

# Medicaid in North Carolina: An Overview

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## What Is Medicaid?

- Medicaid is a health insurance program for qualified low-income individuals, funded jointly by the federal and state governments.
- Every state, U.S. territory, and the District of Columbia have adopted Medicaid programs. In fiscal year 2020, Medicaid covered nearly 76.5 million people.
- The federal government requires states to cover certain services, including hospitalizations, physician visits, labs, x-rays, and drugs. However, each state may provide additional coverage and set their own eligibility requirements.
- Therefore, benefits and qualified recipients vary significantly from state to state.

## Who Qualifies for North Carolina Medicaid?

As of May 2021, 1.5 million North Carolinians were enrolled in Medicaid<sup>1</sup>. Contrary to popular belief, **low income alone does not qualify people for Medicaid in North Carolina.**

- To qualify financially, a family of four must earn less than the federal poverty level, which in 2021 is \$26,500/year for a family of four or \$12,880 for an individual.
- A person must also be a U.S. citizen, live in North Carolina, and have a Social Security number.
- In addition, a person must fall into at least one of the following categories:
  - Age 65 or older
  - Blind or disabled
  - Under the age of 21
  - Pregnant
  - Certain low-income individuals and families
  - In need of long-term care

Anyone receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or State/County Special Assistance for the Aged or Disabled is automatically eligible.

## What Services Does Medicaid Cover in North Carolina?

The NC Medicaid program covers a wide variety of services, including:

- Physicians
- Hospitals
- Laboratory testing
- Behavioral health services, such as mental health care and drug rehabilitation
- Prescription drugs and medical equipment

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, in 1997 Congress enacted the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which all states have adopted, that covers children where income is too high to qualify for Medicaid but the family still cannot afford health insurance. CHIP is called NC Health Choice in North Carolina.

## What Is the Difference Between Medicare and Medicaid?

While their names are similar and both were enacted in 1965, Medicare and Medicaid are quite distinct, as shown in the following table:

	<b>Medicare</b>	<b>Medicaid</b>
<b>Who's eligible?</b>	Those who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Age 65 and older</li><li>• Disabled</li><li>• Suffering from end-stage renal disease</li></ul>	Qualified individuals who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Age 65 or older</li><li>• Blind or disabled</li><li>• Under the age of 21</li><li>• Pregnant</li><li>• Certain low-income individuals and families</li><li>• In need of long-term care</li></ul>
<b>How many are covered in the U.S.?</b>	62.8 million (calendar year 2020)	76.5 million (fiscal year 2020)
<b>Who runs it?</b>	Federal government	States
<b>Who pays for it?</b>	Federal government	Federal/state governments
<b>What kind of insurance is it?</b>	Fee-for-service	As of July 1, 2021, NC Medicaid follows a managed care model. All Medicaid beneficiaries are required to choose a primary care physician and a managed care plan, operated by one of six private insurance companies. The plans, which provide identical services as required by the state, pay for the services provided.

Certain people age 65 or over can qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid.

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The League of Women Voters believes the U.S. health care system should provide a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost to all U.S. residents. For further information about Medicaid in North Carolina, see [LWV-Wake: Healthcare](#).