

## Medicaid: News Article / February 21, 2013

The second phase of NC FAST rollout will involve Medicaid. The NC FAST (North Carolina Families Accessing Services Through Technology) Program is designed to improve the way the Departments of Social Services across the State utilize technology to reduce the time spent performing administrative tasks and increase the time devoted to assisting families. The second phase will involve the Eligibility Information System, which is used for processing Medicaid. This portion of NC FAST includes screening, intake, eligibility determination, and benefits issued. Hertford County's Medicaid staff will be attending training in July & August prior to NC FAST implementation in the fall of 2013.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is the nation's health reform law enacted in March 2010. It contains provisions that will expand health coverage to approximately 30 million Americans. The ACA calls for a nationwide expansion of Medicaid eligibility that is scheduled to begin in 2014. Under the law, nearly all U.S. citizens up to 133% of the Federal Poverty Level will qualify for Medicaid under the expansion. The News Observer stated in 2012, the Federal Poverty Level of up to 133% was represented by a family of four with earnings of \$30,675.00 annually. The median household for Hertford County residents was cited as \$ 30,878.00 annually by the U.S. Census Bureau.

While it was originally mandatory for states to expand Medicaid coverage under the Act, the Supreme Court ruled in June of 2012 that it is now optional. For the (estimated 1.2 million) uninsured North Carolina residents who do not or will not receive coverage through Medicaid, there will be the option of purchasing health insurance through an online marketplace called an exchange. For Hertford County, this represents approximately 18.5% of the county's population, who are currently uninsured per The News Observer.

Under the exchange, participants can begin enrolling in insurance plans in October 2013, but coverage will not begin until January 1, 2014. North Carolina residents will utilize a Federal government exchange if North Carolina does not establish its own.

When phase 2 of NC FAST is fully implemented, the Program will help DSS employees determine if individuals are eligible for Medicaid or if they will need to look to the exchange for insurance. The estimated number of individuals seeking assistance for healthcare coverage under either Medicaid or the healthcare exchange, indicate that Hertford County DSS will see an increased number of customers accessing healthcare coverage. The full implementation of NC FAST, and current policy simplification efforts, will help to assure staff is able to attend to the needs of the whole person, process less paperwork, and assist more customers more effectively.

At this time an individual can apply for Medicaid and NC Health Choice (NCHC) through e-PASS. The public can go to the Hertford County Department of Social Services web site and complete an application. The web site address is [hertfordcountync.gov](http://hertfordcountync.gov), once you are there click on departments and scroll down to Social Services and you will have the home page for Hertford County Department of Social Service. e-PASS is on this web site, just click on e-pass and follow the directions to print the application. Customers can also apply for Food and Nutrition Services using e-PASS.

Submitted by Kathy Richmond

