**NC Coalition on Aging Members’ Meeting**

March 28, 2025, via ZOOM

74 Attendees

**Board Chair Mary Bethel** opened the meeting with welcomes at 10:02 a.m.

The meeting agenda was modified to recognize **Dr. Dev Sangvai**, Secretary of NC DHHS, since he had already joined the meeting. He provided an updated on DHHS and answered questions from the group. He talked about the importance of supporting NC’s aging population and the health care workforce that supports them and maintaining Medicaid. Key points he discussed were:

* **Supporting NC's Aging Population Priorities:** Dr. Sangvai discussed the department's priorities and challenges in supporting North Carolina's aging population. He emphasized the importance of dignity, building a sustainable workforce, strengthening access to care in rural communities, and maintaining a strong Medicaid program. Dr. Sangvai acknowledged recent federal funding cuts and explained that the department is working to understand the impacts and develop contingency plans. He also addressed concerns about the erosion of DEI initiatives, stating that the department will continue to focus on putting people first and reaching out to vulnerable communities.
* **Medicaid's Value:** The Secretary discussed the importance of Medicaid, including the optional services funded by Medicaid in North Carolina, emphasizing their focus on improving outcomes and bending the cost curve. He expressed concern about potential federal cuts to Medicaid but hopes to convince lawmakers of the program's value. The Secretary also addressed questions about Medicaid Expansion, stating they will advocate for maintaining the program if it appears at risk. He highlighted the importance of investing in dual-eligible and IDD populations. The Secretary supports expanding the Healthy Opportunities program to demonstrate how investing in social determinants of health can lead to better outcomes and cost savings.

Dr. Sangvai spent more than 30 minutes answering questions from members. Topics were varied and included challenges in home care services, grant funding for disease-based organizations, healthcare coverage for direct care workers, funding for senior centers, and federal changes, among other topics. We are grateful for his willingness to address our membership.

**Lee Dobson, Secretary/Treasurer’s report**

* Materials from the February 28 Coalition meeting are posted on the Coalition’s website.
* NCCOA ended Q1-2025 in a favorable financial position. On target and within plan. No unusual expenses.
* We received the second year of funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for our direct care worker and caregiver project, led by Trish Farnham.
* We received the sponsorship payment from United Health Care and are grateful for their continued support.
* NCCOA is in its membership renewals period, and we encourage organizations and individuals to renew their membership for 2025, by paying on our website. If you need an invoice, please contact Sandra Phelps, the Coalition’s Executive Director.

**Coalition Updates:**

* Mary Bethel provided a legislative update and talked about the importance of continuing to use the "All Ages, All Stages" plan as a blueprint for moving aging issues forward. Jill Simmerman Lawrence, the Deputy Director of the Division of Aging, agreed, noting that the plan would adapt to address new priorities like supporting a successful Medicaid program.
* **Direct Care Workforce:** Sandra Phelps highlighted the organization's partnership with the North Carolina Center for Workforce for Health and the upcoming workshop on expanding and stabilizing the direct care workforce.
* **Storytelling Initiative:** Mary emphasized the importance of putting a face on the potential cuts to Medicaid and sharing stories with elected officials and the media to advocate for funding. Gina Upchurch with Senior PHARMAssist shared her experience of collecting stories from staff, highlighting the complexity of Medicare and Medicaid. Mary discussed the potential impact of Medicaid cuts on North Carolina's funding for various other programs, including the Home and Community Care Block Grant. She emphasized the need for continuing advocacy.
* **Legislative Advocacy:** Mary also highlighted the work of the Coalition with the General Assembly, focusing on bills related to aging, including pending bills pertaining to property tax relief for low-income older adults and persons with disabilities. She mentioned that a legislator has agreed to introduce a bill to establish a Study Commission on Aging. Mary also discussed the Governor's budget, the potential closure of Social Security offices, and the introduction of a bill to establish a North Carolina DAVE Act.

**Policy Committee Report by Sandra Phelps in the absence of Kay Castillo, Committee Chair**

* [2025 Legislative Priorities](https://nccoalitiononaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-Legislative-Priorities.pdf) are posted on the website.
* Planning for an Aging Advocacy Day at the General Assembly is in the works. A date for this and more information will be shared once confirmed. We plan to organize it similar to last year. The morning would be spent at the NC General Assembly and a celebration for Older Americans Month would be held in the afternoon at the State’s Farmer’s Market.

**Health Equity Committee Report by Dr. Deryl Davis Fulmer and Rosalie Calarco, Co-Chairs**

The Committee Co-chairs provided an update on their Committee’s recent meeting. They discussed the work of the Committee and their continuing commitment to addressing health equity issues for all older North Carolinians in light of the current public dialogue around diversity, equity, and inclusion and the implications of this. As the work of the Committee moves forward, they will be mindful of these matters and how the Coalition can best portray its work. The committee will proceed with sending out a membership survey on best practices for serving the LGBTQ+ community and discussing how to expand partnerships with small nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and schools.

**Member Announcements**

The meeting concluded with updates and announcements from Coalition members.

* Heather Altman with the NC Serious Illness Coalition shared that Governor Stein has proclaimed April as Healthcare Decisions Month.
* Janice Tyler with Orange County Department on Aging announced that their radio show "Aging Well Together," which is hosted by Heather Altman, won the Southern Gerontological Society's Media Award.
* Kevin Robinson with NC SHIIP provided information about the North Carolina Partnership to Address Adult Abuse conference that will be held on May 20, 2025, and updates on funding for the SHIP program.
* Dick Chady, past Secretary/Treasurer for the Coalition, encouraged members to advocate against potential cuts to Medicaid and Social Security by contacting their representatives.

**Upcoming Membership Meetings:**

* April 25, 2025
* May 16, 2025 (Adjusted for Memorial Day weekend)
* June 27, 2025
* August 22, 2025
* September 26, 2025 - Annual Meeting, in-person at the Hilton Garden Inn in Raleigh

Meeting adjourned at noon.

Respectfully submitted, Lee Dobson, Secretary & Treasurer