



# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Grant to Vaya Health to strengthen WNC families, help youth with mental health needs**

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Vaya Health was awarded a four-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to expand services and access to care in seven rural western North Carolina counties for families and youth with mental, behavioral or emotional disorders.

The pilot project will cover McDowell, Alexander, Ashe, Polk, Alleghany, Wilkes and Caldwell counties. A main piece of the expansion is the addition of family and youth partners, which are parents or caregivers of youth receiving services who use their lived experience to assist other families. The family and youth partners attend meetings to advocate for youth at risk, assist in training of community members in early identification of trauma and emotional disorders, link youth and families with services and supports and help provider agencies in identifying needs.

Vaya, in partnership with Youth Villages, will employ these partners to help address trauma and social determinants of health using evidence-based practices, including trauma-informed care, screenings and assessments and trainings. Youth Villages is a nonprofit providing services and treatment across the United States for children’s mental and behavioral health.

“Unfortunately, some families are reluctant to engage in mental health services,” said George Edmonds, regional program director at Youth Villages. “Family and youth partners are essential for service delivery in rural areas to support engagement and clinical goals while working collaboratively with behavioral health professionals. They are often able to engage families in utilizing resources due to their own lived experience. Treatment is most effective when a family is able to add input into their goals and steps to achieve those goals.”

Combined averages and ranges from county needs assessments show a median income 20% below state average. Over one-quarter of youth have stated they have felt hopeless almost every day for two weeks straight, and 10-15% have planned suicide. The Vaya System of Care Expansion Grant will enable at least 880 families to be screened, evaluated and linked to services. A System of Care is a network of partnering organizations working together to support youth and families.

“This work is close to my heart, and I’m thrilled to be leading the project,” said Kelly Wolf, Vaya System of Care project director. “This grant gives Vaya and our partners the ability to directly reach more families and youth who need assistance, and the innovative approach to care serves our members more effectively through

evidence-based practices. We're grateful for the continued support to do this work. This shows how truly valuable it is for the communities we serve."

Vaya, an Asheville-based managed care organization, oversees publicly funded mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual and/or developmental disability services in 22 western North Carolina counties. Vaya will receive \$969,501 this year, with \$1 million for each of the next three years. The grant requires a non-federal match of \$323,167 over the four years. Dogwood Health Trust committed \$50,000 annually, and Vaya will provide the remainder in-kind through facilities, equipment and services.

The five main goals of the grant expansion are:

- To facilitate and support system change in the communities that includes full participation of family and youth at all stages of the process
- Prioritize and address health disparities and social drivers that contribute to isolation, suicidal ideation and family stress
- Increase the number of trained family and youth partners to support services
- Use and develop trainings to increase and improve community capacity and connectedness
- Improve service access and impact for families and children at risk

Vaya is in the process of hiring a lead family coordinator to assist Wolf in overseeing the grant program, which is expected to start in November.

## 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](http://www.vayahealth.com).

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