**Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment (MHSUD Tx) Committee**

**Meeting Minutes - May 13, 2025**

**Attending:** Lacie Scofield (Co-Chair), Tremaine Sawyer (Co-Chair), Renee Shaw, Helen Tripp, Eric Morse, Marc Strange, Kay Sanford, Timeka Harper, Dale Anderson, Jaeson Smith, Quanesha Archer, Michele Easter, Wendy Jacobs, Brian Scott

**Minutes Approved**: Timeka Harper motioned to approve the minutes from the last meeting (April). The motion was seconded, and the minutes were approved.

**Durham County Commissioner Wendy Jacobs:**

Wendy spoke about recent federal funding cuts and potential cuts to Medicaid. She has been a Co-Chair of the Durham Joins Together to Save Lives Task Force since 2017. She said that the Durham County Board of Commissioners recently approved a letter of support regarding Medicaid that would be sent to our federal representatives including Senator Tillis, Senator Budd, and Rep. Foushee. The letter urges the U.S. Congress to strengthen Medicaid and reject any proposals that would cut services, increase costs, or decrease participation. Congress is taking this issue up this week and the question of Medicaid funding is in committee discussions right now before it goes to the full House of Representatives. They are looking for 880 trillion dollars of funding that they can find to fund their tax cuts for the wealthy. Wendy encouraged committee members to also write a letter to senators and representatives telling them about what each committee member’s program does with Medicaid funding, how it helps patients, and what would happen if this money went away.

In Durham, 1 in 4 people receive Medicaid; that is about 76 thousand people. Over 3 million people in North Carolina (a third of the state) are receiving health care because of Medicaid. With Medicaid expansion, we have enrolled over 660k people in about a year and a half. What is dangerous for NC is that we were one of the last states to approve Medicaid expansion. Those 660k people are the most at risk because NC is a trigger state which means that if our funding falls below 90/10 funding ratio (where the federal government is funding 90% and we fund 10% at the state level) and the federal government backs down out of that 90% share, it is a trigger that those 660k people will lose coverage.

We know that in Durham we have enrolled over 22k people into Medicaid due to the expansion. We also know that 92% enrolled into Medicaid are already working, children, disabled, or elderly people in assistant homes. It is important to call out the false narratives in NC because we were one of the last states to do Medicaid expansion.

Something that was not included in the letter was that Durham public schools gets four million dollars’ worth of Medicaid reimbursable expenses for taking care of children who have special needs.

There are also other threats to the work we all do. A few weeks ago it was announced that over 800 million dollars of justice and public safety grants were cancelled by the US Dept of Justice. In addition, they want to eliminate Head Start, which is vital for early childhood brain development for children. It also helps support families in need.

Marc Strange pasted a link to the following relevant article into the chat: [Drug Overdose Deaths Are Finally Slowing -- Medicaid Cuts Would Undermine That Progress | Health Affairs](https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/drug-overdose-deaths-finally-slowing-medicaid-cuts-would-undermine-progress)

Lacie Scofield noted that some members of the MHSUD Tx Committee have already been affected by recent cuts to federal funding, and more programs in Durham may eventually lose funding. In addition, many Durham residents with substance use disorder are on Medicaid and will lose access to life-saving treatment if Medicaid is cut. Lacie asked if the county budget will be altered in response so that we can pick up the slack, because now it’s all going to fall on local shoulders. Will taxes be increased or are any other plans being put in place at the county level to make up for the loss in federal funding?

Wendy said that the county manager presented her budget last night and it’s a very restrained budget. The sales tax revenue is declining and that’s the 2nd biggest source of revenue. That is all related to inflation, covid, work from home, not being in the office, and going out to eat rather than supporting local businesses and spending money.

At the same time, the county is growing, and we haven’t kept up with demand for services in areas like EMS. Also, the state legislature since 2010 has cut public education from funding so that has fallen onto the county level. Local government was never supposed to be the primary source of funding for public education, schools, buildings, and repairs. We are in a very difficult situation where we can’t take the place of these levels of funding. Tens of millions of dollars a month - there is just no way it can be replicated.

**Brian Scott - Executive Director, OurJourney**

Brian talked about support for individuals who are returning from incarceration with mental health disorders. In 2017 to 2018, the opioid overdose rate in the North Carolina general population decreased by 10.1% BUT increased by 32% among formerly incarcerated persons. During 2016 to 2018, the opioid overdose risk for formerly incarcerated people was 50.3 times as high as that for the North Carolina population at 2-week, 1- year, and complete follow-up after release.

Why?

* Tolerance level decreases during incarceration.
* Drugs are more readily available.
* The challenges of reentry are often overwhelming.

Some reentry challenges include finding housing, work, transportation, clothing/food, health care, mental health care, connecting with family, and accessing technology.

OurJourney supports people on their reentry journey. We have a home plan assistance program to help look for housing. We also have something similar to Indeed.com but for people that have criminal records to help them find employment for jobs that give second chance employment. As far as transportation, medical and mental health care, clothes/food, and reconnecting with family, we have a standard first aid reentry kit program and all of this is free of charge.

In addition to the standard first aid reentry kit, there is a digital opportunity first aid reentry kit pilot program at Davidson correctional. This reentry kit provides a brand-new free Samsung galaxy A15 128 gbs phone, 90-day free service, and a number they can call for help on how to use that device. Also, this phone includes a pre-downloaded Reentry app.

How does this work?

We have program staff at the prisons that place the order in the system. When we get the order, it goes through our distribution center in the middle of the state in Hickory, NC, and we process the order there. We ship it, and it goes back to that prison so that the individual actually walks out of prison with it.

We want them to know, you are valued, we care about you, we love you, you are important. Second, we don’t want them to wait for these resources. We don’t want them to contact us to get stuff started. For more information and to order reentry kits, go to OurJourney’s website at <https://www.ourjourney2gether.com>.

**Committee Member Updates:**

Jaeson Smith invited everyone to attend the Opioid Settlement 2025 Annual Community Meeting on June 5th at 5:30–7:00 PM at the BOCC Chambers, Admin. I Building, 200 E. Main St., 2nd floor.