



## EBCI TRIBAL OPTION

[For Providers](#)



### January 2026 Provider Newsletter

#### What is the EBCI Tribal Option?

EBCI Tribal Option assists approximately 5,700 Tribal-eligible Medicaid beneficiaries, primarily in Cherokee, Haywood, Swain, Jackson, and Graham counties.

[Learn More](#)

## **NCDHHS Implements Child Care Academies to Address Early Care and Learning Crisis**

NCDHHS is partnering with 16 NC institutions of higher learning to establish "Child Care Academies," a shortened intensive training and certification that prepares participants for careers in child care at no cost to them. [See the participating schools in a news release.](#)

Each site is required to conduct at least three Child Care Academies through July 2026. Participating schools may independently choose the start for their Child Care Academy program, with some having begun in October 2025 and others launching as soon as January 2026.

Child Care Academies offer training in multiple formats across various counties to ensure statewide accessibility, incorporating both virtual and in-person learning opportunities. The training includes CPR/first aid, health and safety, infant/toddler safe sleep and sudden infant death syndrome, playground safety, and recognizing and responding to suspicions of child maltreatment.

To learn more about Child Care Academies, contact one of the 16 selected colleges and universities. The initiative is being launched to address the severe staffing shortage that is a key contributor to the state's child care crisis and is funded through the [Preschool Development Grant](#).



# Provider Information Sessions: NC Child Welfare Trauma-Informed Assessment



Help shape the future of trauma-informed care in North Carolina! The North Carolina Child Welfare Trauma-Informed Assessment (NC CWTIA) will bring standardized, trauma-focused assessments to child welfare. Attend one of the sessions to learn how your agency can apply to participate as an approved provider.

## What You Will Learn



Overview of the NC Child Welfare Trauma Informed Assessment



Provider Application Process and Eligibility Criteria



Training & Fidelity Requirements



Timeline & Next Steps



Q&A Discussion & Next Steps



Questions may be directed to Kristin Reed at [kreed@benchmarksnc.org](mailto:kreed@benchmarksnc.org)

## Who Should Attend

- Behavioral health providers interested in providing the NC CWTIA
- Clinical directors & program managers
- Agencies committed to a trauma-informed child welfare system

## Click below to register now!



[January 21<sup>st</sup> 11a-12:30p](#)



[January 27<sup>th</sup> 3:30p-5p](#)



[January 29<sup>th</sup> 9a-10:30a](#)

[Jan. 21: 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
\(Click to Register\)](#)

[Jan. 27: 3:30-5:30 p.m. \(Click  
to Register\)](#)

[Jan. 29: 9-10:30 a.m. \(Click to  
Register\)](#)



JANUARY 2026



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## **NCDHHS Launches Student Loan Repayment Program to Strengthen Mental Health, Substance Use, I/DD and TBI Workforce**

NCDHHS announced the launch of the [\*\*Licensed Workforce Loan Repayment Program\*\*](#), a \$20 million initiative to recruit and retain licensed professionals who provide mental health, substance use, intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), and traumatic brain injury (TBI) services in rural and underserved communities.

The loan repayment program is designed for licensed, masters-level professionals—including counselors, social workers, psychologists and therapists—who are essential to delivering services but often face financial barriers to working in high-need areas.

Highlights of the program include an up to \$50,000 loan repayment and a three-year service commitment in a rural or underserved county. Non-medical, licensed professionals, such as clinical social workers, clinical mental health counselors, clinical addictions specialists, marriage and family therapists, and psychologists, should apply.

**Applications opened on Dec. 1, 2025.** Applicants must hold a valid North Carolina license in good standing, work at least 32 hours per week, provide services in mental health, substance use, IDD, or TBI, be employed at an approved agency serving at least 40% Medicaid, uninsured, or underinsured individuals, and serve in a designated rural or underserved area.

NCDHHS has launched several initiatives to heighten awareness of human services careers and to support those already working in the field. [\*\*Information on these workforce initiatives can be found on the NCDHHS website.\*\*](#)



## **North Carolina Celebrates Two Years of Medicaid Expansion**

*Gov. Stein and NCDHHS Secretary Sangvai, with others from a Medicaid in Rural Communities Roundtable event held in Nash County earlier this year*

On Dec. 1, Gov. Stein and NCDHHS celebrated two years since Medicaid expansion was implemented in North Carolina, providing more than 690,000 North Carolinians with access to affordable health care.

North Carolina became the 40th state to expand Medicaid when it was signed into law on March 27, 2023, and took effect on December 1, 2023. Medicaid expansion does not require any state funding and increases the eligible population to adults ages 19 through 64 who have incomes of up to 138% of the federal poverty level.

Since its launch, more than 11 million prescriptions have been filled by new enrollees for heart health, diabetes, seizure disorders, and other illnesses; more than 191,000 people have accessed dental services; and more than 244,500 people in rural communities who may not otherwise have access to health care, enrolled in Medicaid.

Additionally, overdoses in North Carolina continue to decrease following Medicaid expansion, with visits to emergency departments due to overdose down by 14% from 2024 to 2025.

### **NC Medicaid Ombudsman Program Transition**

The NC Medicaid Ombudsman Program (Member Ombudsman) contract with Legal Aid of North Carolina (LANC) will conclude **December 31, 2025**, and will not be renewed. While this marks the end of LANC's role, the essential functions implemented by the Member Ombudsman will continue with reduced services.

Beginning **January 2, 2026**, operations will transition to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, **Division of Health Benefits (NC Medicaid)**.

#### **What to Expect:**

- The Member Ombudsman phone number (877-201-3750) will remain the same.

- The current website will redirect to a new page on the NC Medicaid website.
- NCDHHS Member Ombudsman agents will not refer beneficiaries and families directly to social needs programs (such as food, housing, utilities). Instead, the agents will connect beneficiaries to their health plan for care management support.

If you have questions or concerns about how this transition may affect your organization, please contact [Medicaid.NCEngagement@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:Medicaid.NCEngagement@dhhs.nc.gov). Your input is essential to ensuring a seamless and inclusive transition.

We appreciate your continued partnership and commitment to serving North Carolina's Medicaid beneficiaries. Please stay tuned for additional updates as we move forward.

#### ACRONYM OF THE MONTH

HEDIS

*Healthcare Effectiveness Data  
and Information Set*

#### CHEROKEE LANGUAGE

GALI'ELIGA

SPRUS

*I'm grateful / happy*

### **Questions - Contact Live Help Desk**

Submit questions to the Help Desk via email at [openpayments@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:openpayments@cms.hhs.gov) or by calling 1-855-326-8366 (TTY Line: 1-844-649-2766), Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (ET), excluding Federal holidays.

The Help Desk refers media inquiries to CMS' Press Office for response.

Visit the [Resources](#) page on the Open Payments website for many of the above resources.

**EAT WELL.  
PLAY WELL.  
STAY WELL.**



**EBCI TRIBAL OPTION**



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