TO: North Carolina Joint Legislative Committee on Access to Healthcare and Medicaid Expansion

FROM: National Association of Social Workers North Carolina
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RE: North Carolina Medicaid Expansion Recommendations

The National Association of Social Workers North Carolina (NASW-NC) promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social workers and seeks to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families and communities through its work and advocacy. NASW-NC represents over 5,000 members in North Carolina.

Thank you for seriously considering the much-needed expansion of Medicaid in North Carolina. Research shows that expanding Medicaid could help 150,000 North Carolinians with mental health and substance misuse access care.

NASW-NC’s top priority for the Joint Legislative Committee on Access to Healthcare and Medicaid Expansion is to implement statewide Medicaid Expansion without work requirements. Given the barriers to accessing care that such requirements would impose on beneficiaries such as unreliable or unaffordable childcare, lack of coverage for beneficiaries that are caregiving for older adults or dependents with complex needs, lack of transportation, or lack of employment options, work requirements would impose an additional barrier to accessing care.

NASW-NC offers the following recommendations to increase access to much needed health care services in North Carolina:

- Make permanent **Telehealth** policies that were put into place because of COVID-19 for all insurance carriers. These policies include no preauthorization before seeing a provider, paying the same rate as in-person visits, and flexibility for platforms used to deliver telehealth. Teletherapy options have proven to increase access and treatment engagement for some of our most vulnerable populations. Telehealth can also increase care in rural areas when delivered thoughtfully with access to technology and broadband. Many of these policies are set to expire at the end of the Public Health Emergency, threatening an already fragile behavioral health workforce.

- **Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity**: require insurance companies to cover and reimburse behavioral health services equivalent to primary care visits.

- **Support Medicaid Providers**: To encourage more providers to join the Medicaid network, we must increase reimbursement rates and reduce administrative burdens for providers. Insurance reimbursement rates vary widely across the state but Medicaid rates are often, at a minimum, $20 less than private insurance companies. Becoming a provider and the documentation needed to serve beneficiaries is often punitive compared to private insurance companies. These changes will encourage retention of providers and grow provider networks to help achieve network adequacy.

- Provide more **direct mental wellness support services and activities in schools** as a whole population approach and not just for identified students. This includes hiring more school support staff such as school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.
social workers and restoring master’s level pay for school social workers to be paid equitability for their degrees. Masters level School Social Workers are currently paid at the Bachelor’s level pay.

- **Improve behavioral health workforce shortages** by offering social workers entering the workforce a sign on bonus, loan repayment or forgiveness, and adequate pay ([NASW Social Work Salaries](https://www.nasw.org/); North Carolina falls behind on national average salaries). Further, improve the current workforce and encourage retention through loan repayment or forgiveness programs and increased salaries.

NASW-NC is happy to answer any questions or provide additional information about these recommendations.