in her first year and becoming the only freshman legislator to receive a vice-chairmanship. In her first session, she successfully worked on legislation that became law, including Senate Bill 479 and House Bill 412, as well as House Bill 517 and House Bill 536. Her collaborative, level-headed, and common sense approach has allowed her to provide valuable insight on a range of legislative issues.

For Heather, representing her community is both an honor and a calling that reflects her lifelong commitment to faith, family, and public service.



Michael Waldrum **MD, MSc, MBA**

Chief Executive Officer
ECU Health

Dean
Brody School of
Medicine, ECU

PANELIST

Dr. Michael Waldrum is Chief Executive Officer of ECU Health and Dean of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University.

A specialist in critical care medicine and pulmonology, he has extensive experience in clinical effectiveness, information system and health care management in academic organizations.

Before coming to eastern NC, Waldrum served as President and CEO of The University of Arizona Health Network. Previously, he was CEO of University of Alabama Hospital at Birmingham and Vice President of the UAB Health System, where he also served as Chief Operating Officer and Chief Information Officer.

Waldrum is a member of the CaroNova Board of Directors, the NC East Alliance Board of Directors and the Greenville Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Waldrum also serves as the chair of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Board of Directors where he has held board leadership positions since 2020.

Waldrum graduated from the University of The South Sewanee in Tennessee with a BA in English and the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine. He completed his residency at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, received a Master's Degree in epidemiology from Harvard School of Public Health and earned his MBA from the University of Michigan.



Emily Roland **MPH**

Executive Director of
Program Implementation
North Carolina
Healthcare Foundation
MODERATOR

Emily Roland is Executive Director of Program Implementation at the North Carolina Healthcare Foundation, the charitable nonprofit affiliate of the North Carolina Healthcare Association. She leads cross-functional teams and strategic partnerships to improve health and advance access to care, behavioral health, rural health, and the healthcare workforce.

Emily oversees grant-funded programs and implementation initiatives that address chronic disease, expand healthcare access, and scale innovative approaches to equitable health improvement through community-led interventions and policy change.

Previously, Emily worked in the North Carolina Healthcare Association's advocacy and policy department, leading grassroots advocacy engagement among more than 130 member health systems and their partners across the state. Before joining NCHA in 2014, Emily spent a decade at the North Carolina Chapter of Blood Cancer United (formerly the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society) as the statewide Campaign Director for various corporate and community fundraising campaigns.

She is a graduate of Leadership NC Class XXV and currently serves on the Steering Committee of the NC Rural Health Association, the Office of Rural Health's Primary Care Advisory Committee, and the State Health Improvement Plan's Uninsured Workgroup.

Emily earned her bachelor's degree from UNC Chapel Hill and her Master of Public Health from East Carolina University.

Care that connects communities.



AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina is part of a national mission-driven health care organization with deep experience serving Medicaid populations. We are proud to support NC MedAssist in hosting conversations that help shape the future of health care in our state – and to work alongside providers and community partners to improve access, support whole-person care and build healthier futures for our members and communities across North Carolina.

Care is the heart of our work.®




AmeriHealth Caritas
North Carolina

Medicaid managed care plan

amerihealthcaritasnc.com

Together is better

The best moments are the ones we share. That's why having true support matters. With care that's by your side at every step, we help you build a life that feels connected, complete and supported in every way.



Atrium Health



carolina
complete health

Here for a healthier
North Carolina



We're proud to support
the work of NC MedAssist.

It's work that has a powerful, positive effect on the health of thousands
of North Carolinians — and helps build a brighter future for all.



©. SM are marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans. All other marks and names are property of their respective owners. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. U50822, 9/26



STAY CONNECTED ANYWHERE

BatteryXchange provides convenient,
on-the-go charging solutions for
workplaces, healthcare facilities, and
public spaces so you can stay connected
when it matters most.



CHARGE
YOUR DEVICE



CONVENIENT
LOCATIONS



SAFE &
SECURE



SUSTAINABLE
SOLUTION



Learn more about how
BatteryXchange can support
your facility's connectivity goals.



batteryxchange.co



SCAN TO
VISIT OUR
WEBSITE

batteryxchange.co



TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH **HEALTHCARE & TECHNOLOGY**

Your Trusted Healthcare Solutions Partner

We provide innovative workforce, research, and project management solutions that help healthcare organizations, government agencies, and research institutions deliver exceptional results.

OUR CORE SERVICES



CERTIFIED WOMAN-OWNED
SMALL BUSINESS (WOSB)

CONTACT US TODAY!
 919-977-0841 info@gracefederal.com
 www.gracefederal.com
 8480 Honeycutt Road, Suite 200 | Raleigh, NC 27615



SCAN TO
LEARN MORE!

WHY CHOOSE GRACE?

- ✓ Proven track record supporting healthcare systems, government agencies, and research organizations.
- ✓ Esteemed advisory board comprised of healthcare clinicians providing invaluable insights and strategies.
- ✓ Demonstrated success on major projects and contracts with a commitment to high-quality results.



UNC
HEALTH.

UNC Health is proud to support **NC MedAssist and the Conversation.**

Together, we're helping spark meaningful conversations that inspire understanding, build connections, and strengthen the health of our communities.

Better Together

Vaya Health and Partners Health Management are now Vaya Partners. Our name is new. Our commitment to whole-person, community-based care is stronger than ever.



vayapartners.org



NC MedAssist is grateful
for Merck's support of
the Conversation.

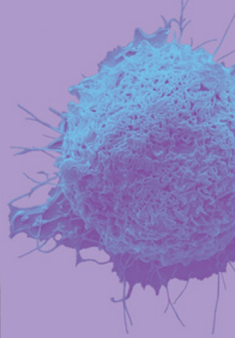


FAMILY
COMMUNITY
ADVOCACY

NCGRANGE.COM



We believe
health is
everything



By reimagining how we discover and develop transformational treatments, accelerating the path from lab to life and advocating for patients every step of the way – we're leading where medicine is going.

Learn more at [JNJ.com](https://www.jnj.com).

Johnson & Johnson

© Johnson & Johnson and its affiliates 2026 02/26 cp-444097v1



Duke Health
proudly
supports
NC MedAssist



DukeHealth

SAVE THE DATE

NC
MedAssist
30
YEARS
OF DISPENSING HOPE

2027
EXECUTIVE
LUNCHEON

Tuesday, March 16, 2027

The Revelry - North End
Charlotte, NC

Join 800+ healthcare and community leaders committed to improving medication access for neighbors in need.

For more info and sponsorships, contact:

Jordan Fletcher, CFRE
Chief Development Officer

jfletcher@medassist.org | 704.350.3597

Thank you to our sponsors for
supporting *the Conversation*

the
CONVERSATION

Policy to Patients:

Reshaping NC Healthcare Access

Presenting Sponsor



Panel Sponsors



Reception Sponsor



Use Your Voice Sponsors



Johnson & Johnson





NCMedAssist



nc_medassist



nc-medassist

www.medassist.org

4428 Taggart Creek Road, Suite 101 | Charlotte, NC | 28208