2025 Annual Report

NC Black Youth Suicide Prevention Action Plan



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL

Village of C.A.R.E.

Executive Summary

In July 2025, the North Carolina Black Youth Suicide Prevention Action Plan (2026–2030) was published, outlining a five-year coordinated, statewide approach to address longstanding disparities in suicide risk among Black youth through strategic, evidence-informed actions. Although the plan was released mid-year, many activities aligned with its goals were initiated prior to publication. This report summarizes key achievements and progress made during calendar year 2025, reflecting both early implementation efforts and actions later formalized under the plan.

Throughout 2025, NCDHHS, in collaboration with the UNC Suicide Prevention Institute, the Department of Public Instruction, Village of CARE, individuals with lived experience, and other partners, advanced priority activities across multiple focus areas of the Action Plan. These efforts strengthened coordinated suicide prevention infrastructure and protective environments, expanded peer support, education and awareness, promoted lethal means safety, and reinforced other protective factors, laying a strong foundation for sustained, statewide implementation.

The achievements documented in this report reflect both the momentum established prior to the plan's publication and the early impact of coordinated action following its release. Collectively, these accomplishments underscore North Carolina's commitment to advancing equitable, culturally responsive suicide prevention for Black youth and provide a strong platform for continued implementation, evaluation, and impact in the years ahead.

The goals for this work are as follows: (a) promoting culturally inclusive care and improving access while understanding the needs of diverse youth; (b) improving mental health access and outcomes for Black youth; (c) increasing the availability of behavioral health providers to offer services when and where they are needed; (d) alleviating pressure on the behavioral health system by creating alternative pathways for support; and (e) expanding prevention and early intervention services.

This project engaged in five focus areas:

- Increase coordination of infrastructure across NC
- Increase peer support services
- Increase community awareness and education
- Reduce access to lethal means
- Increase protective factors

Key Activities and Reach

Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

129 applications
113 accepted

98% Black

¼ LGBTQ+

80% Female

The YAB held **nine meetings** (one per month) with an **average of 53 attendees** at each. Throughout the year, various YAB committees hosted **nine community events, trained 73 members on non-clinical suicide training,** and created **over 30 infographics** for suicide prevention education.

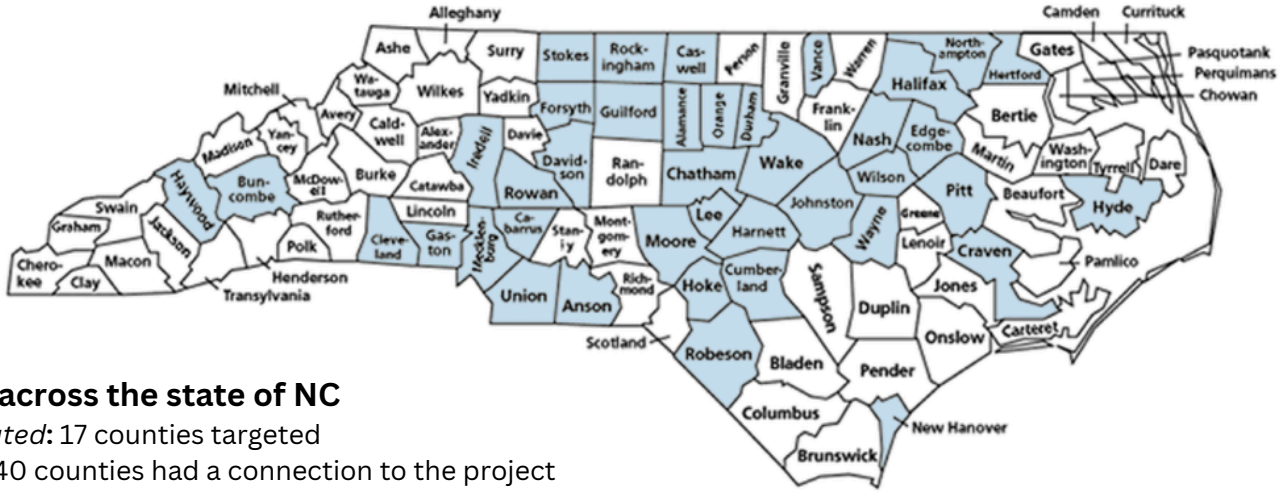
Community of Practice and Education (COPE)

137 applications
134 accepted

75% Black

80% Female

COPE held **nine meetings** (one per month) with an **average of 41 attendees** at each. Throughout the year, COPE cohosted **three non-clinical trainings** for suicide prevention education.



Reach across the state of NC
Anticipated: 17 counties targeted
Actual: 40 counties had a connection to the project

Suicide Prevention Trainings

Across the state, **12 suicide prevention trainings** were given to barbers, community members, and YAB and COPE members, at which **465 gun locks** were distributed. **Over 200** non-clinical providers were trained on Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), LET'S Save Lives, or CALM. Approximately **11 individuals were trained as instructors** of suicide prevention trainings.

Suicide Prevention Conference

The statewide Black Youth Suicide Prevention Conference, Changing Rhythms, New Movements, was held in Rocky Mount on September 20, 2025. The event featured a young adult panel, a cypher and spoken word contest, and a screening of *While the Children Fade* to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and highlight risk and protective factors impacting Black youth and young adult mental wellness.

MHFA- and CALM-trained barbers provided **78 free haircuts**, creating opportunities for mentorship and connection while distributing **63 gun locks** to promote safe firearm storage. Our sponsors distributed **over 165 units of naloxone** and demonstrated how to use them. Community members also painted **over 100 wooden tiles** for a locally built expression tunnel, supporting emotional expression, resilience, cultural identity, and community connection.

300+ attendees

17 counties represented

19 vendors

Outcomes and Impact

YAB Pre-Post-Survey

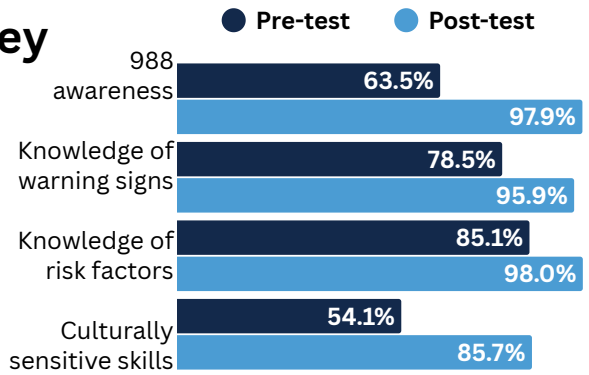
Previous suicide prevention training:

28% reported "Yes" at pre-test

71% reported "Yes" at post-test

> Being able to make connections, network and pour my passion and creativity into Mental Health efforts in my community **truly lit a fire** within me.

> The board has brought me community that is **just as passionate about suicide [prevention] as I am.**



There was an increase across all metrics after participating in the YAB.

COPE Pre-Post-Survey

Though there was no significant change in the quantitative metrics for COPE, many qualitative responses focused on the connectedness and community impact of their participation on the board.

> COPE...offers wonderful opportunities for professionals to collaborate and make a difference within their communities.

> Since joining COPE, I have had the opportunity to connect with many professionals...to exchange ideas on creating safe spaces that support, encourage, and uplift families and communities.

> It has fostered a safe environment of needed connections.

Conference Feedback

93% of participants felt the conference addressed "the unique issues and priorities of the Black community"

98% of participants felt the "content of the conference, including speakers and workshops, authentically center Black experiences and expertise"

Several participants noted that they would like this to be a yearly event.

Expression Tunnel

The Rocky Mount Imperial Centre is currently displaying the Expression Tunnel Exhibit. A 12-foot tall community-created art installation constructed from individually painted panels by participants and attendees of the 2025 Stronger Together Conference. This installation symbolizes shared experiences and the collective journey toward mental health awareness, healing, and resilience.





Rocky Mount, NC

Looking Ahead

Focus Area: Increase Community Awareness and Education



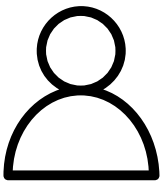
To address reported barriers associated with access to the full conference format, such as travel constraints and the length of an eight-hour day, we plan to introduce a series of shorter, regional "mini-conferences" in 2026. These events will be hosted at HBCUs, faith-based organizations, and other community-based settings to ensure greater accessibility for our target population of young adults.

The programming will be condensed into a focused, multi-hour format designed to maintain engagement while delivering high-impact content. Content will include suicide prevention and mental health trainings, information on mental health and crisis resources, lethal means safety education, opportunities for mentorship and peer support, and activities that strengthen protective factors, foster community connection, and promote overall wellbeing.

Next Steps

- Roll out regional mini-conferences statewide.
- Finalize community host sites and partners.

Focus Area: Increase Coordination of Infrastructure Across NC



Based on lessons learned in 2025, the participant size for both the YAB and COPE will be reduced from more than 80 members to approximately 30–40 members per group to support engagement. A second application cycle for both groups was launched at the end of 2025, and current members were invited to reapply. We anticipate that both boards will continue to utilize the same 13 subcommittee topic areas established in 2026. Both groups will continue to meet virtually on a monthly basis and will convene at least once in 2026 for an in-person event. Additionally, we will continue to explore opportunities to bring the YAB and COPE together to support collaboration and cross-learning.

In 2025, participation in the NC Black Youth Wellness Advisory Board was limited to individuals ages 18–24. In 2026, we will broaden eligibility to include high school–aged applicants, who may serve in a volunteer capacity. The 2026 structure will include two tiers of membership: executive (compensated via honorarium) and volunteer (unpaid). Executive members will be responsible for completing regular project assignments and contributing a higher level of time and engagement, while volunteers will be invited to participate in designated in-person events.

Next Steps

- Equip members with additional training.
- Schedule meetings and in-person convenings.

Focus Areas: Increase Peer Support Services and Reduce Access to Lethal Means



The suicide prevention training curriculum for barbers, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM), will remain consistent in 2026. Additionally, gun locks will continue to be distributed at these events. To date, trainings have been focused in Wake, Nash and Edgecombe counties. We plan to expand training efforts for barbers to Mecklenburg County and Cumberland County in 2026.

Additionally, while suicide prevention training for barbers primarily serves the Black boys and men, we plan to identify and develop intervention settings that will allow us to more effectively reach Black girls and women in 2026.

Next Steps

- Launch trainings in new counties.
- Identify additional settings to better engage Black girls and women.

Acknowledgments

Strategic Planning Committee Members

Sonyia Richardson, Ph.D. | John A. Tate Early Career Distinguished Fellow for Children in Need, Assistant Professor, UNC Chapel Hill, Co-Chair
Hannah Harms | North Carolina Suicide Prevention Coordinator, NCDHHS, UNC SPI, Co-Chair

Stronger Together Leadership

Rodney Harris, Ph.D | UNC Suicide Prevention Institute, Conference Chair
Bettie Murchison | Director, Village of CARE
Isley Cotton, MSW, Mdiv | Youth Suicide Prevention Coordinator, NCDHHS & COPE Chair
Brittany Jones, MA, LCAS, CCS | Crisis Team Lead NCDHHS
Pachovia Lovett, MSW | School Social Work Consultant, NC DPI
Sydney Caddell | UNC Chapel Hill Student & Youth Advisory Board Chair
Suhlor Rapu | NCAT Student & Youth Advisory Co-Chair
Tiani Hinnant | UNC Pembrooke Student & Youth Advisory Co-Chair
Isabel Berge | UNC Chapel Hill Student & Youth Advisory Co-Chair
Nyree Beachum, MSW, LCSWA | COPE Co-Chair
Javonne Green, MSW, LCSWA, LCASA | COPE Co-Chair
Reggie Love, Jr. | UNC Chapel Hill
Rev. Jordan Boyd | Rockwell AME Zion Church & Village Heartbeat, Inc.
Austin Trujillio, BSW | UNC Charlotte

Annual Reporting Team

Margaret Phipps-Bennett, MSW, LCSWA | Evaluator | UNC Suicide Prevention Institute
Grace Lutter, Evaluator | UNC Suicide Prevention Institute
Hannah Harms, Co-Chair | North Carolina Suicide Prevention Coordinator, NCDHHS

Youth Advisory Board Members
Community of Practice and Education Members
NC Department of Health and Human Services

Fiscal Sponsors

Trillium Health Resources
NC Blue Cross Blue Shield, Healthy Blue
Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), Rocky Mount
Grooming Resources and Opportunities (G.R.O.)
NAMI of NC
Imperial Centre of Arts and Sciences, Rocky Mount
Edgecombe Community College, Rocky Mount
Whole Community Connection, UNC
Word Tabernacle, Rocky Mount
NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services

As we look ahead, continued funding will be critical to sustain our programs. We welcome continued and new funding partners to join us in advancing this work and expanding our impact in the year ahead.