



Craig Albanese, CEO, Duke University Health System  
Carl Armato, President and CEO, Novant Health  
Wesley Burks, CEO, UNC Health  
Mary Jo Cagle, CEO, Cone Health  
Mickey Foster, CEO, FirstHealth of the Carolinas  
Donald Gintzig, President and CEO, WakeMed Health & Hospitals  
Steve Lawler, President and CEO, North Carolina Healthcare Association  
Greg Lowe, President, NC Division, HCA Healthcare  
Michael Waldrum, CEO, ECU Health  
Eugene Woods, President and CEO of Atrium Health

Dear Hospital Leaders, Presidents, and CEOs,

As Black Executive Directors of the undersigned organizations who are committed to the collective wellbeing, prosperity, and advancement of Black North Carolinians, we urge you to support the medical debt relief incentive program from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS).

The number of people who have medical debt in North Carolina is shockingly high compared to the rest of the nation, yet the inequitable distribution of this debt is even more disturbing. In 2022, 20% of our state's population had medical debt in collections, but that figure climbs to 25% among communities of color.<sup>1</sup>

**The structural racism that has created less generational wealth and poor health outcomes for Black North Carolinians is why it is so vitally important for hospitals to accept the NCDHHS program to alleviate the burden of medical debt.**

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<sup>1</sup> Urban Institute. *Debt in America: An Interactive Map*. Available at <https://apps.urban.org/features/debt-interactive-map/?type=overall&variable=totcoll>

**We urge you to act on your mission and vision of building healthier communities and whole-person health to give patients an opportunity to focus on healing without the financial distress of medical debt.**

Nearly 19% of Black North Carolinians live in poverty<sup>2</sup> while also experiencing significantly higher rates of chronic health conditions such as heart disease, HIV, diabetes, and certain types of cancer.<sup>3</sup>

**The NCDHHS program would not only unburden the weight of medical debt for two million North Carolinians — of which a significant number would be Black — but it would also create a path forward to ensuring affordable health care for a community that experiences devastating health disparities.**

Millions of North Carolinians need our hospital CEOs and leaders to embrace the values of equity, holistic care, and whole-person health.

We urge you to accept this innovative medical debt relief incentive program to address structural harms and disparities that deeply impact the health and wealth of Black North Carolinians.

Sincerely,

Abdul Hafeedh Bin Abdullah, Quality Life Blueprint – Sokoto House

Marcus Bass, NC Black Alliance

Dawn Blagrove, Emancipate NC

Dreama Caldwell, Down Home NC

Sharon C. Goodson, North Carolina Community Action Association

Dr. Eleanor Greene, Triad Women’s Center

Kathy Greggs, Fayetteville Police Accountability Community Taskforce

Veleria M. Levy, NC AIDS Action Network

Deborah Maxwell, North Carolina NAACP

Naomi Randolph-Hwesuhunu, Action NC

Reggie Shuford, NC Justice Center

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<sup>2</sup> NC Budget and Tax Center. *NC Budget & Tax Center Releases Analysis of New Poverty Data.*

<https://ncbudget.org/nc-budget-tax-center-releases-analysis-of-new-poverty-data/>

<sup>3</sup> NCDHHS, NC State Center for Health Statistics. *Statistics and Reports: Minority Health.*

<https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/minority.cfm>