



# NEWS RELEASE

**Media contact:** Rachel Leonard-Spencer  
Marketing and Communications Coordinator  
rachel.leonard-spencer@vayahealth.com  
828-225-2785, ext. 5197

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **N.C. governor promotes substance use recovery during Vaya Health visit**

***Gov. Roy Cooper designates September as statewide Recovery Month Thursday during Asheville stop***

August 31, 2017 – N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper called for compassion, cooperation and expanded treatment services to combat “epidemic” levels of opioid drug addiction during a Thursday visit to Vaya Health in Asheville.

“Substance use disorder has to be treated,” the governor told local officials, healthcare leaders and recovery advocates. “And we have to understand that a person’s physical health and mental health come together and have to be treated together.”

That includes expanding the availability of naloxone, a medication that can reverse potentially lethal effects of an opioid drug overdose, Cooper said. He also advocated for increasing access to medication-assisted treatment and scientifically proven substance use services.

“Most of the law enforcement people I know, when dealing with the people who are affected with this disorder, they will tell you that we cannot arrest our way out of this problem,” he said.

The governor read aloud and signed a proclamation designating September as Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month. The observation coincides with National Recovery Month, held each September to reinforce the message that prevention works, that treatment is effective and that people can and do recover from mental health and substance use disorders.

Since 1999, more than 12,000 North Carolinians have died from overdoses of opioid drugs such as heroin and prescription pain medication. Vaya, an Asheville-based public managed healthcare organization, is leading an initiative to distribute 2,400 opioid overdose-reversal kits throughout western North Carolina. The kits contain NARCAN®, the first and only FDA-approved nasal form of naloxone, along with cards with Vaya’s 24/7 crisis number and information on how to seek treatment.

The NARCAN® was funded through a state grant to Vaya. The N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) will distribute the kits throughout the region, at no cost to residents.

“The benefit of NARCAN® to an individual is life-saving,” said Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham. “But it can also be the first step toward seeking treatment and ultimately finding hope and recovery.”

Vaya manages Medicaid and other public funding for behavioral health and developmental disability services in 23 western N.C. counties. In addition to NARCAN® distribution programs, Vaya is leading initiatives to increase the number of local substance use detox beds, expand medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and expand services available to women who are pregnant and using opioids.

Vaya, which leads the Western N.C. Substance Use Alliance, also supports assertive outreach programs to help opioid users, safe medication disposal programs and local government efforts to improve substance use treatment models. In 2016, Vaya funded the distribution of 1,300 NARCAN® doses throughout the region. To date, that medication has reversed at least 112 reported overdoses in 13 counties.

The governor took time Thursday to personally assemble an overdose-reversal kit alongside Vaya staff. He also met privately with six western N.C. residents who are in recovery from addiction and use their experience to help others through peer support and advocacy.

Richie Tannerhill, a certified peer support specialist and peer trainer at Vaya, participated in the private listening session. The governor made people feel comfortable as they shared personal stories of addiction and recovery, said Tannerhill, who has been in long-term recovery for 12 years.

“He said, ‘I am an ally.’ Those were his words,” Tannerhill said.

In June, Cooper announced the launch of North Carolina’s Opioid Action Plan, designed to reduce both opioid use and overdose deaths. Strategies outlined in the plan include reducing prescription opioid oversupplies, reducing prescription drug diversion and illicit drug flows, increasing awareness and prevention, making naloxone widely available while linking overdose survivors to care and expanding treatment and recovery systems of care.

The governor also serves on the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis.

## **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).

###