

N.C. free and charitable clinics gear up for surge in patients as ‘unwinding’ puts at least 300,000 Medicaid recipients at risk of losing health insurance

- *35,000 in state lost Medicaid benefits in June, indicating earlier estimates may be low*
- *Even with Medicaid expansion, some 700,000 expected to remain without coverage*
- *Statewide network of 70 free and charitable clinics ready to serve new patients*

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (July 21, 2023) – North Carolina’s nonprofit free and charitable clinics that provide low-cost/no-cost health care to the uninsured are expecting an influx of new patients as more than 300,000 people face losing their Medicaid coverage due to changes in the federal insurance program.

Since March 2020, as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, states had been required to maintain enrollment of nearly all Medicaid beneficiaries and their level of coverage. That requirement has ended, triggering a review to determine if Medicaid recipients remain eligible to receive benefits.

In North Carolina, 35,000 Medicaid recipients lost their benefits in June as a result of the so-called “unwinding” of pandemic rules, according to numbers from the state Department of Health and Human Services. DHHS initially estimated 300,000 North Carolinians could see their benefits terminated or reduced, but experts cited in [media reports](#) now predict the number could be much higher.

Some of those who have lost their Medicaid coverage are already turning to the 70 member clinics of the North Carolina Association of Free and Charitable Clinics ([NCAFCC](#)), according to April R. Cook, CEO of the association.

“We want anyone who loses their Medicaid coverage and has income between 139% and 250% of the federal poverty level to know there is a free and charitable clinic near them,” Cook said. “Our mission is that all North Carolinians have access to high-quality health care regardless of ability to pay.”

Even after the anticipated expansion of the Medicaid program in North Carolina, which was approved by state lawmakers earlier this year but is being held up until a new state budget is adopted, as many as 700,000 people who are currently uninsured are expected to remain without coverage.

Some of those who lose coverage due to the “unwinding” may become eligible again under Medicaid expansion but could face a gap of several months without health insurance depending on when a final state budget is approved by the North Carolina General Assembly and signed by Gov. Roy Cooper.

Cook encourages anyone without health insurance, including Medicaid, to visit www.ncafcc.org to find a free and charitable clinic close to home. Most clinics serve community residents who have no health insurance of any kind and household incomes at or below 250% of the federal poverty level.

“The vast majority of our clients work fulltime but are not offered health insurance through their employers and cannot qualify for Medicaid,” Cook said. “These are the frontline workers who provide essential services every day, and they deserve to be cared for, too.”

NCAFCC’s member clinics serve more than 80,000 uninsured and underserved people in 87 of North Carolina’s 100 counties, providing a range of services including primary, specialty and dental care, behavioral health services, pharmacy, vision care, lab tests and hospital referrals.

About the North Carolina Association of Free and Charitable Clinics

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics supports 70 member clinics in expanding access to health care, reducing health disparities and improving the health of uninsured and underinsured individuals. Member clinics are a vital part of North Carolina's safety net, providing care for more than 80,000 patients in 87 counties, including primary and specialty medical care; dental care; pharmacy services; optometry; behavioral health care; lab tests and hospital referrals. The association supports member clinics with education, advocacy, research, funding and collaboration, and promotes quality health care for all North Carolinians. Learn more at www.ncafcc.org.

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