



North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

Medical | Pharmacy | Dental | Social Services

Starting a Free and Charitable Clinic

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

While the North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics (NCAFCC) can provide resources and advice in starting a free and charitable clinic, the NCAFCC cannot create a clinic in a community – we cannot ‘make’ a clinic be there. The ONLY way a free & charitable clinic happens in a community is when the community wants to make it happen – a driven, compassionate group of leaders with a desire to help the uninsured.

The “origin story” of our 60+ members differ greatly from clinic to clinic. Many started with modest, grassroots efforts that grew, and continue to grow over time. There are some with 100 patients and some with 1,000+; some open two days a week and some operating full-time; some offering primary care only and some with specialty care; some run exclusively by retirees and medical students and some operating with paid full-time staff. The common denominator is that they all started somewhere – a fellowship hall, a basement, a borrowed or leased space – with someone ready to better their community and the lives of the people in it.

NCAFCC is committed to helping in this effort to bring accessible healthcare to every North Carolinian regardless of their ability to pay for it. We applaud your interest in becoming a champion for change and have identified several key factors that should be considered before opening a free and charitable clinic. They are just a starting point for you. Please feel free to reach out to the Association and your community leaders with questions that will arise as you contemplate your decision.

Applying for 501c3 Status

Although it isn’t necessary to have a 501c3 designation, all NCAFCC members must have this nonprofit status. This means your organization has been formed for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes and is eligible for federal and state tax exemptions. To create a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, first you need to form a North Carolina nonprofit corporation. The following steps are included:

- Pick a name for your nonprofit corporation
- Apply for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status
- Register with the state of NC

Online Resources:

https://www.sosnc.gov/Guides/launching_a_business/nonprofit_corporation_structure

<https://ncprobono.org/npmanual/section4/>

<https://ncnonprofits.org/resources/nonprofit-starter-kit/starting-nonprofit>

Needs Assessment

Does the community need a free & charitable clinic, if so why?

An estimated 600,000 to 700,000 North Carolinians remained uninsured after the 2024 Medicaid expansion. The need is great, but opening a clinic requires research into existing resources in your community. Questions to be considered include:

- Is there an existing NCAFCC clinic in your community? Visit <https://ncafcc.org/our-clinic-list/> to find clinic locations, hours, services and other information
- Is there a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) or other low/no-cost clinic in your area? How many patients are they not able to serve? Do patients wait weeks/months for appointments?
- Is your local Department of Health able to meet the needs of patients in your community? How many patients are they not able to serve? Do patients wait weeks/months for appointments?
- Are there statistics (US Census Bureau, NC DHHS, local health department statistics readily available that support the need for more healthcare services in your community?
- Have you approached similar organizations with ideas to collaborate and provide services?

Community Support

Almost all successful free and charitable clinics have a clinic “champion,” – a person or organization who is passionate or motivated about serving the uninsured. For example, a local

county official or hospital CEO have vested interests in keeping patients out of local emergency rooms. A retired nurse or physician, likewise, may be looking for somewhere to volunteer their time. And lastly, a foundation or individual donor may be looking for a place to donate money.

Typically, a clinic founder is a medical provider or clinician, but this isn't always the case. Starting a free and charitable clinic cannot be planned and implemented by one person. The following community members may be instrumental in kick-starting your efforts:

- Retirees (knowledge and labor)
- Employers with part-time workers (patient recruitment)
- Elected or appointed officials (space, labor, monetary resources)
- Faith Community (patient recruitment, volunteer recruitment, monetary resources)
- Colleges and Universities (space, labor, monetary resources through collaboration)
- Government Entities (space, labor, monetary resources through collaboration)
- Other nonprofit organizations (space, labor, monetary resources through collaboration)

Hospital Support

Additionally, many successful clinics have the active support of their local hospital, including serving on the clinic board, providing in-kind lab work and other services, encouraging medical providers to volunteer and providing financial support. Considerations:

- Have you approached your local hospital and asked for their support? A Diverse, Active Board and Community Successful clinics have boards who are a group of champions and that represent a cross-section of the community, and are active – they volunteer, participate, and donate – 100%.
- Are others concerned about those without access to health care, and will they insist on such a service being developed?
- Does the medical community share your concern?
- Would employed personnel, both medical and non-medical, be willing to volunteer a few hours a month in the clinic?

Additional Online Resources:

<https://www.studentrunfreeclinics.org/25-steps-to-starting-a-clinic/>

<https://smallbusiness.chron.com/start-health-clinic-13423.html>

<https://www.kff.org/statedata/election-state-fact-sheets/north-carolina/>

<https://www.heart.org/>

<https://www.acnchealth.com/>
<https://bensonhealth.org/>
<https://www.brchs.com/>
<https://care4carolina.com/>
<https://downhomenc.org/>
<https://equalitync.org/>
<https://oralhealthnc.org/>
<https://foundationhli.org/ncrhla/>
<https://legalaidnc.org/project/medical-legal-partnership/>
<https://www.mdcinc.org/>
<https://ncchild.org/>
<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/orh>
<https://www.ncruralcenter.org/>
<https://nextstage-consulting.com/>
<https://www.ncahec.net/>
<https://ncafcc.org/>
<https://www.ncalhd.org/>
<https://ncchwa.org/>
<https://ncchwa.org/en/>
<https://ncchwa.org/>
<https://www.ncjustice.org/>
<https://onsms.org/>
<https://projectaccessdurham.org/>