

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Asheville-based Vaya Health Responds to Hurricane Helene

ASHEVILLE – Vaya Health, an Asheville-based public managed care organization for people with mental health, substance use, intellectual/ developmental disability, and traumatic brain injury needs, serves 19 of the North Carolina counties included in President Biden’s [Sept. 29 Major Disaster Declaration](#) following Hurricane Helene: **Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Clay, Henderson, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey.** Swain County, also within Vaya’s service area, sustained significant damage as well.

Vaya staff live and work in the communities we serve, including all counties in the disaster area. Many staff are experiencing the same issues as these communities, but Vaya successfully activated its business continuity and disaster recovery plans and is responding to the evolving situation.

Vaya’s offices in western North Carolina are closed to the public through at least Oct. 4, but **Vaya staff with internet access are working and all systems are operational.** Vaya’s service lines are operating normally, including:

- Vaya’s **Behavioral Health Crisis Line (1-800-849-6127)** is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Vaya’s **Member and Recipient Service Line (1-800-962-9003)** is available Monday through Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

“We know that many of you are worried about the members and recipients we serve,” Vaya Area Director and CEO Tracy Hayes wrote to staff in an email Oct. 1. **“Please know that our No. 1 priority is supporting members, we are going to put their needs first and do whatever is necessary to get them the care they need. That is our mission and who we are.**”

“We are working closely with our partners at NCDHHS and other LME/MCOs to identify necessary flexibilities so that we can support members and providers throughout the full disaster recovery period.

Staff who have cell and internet are currently reaching out to members and providers to determine status and next steps.

“We are focusing on members with significant needs such as dialysis, oxygen tanks, critical medication, and those who are in unsafe living conditions or need food/water. We have also waived all restrictions on out-of-state claims as we know that many people have evacuated to other states but still need their medications and other essential services.”

Vaya has launched a Helene recovery page at <https://www.vayahealth.com/helene-recovery/> to provide specific support and information. This page will be updated frequently as conditions evolve.

“We know there are many Vaya health plan members and health care providers we serve in counties unaffected by the storm,” Hayes said. “I want to assure those communities that they should see minimal impact from Helene and that Vaya staff in those communities are ready to help as always. Our plans to prepare for a disaster situation have worked well. While no one can predict every effect from every disaster in advance, we are well prepared to be a key resource for western North Carolina in what will be a long recovery period. Our staff are committed to doing whatever it takes to support all 32 of the counties we serve.”

Other information:

- **Pharmacy Concerns:** Early prescription refills and prior approval overrides are available for members impacted by Hurricane Helene. Please contact the pharmacy service line at 1-800-540-6083 with any medication access questions or concerns.
- **Operating Pharmacies in Counties Affected by Hurricane Helene:** North Carolina Board of Pharmacy staff have received notice of pharmacies in western North Carolina that are operating and serving patients. Learn more: [Operating Pharmacies in Counties Affected by Hurricane Helene](#)
- **Temporary Medicaid Flexibilities:** NC Medicaid has issued temporary flexibilities following Gov. Roy Cooper’s Executive Order 315 (Sept. 25), which declared a state of emergency for North Carolina. See more: [NC Medicaid temporary flexibilities](#).
- **Behavioral Health Resources:** Behavioral health resources are critical during disaster response and recovery periods. Vaya is working with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services, the Red Cross, and county officials to make sure shelters in the impacted counties are staffed with behavioral health clinicians. People in the communities Vaya serves can reach out to the following resources:
 - Call **911** for emergency assistance
 - Call **211** for local resources (non-emergency). Use 211, not 911, if you are trying to find a friend or loved one you can’t contact
 - Vaya’s **Behavioral Health Crisis Line (1-800-849-6127)** is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
 - Vaya’s **Member and Recipient Service Line (1-800-962-9003)** is available Mon.-Sat., 7 a.m. - 6 p.m.
 - Call NC’s Peer Warmline (1-855-PEERS NC) to speak to a peer living in recovery from mental health or substance use issues

- Available 24/7
- Free and confidential

About Vaya Health

Vaya Health is a specialty managed care organization that oversees publicly funded health care services across a 32-county region of North Carolina for people with significant behavioral health needs, intellectual/developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. Vaya manages Medicaid, federal, state, and local funding to meet member and community needs while advancing whole-person health. Together with members, contracted providers, and local partners, we're moving forward to a healthier North Carolina. Vaya Health can be found online at vayahealth.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/VayaHealth/, on X [@VayaHealth](https://twitter.com/VayaHealth), and on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/company/vaya-health.

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