



## JOINT LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**NC Department of Health and Human Services**

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Secretary

**February 15, 2022**

# Responding to and Recovering from a Global Pandemic

- North Carolina's Goals for Pandemic Response
- Building on Our Response
- Recovering Stronger

# Goals for North Carolina's COVID-19 Pandemic Response

**Vaccines**

**Boosters**

**Masking**

## Save Lives



- Widespread Vaccine Access
- Transparent Communications
- Clear Messaging and Guidance
- Treatment Availability
- Convenient Testing
- Access to PPE
- Contact Tracing in High-Risk Settings

## Protect Hospital Capacity



- Statewide Patient Coordination
- Regulatory Flexibilities
- Staffing Pool for Health Systems
- Non-Traditional Staffing Resources
- Federal Requests for Support
- Regular Communications
- Real-time monitoring of capacity

## Keep Kids in the Classroom



- StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit
- COVID-19 Testing Program
- Frequent Communication and Coordination with Schools
- Monthly Meetings w/ State and Local Education Leaders
- N95 Mask Distribution

# Pillars to Build Upon

North Carolina's success has been driven by grounding ourselves in:

1. **Strong Collaborative Partnerships.** North Carolina's progress is the result of the collective efforts of government agencies, elected officials, business leaders from every industry, school officials, entertainment and sports leaders, health care providers, community leaders and individuals.
2. **Robust Data Infrastructure and Accountability.** Data drives an effective response, is essential to making progress on health equity, and relies upon modernizing information systems and data transparency
3. **Transparent Communications Focused on Earning Public Trust.** Communications in a time of crisis require transparency, managing of expectations, clear and understandable messages, actionable guidance, and partnership with trusted messengers.
4. **Adapting to Evolving Science and Research.** North Carolina has evolved its response based on the emerging science and lessons learned, focusing on strategies that are most effective at each stage of the pandemic

# Recover Stronger

- **The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges.**

Behavioral Health	Children and Families	Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearly 1 in 5 North Carolinians have a mental illness.</li> <li>• During the pandemic, approximately 1 in 3 surveyed North Carolinians reported symptoms of depression and/or anxiety</li> <li>• Alcohol-related ED visits increased 13% from 2019 to 2020.</li> <li>• Opioid overdose visits to ED increased 40% from July 2019 to July 2020.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of children experiencing food insecurity rose from 1 in 5 pre-pandemic to as high as 1 in 3 children in rural NC</li> <li>• Rate of children in NC discharged from EDs with a behavioral health condition increased by ~70% in the pandemic.</li> <li>• Over 3,600 children in NC have lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19.</li> <li>• ~25% of families missed a child's preventive visit due to the pandemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of NC early childhood education staff decreased by ~10% between March 2020 and November of 2021.</li> <li>• Currently, there are over 15,000 nurse vacancies in NC &amp; nationally, nursing turnover rates were 15.8% between August 2020 and 2021 (McKinsey).</li> <li>• In August 2020, 66.2% of public health workers nationwide reported feeling burnout (NIH).</li> </ul>

# Recover Stronger

*These priorities and our work across the department are grounded in **whole-person health**, driven by **equity**, and responsive to the lessons learned responding to the greatest health crisis in more than a generation.*

## Behavioral Health & Resilience



We need to offer services further upstream to build resiliency, invest in coordinated systems of care that **make mental health services easy to access** when and where they are needed and **reduce the stigma** around accessing these services.

## Child & Family Wellbeing



We will work to ensure that North Carolina's children grow up safe, healthy and thriving in nurturing and resilient families and communities. **Investing in families and children's healthy development builds more resilient families, better educational outcomes and, in the long term, a stronger society.**

## Strong & Inclusive Workforce



We will work to strengthen the **workforce that supports early learning, health and wellness by delivering services to North Carolina.** And we will take action to be an equitable workplace that lives its values and ensure that all people have the opportunity to be fully included members of their communities.

***The health insurance coverage gap coupled with insufficient access to affordable care disproportionately impacts Historically Marginalized Populations who have also experienced worse outcomes than others under COVID-19. Medicaid expansion would help close the health insurance coverage gap.***