Buncombe County Government

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County Manager

Buncombe County Government
Commissioner Briefing
August 18, 2026
3:00 PM
1st Floor Conference Room

I.	Meeting Called to Order		Chair Edwards
II.	Review Meeting Agenda		Chair Edwards
III.	Staff Updates		
	a. UNC Health Letter of Support	10 mins	Chair Edwards
	b. NCACC Legislative Goals	15 mins	Josh Hallingse
	c. Update on Benefits and Pharmacy Offerings	30 mins	Shauna Shepherd, & USI
IV.	Open Discussion		All

[MEET_FOOT]

Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

Chair	*District 1*	*District 2*	*District 3*
Amanda Edwards	Al Whitesides	Martin Moore	Parker Sloan
	Jennifer Horton	Terri Wells	Drew Ball

On behalf of the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners, I write to express our strong support for the Certificate of Need application filed by UNC Health West Medical Center to develop a new 92-bed acute care hospital on the western side of Asheville.

The North Carolina 2026 State Medical Facilities Plan identified a need for 92 additional acute care beds in the Buncombe, Clay, Graham, Madison, and Yancey County multicounty service area, reflecting sustained population growth and rising demand for acute care services across our region. The proposed site located west of the French Broad River near the interstate interchange serving the western approach to the county is uniquely positioned to serve as a point of entry for patients traveling into Buncombe County from Clay, Graham, Madison, and Yancey Counties, communities that do not currently enjoy convenient access to acute care services at any hospital located within Buncombe County.

This need was made painfully clear during Hurricane Helene in the fall of 2024, when road and interstate closures severely limited the ability of residents in our region's rural counties to reach acute care services. That experience underscored the importance of a well-distributed network of accessible emergency and inpatient care throughout Buncombe County.

The Board of Commissioners is committed to ensuring that all residents of the county, including those in our westernmost communities and those traveling from neighboring rural counties, have timely and reliable access to emergency and acute care services. We view the development of additional acute care capacity as directly consistent with the County's public health, safety, and economic development priorities.

UNC Health has a longstanding and well-regarded presence in western North Carolina, including its affiliated hospitals and ambulatory facilities serving the region, and has demonstrated a sustained commitment to the health of Buncombe County residents through the provision of high-quality, accessible care. We further note that development of UNC Health West Medical Center is anticipated to generate substantial economic benefit to Buncombe County, including construction and permanent employment opportunities, capital investment, and an expanded local tax base.

Having reviewed the general scope, location, and public benefit of the proposed project, the Board of Commissioners finds that its approval would serve the interests and welfare of Buncombe County and its residents. We respectfully urge the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health Service Regulation, to approve this application in recognition of the demonstrated need, the public benefit of the proposed site, and the project's alignment with our region's health access and economic development priorities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

BUNCOMBE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

2027 HEALTH PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

August 18,2026

Larry Reece

Roberta Ferdinand

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Agenda

- 2027 Recommendations

1. Pharmacy
   - RxSave Card Program Overview
     (for Weight Loss Medications, not Diabetic Drugs)
   - Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) Change

2. 2027 Other Benefit Changes

- Next Steps

RxSaveCard – 2027 GLP-1 Management Strategy for Weight Loss Medications

The recommended GLP-1 savings strategy for 2027 is for the County to remove GLP-1 medications prescribed for weight management from the BCBS formulary, eliminating coverage through the medical plan. Instead, the County would implement an RxSaveCard program to provide financial assistance for eligible employees prescribed these medications.

Program Overview

- Employees would obtain a GLP-1 prescription directly from their physician rather than through the VIDA program.
- Employees would use an RxSaveCard website or app to obtain access to online participating pharmacies as directed by the respective drug manufacturer, accessing direct-to-consumer pricing that is significantly lower than traditional insurance pricing.
- The County would fund the RxSaveCard program, and employees would pay a predetermined copay amount at the point of sale, with the balance of cost funded by using the RxSaveCard digital program.
- Employees must have a personal credit card that can be loaded into the RxSaveCard site to fund their copay, and they must have an active email address to use the program.
- Employees may upload BMI verification documentation through the RxSaveCard app to confirm eligibility.

RxSaveCard – 2027 GLP-1 Management Strategy

Financial Advantages

- Direct-to-consumer pricing creates savings for both employees and the County compared to traditional insurance reimbursement rates.
- Employees benefit from lower personal costs and a simplified purchasing process.
- Based on 2025 utilization data, projected annual savings for the County exceed $565,700.

Employee Cost Share Recommendations

- Weight Management Only: Recommended employee copay of $100 per prescription, aligning with the County's current highest pharmacy copay tier.

RxSaveCard – 2027 GLP-1 Management Strategy

Items to Note

- Employee copays will not be applied to their deductible nor to the out of pocket maximum for the year.
- RxSaveCard only allows home delivery. Prescriptions cannot be picked up.
- VIDA will no longer provide oversight and coaching for GLP-1 weight management. VIDA is a Blue Cross Blue Shield partner and does not partner with RxSaveCard.
- VIDA will no longer be the provider for any weight management support. Buncombe County is currently looking at options to provide weight management support through a different vendor.

RxSaveCard Savings Analysis

	Current 2026 Costs	Proposed 2027 costs
Employee co-pay	$200	$100
Net Employer cost (after rebates)	$700-$900	$200-$350
Net employer cost based on 2025 utilization	$1,035,600	$443,856



Pharmacy Benefit Manager Options for 2027

Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) Review

Key Considerations for Management

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina has announced that Prime Therapeutics will no longer serve as its Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) beginning in 2027. As part of our renewal strategy, USI conducted a PBM market evaluation and identified two primary options:

  1. Remain with BCBSNC and transition to their default PBM, Optum.

  OR

  2. Carve out pharmacy benefits from BCBSNC and contract directly with Employers Health-CVS (EHCVS) as the PBM.

- Both options represent a change from the County's current pharmacy arrangement and would require implementation of a new formulary. As a result, some level of member disruption is expected regardless of the option selected.

- Given the similarities between the two approaches, the primary differentiator is financial performance.

- RECOMMENDATION -Based on our analysis, Employers Health - CVS delivers significantly stronger rebate guarantees and overall pharmacy economics, generating approximately $1.43 million in savings compared to the current renewal terms with BCBS/Optum.

- Employers Health – CVS includes thousands of national network pharmacies. Members are NOT restricted to using CVS only. Examples include Ingles, Walgreens, Walmart, Sam's Club, etc.

Pharmacy Benefit Manager Advantages

Advantages of Employers Health - CVS

- Estimated savings of approximately $1.43 million in compared to the current renewal terms with BCBS/Optum. A significant driver are the more favorable drug rebate arrangements.
- Competitive pharmacy benefit management model.
- Member transition support, including proactive outreach to affected participants.
- Member Communication: Employers Health - CVS will proactively identify impacted members and conduct outreach approximately 90 days prior to implementation to help facilitate any necessary medication transitions.

Items to Note

- Separate Pharmacy ID Card: A pharmacy carve-out may require employees to carry and utilize a separate prescription insurance card, which differs from their current experience under the integrated BCBSNC model.

- Formulary Changes: Some members may need to transition to therapeutically equivalent alternatives if their current medication is not included on the new formulary. In addition, certain employees could experience higher or lower copays depending on the medication.

Pharmacy Benefit Manager Recommendation

Recommendation

While both BCBS Optum and Employers Health - CVS involve formulary changes and some level of employee disruption, the projected $1.43 million in additional savings makes Employers Health - CVS the stronger financial option.

The carve-out approach provides a substantial opportunity to reduce pharmacy costs while maintaining access to clinically appropriate medications and offering transition support to affected employees.

Coverage Highlights and Updates

Confirmed Changes for January 1, 2027

- ✓Employee Medical Premium increases
- ✓HDHP deductible and out of pocket maximum increases as required by the IRS
- ✓Increase to County contribution to Health Savings Account to one half of new HDHP deductible
- ✓VOYA Accident and Critical Illness insurance – employee premium increase
- ✓Flexible Spending Account / Dependent Care FSA – new vendor

Pending Board of Commissioner Approval for January 1, 2027 changes

- Approve removal of GLP-1 weight management drugs from the pharmacy formulary and activate RxSaveCard option
- If RxSaveCard option approved, also approve $100 employee co-pay amount
- Approve carve out of pharmacy benefit manager to Employers Health - CVS



- Buncombe County Board of Commissioners
  - August 18th – BOC briefing
  - September 1st – BOC regular meeting to vote on recommended changes

- Proposed Implementation Schedule (pending approval)

To allow a January 1, 2027 effective date:

  - EHCVS: Target implementation kickoff during the week of September 1st
  - RxSaveCard: Target implementation kickoff during the week September 1st

- Employee Communication & Support
  - Communicate upcoming changes to plan participants
  - Provide educational materials and communication resources

- USI Support
  - Project management and implementation coordination
  - Employee communication strategy support
  - Ongoing education and support throughout the rollout

Questions & Discussion

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