



NC Coalition on Aging Members' Meeting Minutes

March 27, 2026, via ZOOM

52 Attendees

Mary Bethel, Board Chair, opened the meeting at 10:02 a.m. It was noted that ASL and CART Captioning services were available for the meeting.

Minutes from the February 27, 2026 meeting were posted on the Coalition's website and were sent with the meeting notice.

Financial Update – Lee Little, Secretary-Treasurer

- Lee Little presented a financial update, reporting 32 individual and 37 organizational membership renewals since January 1, with year-to-date income slightly above and expenses slightly below budget.

PRESENTATION: Assisted Living in North Carolina and Its Role in the Continuum of Care

Stacy Massey, CEO - North Carolina Senior Living Association (NCSLA) shared information about assisted living in North Carolina and its role in the continuum of care including the following:

- She presented an overview of the NC Senior Living Association, highlighting their mission to provide leadership and assistance to members in the assisted living industry and to work with others to ensure the quality of life for residents in assisted living. She discussed the Association's collaboration with NCALA, their educational programs, and their advocacy efforts with a shared lobbyist.
- Stacy discussed challenges caused by the low rates for the State/County Special Assistance (SA) program in North Carolina which impacts the ability of residents to get the level of care they need and causes facility closures.
- A provision - Section 7.1(a) - in NC House Bill 546 passed last year directs the NC Division of Health Benefits to explore options available to increase access to Medicaid services for dual eligible residents in adult care homes.
- Legislative priorities for 2026 include maintaining or increasing the current Medicaid personal care services rate and continuing working to align the SA rates with the actual cost of providing room and board and other services required by law.

Frances Messer, President & CEO - NC Assisted Living Association (NCALA)

- Frances presented data showing a significant decline in licensed assisted living and family care home beds in North Carolina over the past 15-20 years, from 610 assisted living facilities in 2007 to 569 today, while family care homes decreased from 601 to 514.
- The key distinction between assisted living and independent living, is that assisted living provides 24/7 unscheduled care while independent living offers scheduled services only. Independent living is also not regulated by the state or monitored by county departments of social services.
- Frances highlighted the need for increased funding and reimbursement rates for Special Assistance, as current rates are insufficient to cover the actual costs of care, particularly affecting providers who serve 80-90% Medicaid beneficiaries.
- She discussed the workforce crisis in the industry and also shared her experience recruiting international nurses and highlighted the potential benefits of legal immigration for addressing staffing shortages.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: North Carolina United Healthcare Community Plan Empowering the Aging Community: Addressing Nutrition and Food Insecurity Across NC

Dr. Rashim Gupta, Community and State Medical Director

- Dr. Gupta presentation on nutrition and food insecurity highlighted the connection between diet quality and chronic disease management.
- Food as Medicine (FIM): integrates nutrition into health care to prevent, manage, and treat diet-related chronic disease.
- United Healthcare's Community Plan initiatives include value-added services like nutrition education, Ucards for healthy food purchases, and virtual fitness classes.
- Specific strategies for addressing food insecurity, particularly among Medicaid and dual-eligible populations, include partnerships with NC State Cooperative Extension and Goldsboro Pediatrics for nutrition education programs.

Coalition Updates/Announcements Provided by Sandra Phelps and Mary Bethel

- The Coalition was represented by Sandra at the 25th Anniversary of the DHHS Division of Aging Ann Johnson Institute for Senior Center Managers. There have been 357 graduates since its inception.
- Mary and Sandra attended the UNC School of Social Work Legacy Speaker Series – Retelling the Story of Aging on March 5. Mary was the closing speaker with a presentation titled “Becoming Invested: Moving Forward in an Aging State.”
- Sandra attended webinars on Strengthening Your Nonprofit’s Social Media Presence and Digital Outreach for Nonprofits.
- An invitational Older American’s Month event will be held in May at the Governor’s Mansion. Details about the event are being finalized. Sandra sits on the Older Americans Month committee.
- The national theme for Older American’s Month this year is “Champion Your Health.”
- There are a lot of conferences and events going on this month including that Adult Day Services Conference on March 24-25 in Winston-Salem which Mary presented at.
- The Coalition’s newsletter will be out today.
- The All Ages, All Stages, NC Financial Education and Planning Webinar Series- Money Matter Monday – will kick off on April 20 at 11:30 a.m. in honor of Financial Literacy Month.
- The Division of Aging has posted a job announcement for their Deputy Director position.
- Mary announced that the search for the Coalition’s Executive Director is going well and an announcement will be forthcoming.
- Sandra provided a report for the Health Equity Committee. On Friday, March 13, representatives from the NCDHHS Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities presented *Healthy Aging for All: Addressing Health Disparities and Strengthening Health Literacy in North Carolina* as the first speakers for the Health Equity Committee 2026 Speaker Series. The Committee’s first “Hot Topic” Series presentation will be May 8. Lindsey Golden, Territory Government Relations Director, Alzheimer’s Association, will present *"Building Healthy Brain Habits During Older Americans Month - Taking Care of Your Cognitive Health is More Important than Ever."*

Discussion of State and Federal Legislative Developments – Mary Bethel and Coalition Members

- There will be a lot of changes in the North Carolina's General Assembly due to current members losing primary races on March 3, including the leader of the state Senate, and the retirements of members. With the loss of Senator Berger, there will be a new Speaker Pro Tem.
- The consensus revenue forecast has been released, and it shows a \$370 million surplus this fiscal year, but revenue is expected to fall by \$360 million next year. The Governor and the Speaker of the House do not support further tax cuts.

- Key concerns for the upcoming NCGA Short Session which begins April 21 include the Medicaid funding shortfall of \$319 million, potential tax cuts, and proposed changes to property tax exemptions which could impact local funding for local services, including aging programs.
- Tough decisions will need to be made regarding state funding due to reduced federal revenue because of the HR.1 bill passed in July 2025.

Member Announcements

- Heather Altman with the NC Serious Illness Coalition announced that April has been declared as Health Care Decisions Month after a proclamation was signed by Governor Josh Stein. The General Statutes Commission is recommending changes to make it easier to get a Health Care Power of Attorney.
- Teresa Troup with the NC Adult Day Services Association expressed appreciation for the 170 individuals that attended the NC Adult Day Services Association conference.
- Janice Tyler stated that Orange County Department on Aging will host an End Of Life Options Expo on April 11.
She also announced that the North Carolina Association on Aging will host a virtual Aging Bootcamp on May 4 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
- Lee Dobson, Vice-Chair of the Coalition and Chair of its Public Policy Committee, announced that there will not be an Aging Advocacy Day this year at the Legislature, but the Coalition will join with other groups that have sponsored Advocacy Days in the past to host an Advocacy Education Day at the Legislature sometime in May. This informal session will include a guided tour of the Legislative and the Legislative Office buildings, sharing of information about how the legislative process works and advocacy strategies and techniques, and observation of a legislative committee meeting. Coalition members are encouraged to contact legislators in their home communities and to invite them to visit local programs. The Coalition will provide materials to provide guidance on this.
- Hearts for Home Care will host an NC Action Hour on April 15 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. with Sen. Gail Adcock who will discuss the short legislative session.
- Sandra shared for Tara Muller who had to leave the meeting that Disability Rights will have a Conference on May 6 at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill.

No Additional Business Identified

Upcoming NCCOA Membership Meetings (from 10:00 – 12:00):

- April 24, 2026
- May 15, 2026

Meeting adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Sandra Phelps, Executive Director