



You are cordially invited to the 2022 virtual kick-off meeting of the ***Change for Life: Tobacco-Free Recovery Coalition*** on Thursday, January 27<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 am. The Coalition is comprised of behavioral health (BH) professionals and allies in 11 counties of NC Public Health Region 4. The Coalition's purpose is to support behavioral health agencies in transitioning to and maintaining a tobacco-free culture of care through tobacco-free policy adoption and integration of tobacco dependence treatment into services. The Coalition serves as a support network where you bring thoughts, questions, concerns, learn best practices and share resources. As we all strive to address whole person wellness, we invite you to join the regional coalition and invite others in your community who can benefit from its membership. [Click here](#) for *Change for Life: Tobacco-Free Recovery* webpages hosted by Mecklenburg County Public Health.

Starting December 1, 2022, North Carolina Standard and Tailored Prepaid Health Plans that serve people with Medicaid or who are uninsured will require contracted medical, behavioral health, and some intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD)/traumatic brain injury (TBI) organizations to provide a 100% tobacco-free campus. While this will be required by NC Medicaid, the primary reason for adopting a tobacco-free policy is that it supports wellness and aligns well with person-centered care.

Here are just a few facts that speak to why this initiative is so important:

- Everyone has the right to clean air which includes protections from secondhand smoke and e-cigarette aerosol, as well as reduced exposure to tobacco products. This historically unequal protection for individuals with BH conditions has contributed to a disproportionately high rate of tobacco use within the BH population – while individuals with BH conditions make up 25% of the population, 44.3% of all cigarettes consumed are by people with mental health and substance use disorders.
- Individuals with BH conditions are dying 5 to 25 years earlier than the general population, not due to their substance use or mental health disorder, but due to chronic disease from tobacco use.
- The great news is that treating all addictions including tobacco, simultaneously, increases the likelihood of long-term recovery from all substances by an average of 25%.
- Many clients in behavioral health settings WANT to quit tobacco use but are often not provided support.
- Comprehensive tobacco-free policies (that include access to tobacco dependence treatment) have a positive impact! They have no negative effect on behavioral health symptoms or management, provide support for individuals trying to quit and can improve mental health.

We are pleased that Mary Ward, president of [McLeod Addictive Disease Center](#), chairs our coalition. Mary, along with other local behavioral health leaders who have led their organizations to a tobacco-free campus, will continue to share their journeys, including what they have learned and continue to learn about this wellness initiative. You do not have to travel this journey alone – there are many available resources! For starters, check out the state's [Breathe Easy NC - Becoming Tobacco Free](#) website.

The first 2022 virtual meeting will be Thursday, January 27<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 am will be hosted on Microsoft Teams. Email [carleen.Crawford@MeckNC.gov](mailto:carleen.Crawford@MeckNC.gov) for the link. We look forward to seeing you in 2022!

Sincerely,

Mecklenburg County Public Health Tobacco Control Team

*Kim Bayha, Carleen Crawford, Kim Caldwell and Irimi McCarthy*