

## POLICY BRIEF: Extend Behavioral Health Provider Deadline to Connect to NC HealthConnex

The North Carolina Health Information Exchange (NC HealthConnex) is a secure electronic network that gives authorized health care providers the ability to access and share patient information across a statewide information network. It is designed to improve health care quality, enhance patient safety, improve health outcomes, and reduce overall health care costs by making health information available to participating health care providers. The North Carolina General Assembly created the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) to oversee and administer the state-designated HIE ([NCGS 90-414.7](#)).

**A large number of licensed behavioral health providers will be impacted** by North Carolina's requirement to connect to the North Carolina Health Information Exchange (NC HealthConnex) by June 2019 and this will have a negative effect on delivery of behavioral health services throughout our state.

### Who is Required to Connect?

All health care providers who receive state funds (Medicaid, NC Health Choice and State Health Plan) for the provision of health care services must connect to NC HealthConnex by specific dates in 2019 in order to receive payments for services provided (*NCSL 2015-241*, as amended by *NCSL 2017-57*). This means that all providers must already have an Electronic Health Records (EHR) in order to connect to NC HealthConnex.

This requirement will limit access to behavioral health services because:

- 1) EHRs are expensive and providers from solo or small practices cannot afford to connect to NC HealthConnex and will have to stop seeing their most vulnerable patients as a result. In the study mentioned below, 64% of EHR vendors said they charge providers up to \$50,000 and 36% of EHR vendors said they charge providers more than \$50,000 for their EHR product. This is in addition to the monthly maintenance and data submission charges.
- 2) Many EHRs are not equipped to serve small, private providers (less than 10 providers in a practice).
- 3) The requirement to connect was established quickly and behavioral health providers were not ready to connect.

### The Solution

As recommended by the [NC Health Information Exchange Connectivity Feasibility Study](#) released on July 25, 2018 by the NC Department of Information Technology, the NC Department of Health and Human Service, and the North Carolina State Health Plan, the deadline for **behavioral health providers to be connected to NC HealthConnex should be delayed**. Per the study, 35% of providers do not have the technology to meet the pending mandate to connect. NASW-NC is very concerned that many licensed behavioral health professionals will decide to no longer provide services to Medicaid, NC Health Choice and State Health Plan patients causing a severe hardship to those covered by these plans.

NASW-NC urges North Carolina lawmakers to pass [House Bill 70](#) to delay behavioral health providers connection to NC HealthConnex until June 2021.