



Hannah McClellan <hmccllellan@ednc.org>

Child Health Advocates Chart NC Course for 2027

1 message

Billy Warden <excelmedia@ncchild.org>
To: Billy Warden <excelmedia@ncchild.org>
Cc: Billy Warden <billy.warden@gmail.com>

Thu, Oct 15, 2026 at 2:55 PM

Greetings. The statewide EarlyWell coalition met today to chart its 2027 policy course (more below, photos [here](#)). EarlyWell brings together a variety of specialties, all committed to childhood health. We are well-positioned to help with stories in this realm, including access to local specialists. We look forward to working with you. Thanks! ...

EarlyWell Begins Shaping 2027 Priorities for North Carolina's Youngest Children***Coalition members gather at Guilford College to strengthen support for children and families***

COLFAX, N.C. — October 15, 2026 — Members of the statewide EarlyWell coalition met Thursday at Guilford College to begin shaping their advocacy priorities for the 2027 session of the North Carolina General Assembly, focusing on strengthening the systems that support young children and their caregivers. (Photos [here](#).)

The EarlyWell Initiative is a nonpartisan partnership co-led by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation and NC Child. It unites families, early childhood clinicians, advocates, and system leaders around a shared goal: strengthening infant and early childhood mental health and the policies that help children and their caregivers thrive.

"EarlyWell was built on a simple but powerful idea," said Erica Palmer Smith, CEO of NC Child, in her opening remarks. "If we want to improve outcomes for young children's social, emotional, and mental health, we have to strengthen the systems and policies that shape their early experiences. And we have to do it together."

In her remarks, Theresa Stacker, Executive Director of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, added, "Today is an opportunity to begin developing action plans for collective action ahead of 2027. Plans grounded in shared priorities, informed by the experiences of families, and strengthened by collaboration across sectors."

Challenges and opportunities

Since its launch in 2019, EarlyWell has engaged hundreds of stakeholders across North Carolina and grown into a statewide coalition representing the broader early childhood and family well-being community – most importantly, families and caregivers.

Thursday's convening allowed coalition members to share what they are seeing in communities, identify challenges and opportunities, and begin shaping priorities for the upcoming year.

"North Carolina's future depends on how well we support children and families today," said Sharon Hirsch, President and CEO of Positive Childhood Alliance NC and EarlyWell Coordinating Team

Member, Wake County. “The earliest years of a child’s life lay the foundation for healthy relationships, learning and well-being. With all this in place, a child is well positioned to grow strong and make a positive difference in our world.”

Priorities discussed included expanding access to evidence-based home visiting programs, strengthening Family Support Network services statewide, and making early relational health a priority within North Carolina’s Rural Health Transformation Program. ‘Relational health’ refers to the presence of stable, safe, and nurturing adults in a child’s life.

The coalition is seeking sustainable state support for home visiting and Family Support Network programs, full use of available federal resources, and better integration of early childhood mental health supports into rural health systems.

“Families don’t experience these issues one program at a time,” said Connie Outlaw, Early Well Family Leader and Coordinating Team Member, Greensboro. “They need support that is accessible, connected, and responsive to their needs. That’s the kind of system EarlyWell is working with local and state leaders to build.”

EarlyWell members will continue planning their 2027 policy priorities in the months ahead and engaging lawmakers, state leaders and other partners as the legislative session approaches.

About EarlyWell

The EarlyWell Initiative is a nonpartisan coalition co-led by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation and NC Child. The coalition advances public policy to ensure North Carolina children — from prenatal through age 8 — and their caregivers can thrive in strong relationships, experience positive mental health and access the care they need without barriers. For more information, visit <https://ncchild.org/what-we-do/earlywell/>.

About NC Child

NC Child is a nonprofit organization that advocates for policies that improve the lives of all North Carolina children. For more information, visit ncchild.org.

About the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation

The NC Early Childhood Foundation is driven by a bold – and achievable – vision: Each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for lifelong health, education, and well-being supported by a comprehensive, equitable prenatal-to-8 ecosystem. We build understanding, lead collaboration, and advance policies to ensure each North Carolina child is on track for lifelong success by the end of third grade. For more information, visit buildthefoundation.org.

###