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Community & Economic Development

Unifour HOME Consortium Marking 25th Anniversary



In 1995, local governments in the region began discussing the formation of the Unifour Consortium. In July 1996, the Consortium, with the City of Lenoir as the Lead Entity, received its first allocation from the Department of Housing on Urban Development. Since then, \$24.7 million of HOME dollars have been brought to the region, leveraging an additional \$395 million.

In the past 25 years, the Consortium has provided down-payment assistance to over 3,000 first-time homebuyers and assisted in developing 1,225 affordable rental units, including 380 for senior housing throughout the region.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development requires the HOME program to leverage a 25 percent match to receive funding. In the beginning, the Unifour Consortium's program was designed so that the match was generated from different sources, saving the local governments in the region over \$6 million.

Much of the success of the program is due to the City of Lenoir's Finance Department. Over the years, the City of Lenoir has written over 4,000 checks and completed 25 audits and annual reports for the Consortium. Lenoir Finance Department's ability to be flexible by providing checks to closing attorneys in a timely manner allowed the program to be reliable for homebuyers and lenders for the past 25 years.

As we look toward the next 25 years, the down-payment assistance program's design is changing - going from \$5,000 per home to investing 20 percent of the purchase price up to \$30,000. Multi-family construction costs continue to rise and will make it challenging to provide affordable rental units. The Unifour Consortium will continue to support Habitat for Humanity chapters in all four counties.

Article by Paul Teague

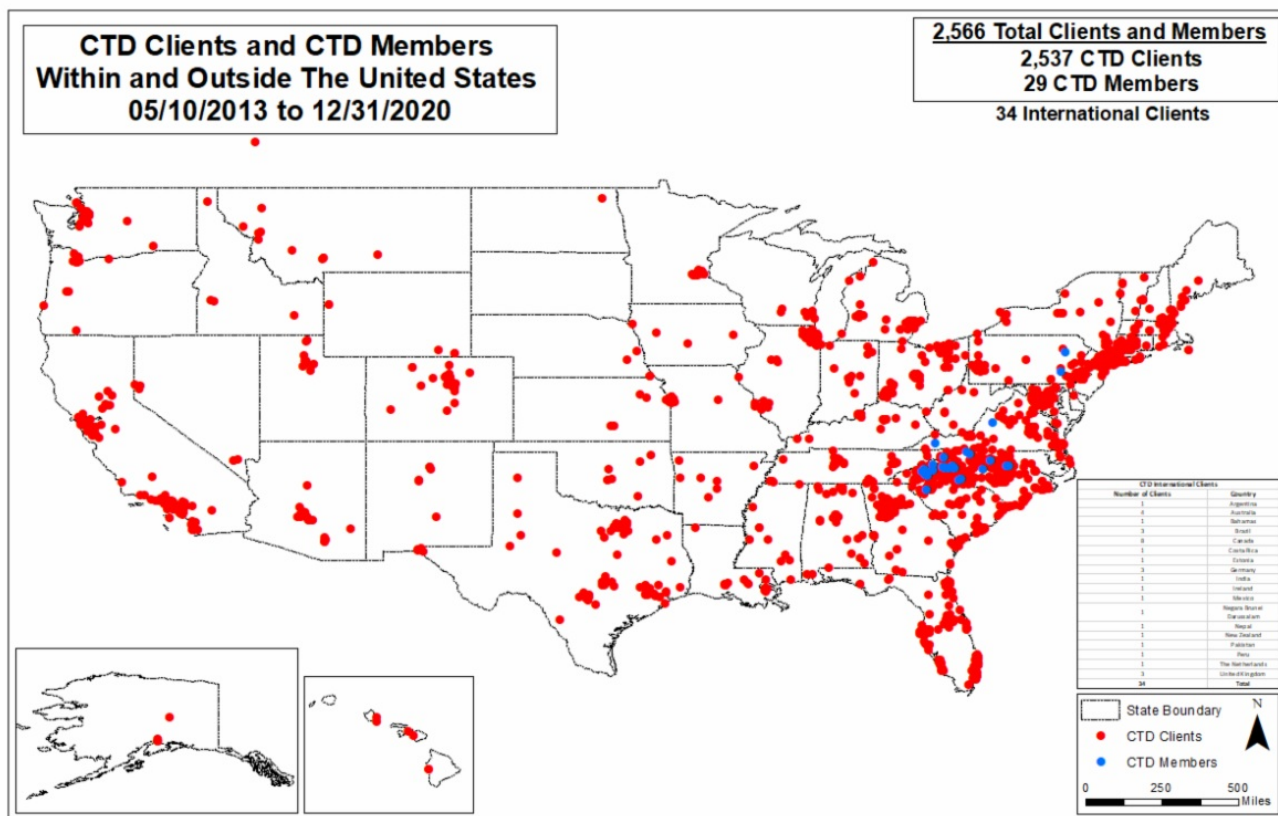
Community & Regional Planning

Carolina Textile District (CTD) Client and Manufacturing Solution Center (MSC) Customer Mapping Update

In 2017 The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) developed the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) that included strategies to promote and support critical economic development assets in the region like the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) and the Carolina Textile District (CTD). The Manufacturing Solutions Center's mission is to "help US manufacturers increase sales, improve quality, and improve efficiency to create or retain jobs." The Carolina Textile District's mission is "to revitalize the American Textile Industry in a way that builds on local people, assets, and heritage." CEDs action plan items specific to MSC and CTD include providing support to MSC's and CTD's mission and using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to track MSC and CTD company contacts.

In 2014, the Carolina Textile District (CTD) and MSC first requested WPCOG to generate a map of their clients and customers within the United States for an upcoming presentation. A few months later, WPCOG started to provide CTD and MSC with technical services on a semi-annual or ad-hoc basis to complete a series of maps of their customers within North Carolina, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) area, and the United States, as well as internationally. The creation of the maps starts with client and customer lists provided by CTD and MSC. Then GIS software plots them onto a map through a process called geocoding. Geocoding is a mapping process that turns a location's physical address into a coordinate point. Next, WPCOG staff adds the points to the maps and databases to show and track CTD and MSC customer growth.

Below are examples of two of the maps completed for CTD and MSC. Map 1 shows where CTD Clients and CTD Members are located within the United States and lists Clients outside the United States. Currently, CTD has assisted 2,566 clients/members since their May of 2013 inception; 841 of CTD's clients/members are within North Carolina; and 386 clients/members in the ARC area. There are 34 CTD international clients in Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America.



Map 2 shows MSC Customer locations within the United States and list customers outside the United States. MSC has helped 2,662 customers since July 2013, 805 MSC customers are within North Carolina, and 357 customers in the ARC area. MSC has 244 international customers in six continents (Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America).

- The Hickory MSA's median sales price increased 12.4% between 2019 and 2020, while the average sales price grew 16.3%. For the first time, the average sales price in the region exceeded \$240,000 in 2020.
- In 2020, a house was only on the market 43 days before being purchased. By comparison, in 2019, it took 52 days on the market until the sale of the house.
- As of December 2020, the Hickory MSA had only 423 homes for sale and a 1.2 months supply of housing inventory.
- Between February and April 2020, the number of jobs in the Hickory MSA decreased from 155,500 to 126,900.
- Since April 2020, the Hickory MSA has experienced a 13.9% increase in employment, which is the third-highest percentage increase among the NC MSAs and a faster growth rate than North Carolina (10.6%) or the United States (10.3%).
- More than 5,000 jobs have been added in the leisure and hospitality sector in the Hickory MSA, while employment gains of 2,900 have occurred in furniture manufacturing, and an increase of 1,400 jobs has taken place in retail trade.

The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. The EIN is now available digitally. To join the EIN subscription list, please click [here](#). To see the latest edition, please click [here](#).

For questions concerning the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst, at 828-485-4233 or by email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

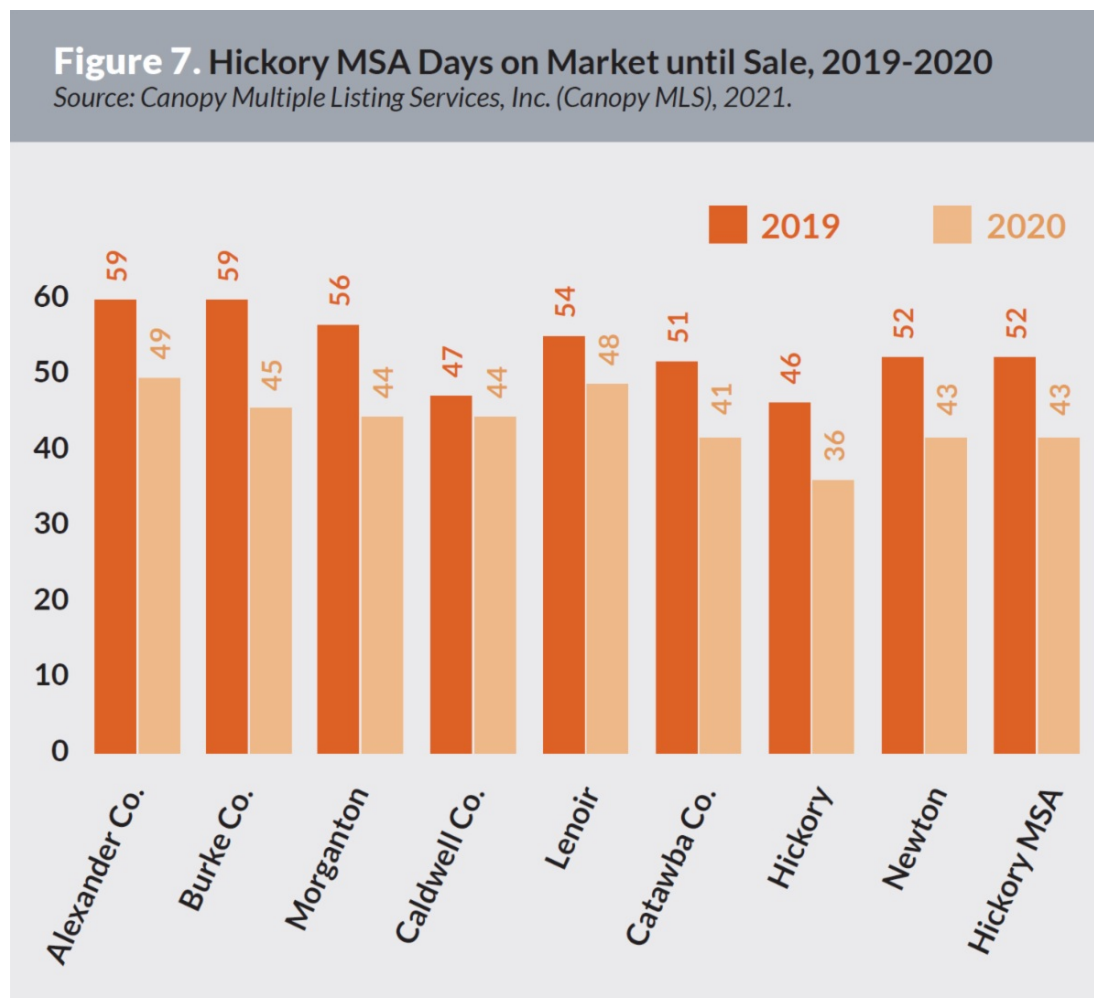
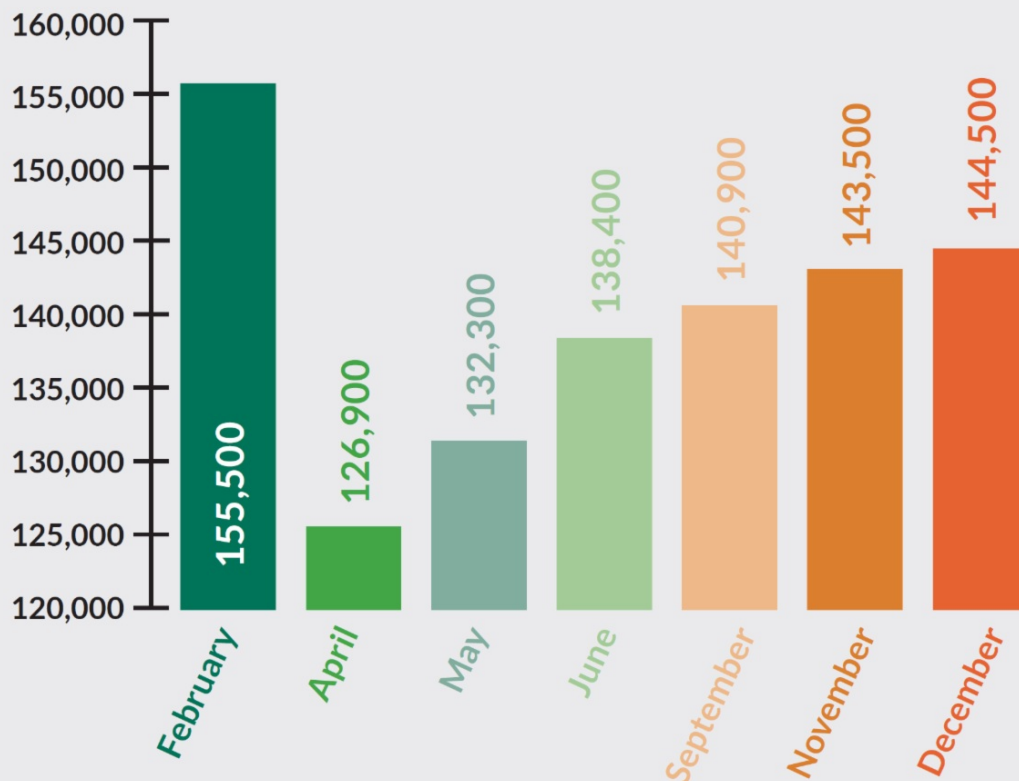


Figure 10. Hickory MSA Estimated Employment, February-December 2020*



* Employment numbers shown are not seasonally adjusted. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, CES Program, 2021.

Article by Taylor Dellinger

Regional Housing Authority Waiting List for Housing Choice Voucher Applicants

The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) maintains a waiting list for Housing Choice Voucher applicants. The RHA closed its waiting list with more than 2,500 applicants on December 31, 2019. As of March 1, 2021, approximately 1,200 applicants are waiting for housing payment assistance. Housing Choice Vouchers become available when active participants end their assistance or otherwise become ineligible for assistance.

With a goal of using all available vouchers, the RHA sent out 500 Applications for Admission in February. To qualify for the program, the applicant must meet HUD's very low income guidelines for their family size and HUD's eligibility criteria. Once applicants receive the Application for Admission, they must complete the Admission packet and return it to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments office in Hickory or send it by email or fax. WPCOG offices remain closed to the public, but a drop box is available and checked daily.

Several Applications for Admission packets have been returned to the office undeliverable. The RHA staff encourages all waiting list applicants to verify their mailing address and contact information on the WPCOG RHA website housing.wpcog.net/AppNewAddress.aspx. For waiting list questions, please contact Sharday Black at (828) 485-4241 or by email at sharday.black@wpcog.org.

For persons interested in applying for a Housing Choice Voucher through the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, the RHA encourages them to check our website wpcog.org for updates regarding when the waiting list will open.

Article by Elizabeth Moncrief

Transportation

WPCOG to Launch New Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)

Last year, WPCOG was awarded a grant from the Walkability Action Institute of the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. The grant's purpose was to train an interdisciplinary team of community planners, transportation engineers, and public health officials to collaborate with local governments to improve public roads and community design to support mobility and other forms of active transportation. With the pandemic, the training became a year-long series of webinars resulting in a local action plan geared towards policy, systematic, and infrastructure improvements.

The new action plan seeks to empower local communities to overcome mobility barriers and economically transform their built environments. Strategies include forming a new Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) with representation across all four counties of the Western Piedmont Region, as well as diverse user groups, including active seniors, cyclists, transit riders, health officials, private sector advocates, and individuals living with disabilities. The BPAC will be staffed by Averi Ritchie at the WPCOG in a newly expanded Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator role while also retaining her role as Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Coordinator. Key goals of the new Committee and Coordinator include:

- Cataloging past plans.
- Developing and updating regional plans.
- Conducting walkability audits.
- Coordinating local input on state-maintained road resurfacings and projects.
- Supporting local demonstration projects.
- Identifying new potential bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- Managing the Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP).

The Committee is expected to start in May and meet quarterly. If you are interested or know a good candidate for the BPAC, please contact Averi Ritchie at averi.ritchie@wpcog.org or 828-485-4248.

Article by Brian Horton

Workforce Development Board

NEXTGEN Program Offers Scholarship Opportunities

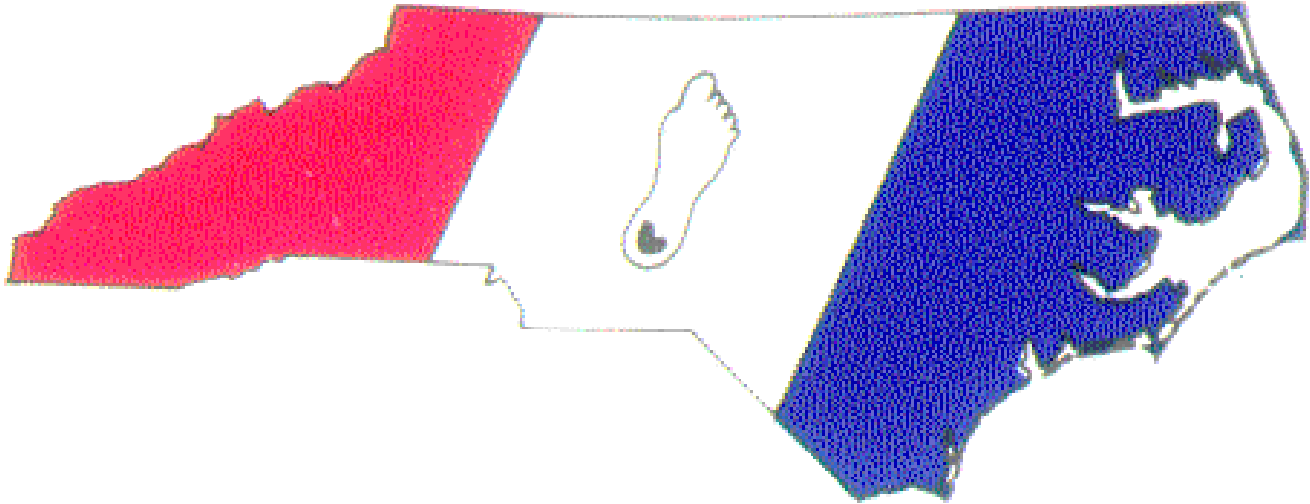


Our NCWorks NEXTGEN program offers scholarships to eligible individuals between the ages of 16-24 years old for training for in-demand jobs in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties. Training opportunities could include short-term or long-term training (up to 2 years), as well as a potential to participate in a paid

internship. The goal of NCWorks NEXTGEN is to develop a talent pipeline for job opportunities in our area. If you are interested in pursuing a scholarship opportunity through NEXTGEN, please complete the pre-application located on our website at www.wpcog.org/youth, and follow the directions. Please answer the application completely, and allow three business days for a response from a NEXTGEN Career Center staff. Completing an application is the first step in the process of being considered for a scholarship. Additional information and documents will be requested prior to final approval.

Article by Wendy Johnson

Area Agency on Aging North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature



The North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) was created by the North Carolina General Assembly with the passage of Senate Bill 479 in July of 1993. The STHL was created to:

- Provide information to senior citizens on the legislative process and matters being considered by the North Carolina General Assembly.
- Promote citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the North Carolina General Assembly.
- Assess the legislative needs of older citizens by convening a forum modeled after the North Carolina General Assembly.

Each of the 100 North Carolina counties is entitled to one delegate to the Senior Tar Heel Legislature. Most counties also have an alternate delegate. Delegates and alternates must be age 60 or older. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services provides staff support for the Senior Tar Heel Legislature in cooperation with the 16 Area Agencies on Aging, which are responsible for conducting the selection of delegates and alternates.

The STHL will convene in a virtual platform this year to conduct business to advocate for the senior citizens of North Carolina and continue to work to advance the STHL Legislative Priorities.

The 2021 STHL Legislative Priorities are:

Increase HCCBG Funding

The North Carolina Home and Community Care Block Grant is vital in assuring the availability of cost-effective home and community-based services to the elderly, malnourished, homebound, dependent, and those who are socially and economically needy. This older population continues to increase; approximately 10,000 citizens are currently waitlisted for services, and 1.1 million more are expected to turn 60 years of age by 2038. This rapidly increasing older adult population will place even greater pressure on an already overburdened service delivery system. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature requests the General Assembly increase the Home and Community Care Block Grant funding by \$8 million dollars in recurring funds.**

Maintain and Increase Funding for Senior Centers

There are 169 senior centers in 95 counties that provide programs and services to enhance the health and wellness of older adults. These services are of significant benefit to help elders remain independent, thus delaying their potential for costlier services or housing options. Senior Center General Purpose money is vital to support critical center operations. To maintain operation, senior centers must leverage resources from a variety of sources that include federal, state, and local governments, special events, participant contributions, grants, and volunteer hours. Even with leveraging, funding for senior centers has not been able to meet the needs of the state's increasing aging population, who now constitute more than two-thirds of the fifty and overpopulation. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature requests that the General Assembly maintain the current General Purpose funding and increase this funding by a recurring \$400,000 to continue to meet the vital needs of North Carolina's growing population of older adults.**

Increase funding for Project CARE

By mandate of the North Carolina General Assembly, Project CARE (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty) was developed by recommendation of a statewide, multi-stakeholder task force to address Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Through the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Funded by the state, the Division of Aging and Adult Services provides caregiver support, care management, and referrals to available services. It has become a national best practice model for providing respite services to family members caring at home for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. More funding is needed to assist the caregivers of the ever-growing older adult population. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature requests that the General Assembly increase funding for Project CARE in 2021 by \$575,000 and in future years increase funding by ten percent annually for expected growth.**

Strengthen and Fund North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program

North Carolina's Adult Protective Services Program (APS) must be strengthened and funded to respond to the accelerated growth in the State's aging population. APS is a core of services provided to vulnerable and older adults at risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. By 2025, 88 counties in North Carolina are projected to have more people age 60 years of age than 17 years and under. Many of these adults may be at risk of becoming victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The number of APS reports is expected to continue to increase as North Carolina's aging population increases. NC General Statute 108A, Article 6, Protection of the Abused, Neglected, or Exploited Disabled Adult Act, mandates county departments of social services provide APS to vulnerable and older adults who have been abused, neglected, or exploited. In SFY 2019-2020, county departments of social services received 30,779 APS reports alleging the abuse, neglect, or exploitation of vulnerable adults. In SFY 2019-20 counties expended approximately \$31.4 million, 0% state, 81.55% county, 18.45% federal, for the provision of APS. Counties are struggling to locate funding to provide these mandated services. Counties rely on county governments and a decreasing federal Social Services Block Grant that is used to fund many services provided by counties. The need for APS has continued to increase over the years, but the only state funding, \$2 million provided for the provision of APS, was eliminated in the SFY 2010-2012 State Budget. A comprehensive evaluation/review is needed to better reflect the challenges counties currently face in meeting the changing needs of vulnerable and older adults who have been abused, neglected, or exploited and need protective services. **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature urges the General Assembly recognize and value its vulnerable citizens by making available \$8 million in recurring funds in the State budget to meet the growing need for Adult Protective Services in North Carolina and conduct a comprehensive evaluation/review of these services to ensure this protection is adequate.**

Staff -to-Patient Ratios in Nursing Homes

The positive relationship between nurse staffing levels and the quality of nursing home care has been demonstrated widely. Increasing nurse (RN, LPN, and CNA) staffing levels facilitates the enhancement of nursing home care outcomes. The federal Nursing Home Reform Act (NHRA), as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1987, requires minimum staffing levels for registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs), and minimum educational training for nurse's aides (NAs), but fails to establish a specific requirement for minimum caregiver/resident ratio or a minimum standard for the number of hours per patient day that a resident should be receiving care. In a nursing home, the CNA is the true point-person for providing adequate one-on-one care to the resident. The quality of care that facilities provide to their residents is frequently evaluated across three domains, including structure (resources used to provide care; e.g., staffing), process (actions used to provide care; e.g., restraints), and outcomes (results for patients; may be bad outcomes or good outcomes). **The Senior Tar Heel Legislature recommends that the General Assembly enact legislation, which establishes either a mandatory standardized HPPD (hours per patient daily) or minimum staff-to-patient ratios for direct patient care, including enforcement standards and consequences to ensure quality care in nursing homes in the state of North Carolina, regardless of whether they are a for-profit or non-profit organization.**

INFORMATION ON THE NORTH CAROLINA SENIOR TAR HEEL LEGISLATURE

Rebecca Freeman is the principal DAAS staff liaison and can be contacted at Rebecca.Freeman@dhhs.nc.gov,

919-855-3421 (office), or 984-328-2497 (cell).

Information about the Senior Tar Heel Legislature can be found at: www.ncsthl.org and on Facebook (North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature: www.facebook.com/NCSTHLNC).

For more information about the North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature, please contact your county's delegate or

Alexander County

Delegate: Paulette Huffman - Email: huffmanp64@gmail.com

Alternate - George Holleman - Email: george.b.holleman@gmail.com

Burke County

Delegate: Karen Robinson - Email: kjcr@charter.net

Alternate: Maxine Childress - Email: maxinechildress@gmail.com

Caldwell County

Delegate: Trilla Annas - Email: trillaannas@gmail.com

Alternate: Linda Vitsyn - Email: yitsyn7@bellsouth.net

Catawba County

Delegate: Gail Miller - Email: gdbrmiller@charter.net

Alternate: Richard Smith - Email: smithrpsjr@gmail.com

Article by Anita Roberts

WPCOG CALENDAR

All scheduled meetings are currently being conducted electronically.
For a listing of upcoming meetings and information on how to participate or attend, please visit www.wpcog.org/electronic-public-meetings.

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