



# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Vaya Health announces new chief officer, department for population health**

August 2, 2017 – Vaya Health, a regional managed healthcare organization, announced today it has named Rhonda Cox to the new position of Chief Population Health Officer.

Cox previously served as Senior Director of Care Coordination at Vaya, which manages public funds for mental health, substance use and intellectual and/or developmental disability (IDD) services in 23 western N.C. counties. In her new role, Cox will oversee a range of programs that address both mental and physical health, alongside other factors that impact individual wellbeing, in collaboration with local and statewide partners.

Cox will supervise Vaya’s Care Coordination Department and a new Population Health Management Department, which aims to improve health results among entire groups of people.

“We know from experience that mental health and physical health are closely connected,” said Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham. “By increasingly focusing our efforts on caring for the ‘whole person,’ we’re working to improve treatment results and enhance the overall health of our communities. Rhonda is a proven leader and a natural choice to lead us in our efforts to more efficiently coordinate services and supports across multiple healthcare systems.”

Cox said, “Our number one goal is to improve overall health throughout western North Carolina. This requires partnerships, collaboration across providers and better communication. It also involves attention to factors that impact health, such as housing and employment, and providing a seamless system of care to expedite healing and stabilize healthcare costs over time.”

Vaya’s focus the whole person reflects modern best practices in treating people with multiple healthcare needs. Studies show individuals with mental health or substance use disorders are likely to die at a younger age than the general population. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), nearly 70 percent of adults with mental illness have at least one chronic physical condition, and one in five have a substance use disorder. People with an IDD face higher risks of several chronic medical conditions, and an estimated one-third also experience mental illness.

Cox brings to her position more than 20 years of experience in managing behavioral health and/or IDD services. She has been instrumental in developing the region’s behavioral health treatment continuums for youths involved with the social services or juvenile justice agencies. She has also overseen programs involving geriatric

specialty services, housing and employment. Cox holds an undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Appalachian State University.

### **About Vaya Health**

Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 23 North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to services and crisis help are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at [www.vayahealth.com](http://www.vayahealth.com).

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