



NEWS RELEASE

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Vaya, The Free Clinics partner with Henderson County jail to provide mental health, substance use services

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Vaya Health and The Free Clinics are teaming up to help inmates at the Henderson County Detention Center get counseling and other support to tackle mental health and addiction challenges.

The Free Clinics will receive county funding through Vaya to assume responsibility for the jail's behavioral health services. The funding will allow The Free Clinics to hire a full-time employee to provide assessments, therapy and case management services for inmates with mental health or substance use concerns.

Based in Hendersonville, The Free Clinics currently operates an integrated group program in the detention center. The additional funding for behavioral health services, as well as additional funds from the county for a full-time patient navigator, will provide inmates with a more streamlined, broader system of support and connections to behavioral health and medical providers and social services once they are released from detention. That may include care directly from The Free Clinics or referrals for medical, psychiatric and pharmacy services available to low-income individuals without insurance, in addition to referrals for social needs like food, housing and transportation, among others.

More than 70 percent of adults involved in the criminal justice system have substance use disorders, and up to 34 percent have serious mental illnesses, according to the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Those rates greatly exceed those found in the general population.

Vaya, a public managed healthcare organization, oversees Medicaid and other government funding for mental health, substance use and developmental disability services in 22 North Carolina counties, including Henderson. For several years, Vaya has managed funds to help support The Free Clinics' pharmacy services for local residents.

"We're looking forward to partnering with Henderson County and The Free Clinics to offer quality services and support to inmates and link them with community resources upon release," said Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham. "When individuals pursue mental health and substance use recovery, families and communities also benefit."

"The Free Clinics has served Henderson and Polk Counties for 18 years and has built a network of almost 180 health and community partners in the region," said Executive Director Judith Long. "We are excited about the new contracts with Vaya and Henderson County to expand services for inmates at the county detention center."

These new services at the jail and in the community will help ensure inmates with behavioral health concerns are afforded a more seamless transition to care once released from detention.”

Henderson County Sheriff Lowell Griffin stated, “Both The Free Clinics and Vaya Health provide compassionate and specialized services in our community. At the Henderson County Sheriff’s Office, our goal, by virtue of this partnership, is to provide an opportunity for individuals with behavioral health challenges to regain and manage their lives with hope and purpose.”

The Free Clinics is also working with the Henderson County Department of Public Health to staff a Post-Overdose Response Team through a grant from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. The grant will fund two peer support outreach specialist positions to help prevent repeat overdoses. The team will also reach out to identified individuals recently released from detention who agree to participate.

About Vaya Health

Based in Asheville, N.C., Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 22 western North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to care and crisis assistance are available 24/7 at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at www.vayahealth.com.

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