



MAHEC CEO Dr. William Hathaway Delivers Opening Remarks at the WNC Health Policy Initiative 2024 Legislative Caucus

March 15, 2024 – UNC Asheville

On March 15, 2024, UNC Asheville’s WNC Health Policy Initiative, together with MAHEC and the Dogwood Health Trust, hosted the second annual Health and Healthcare Legislative Caucus on the campus of UNC Asheville.

This annual event brings together members of the NC General Assembly, individuals working in policy development and advocacy, regional health and healthcare leaders, and community service organizations to learn about key health policy priorities for Western North Carolinians, connect with one another, and share their own questions and insights surrounding these issues.

This year’s event focused on current and future upstream solutions to reduce costs, improve health outcomes, expand economic opportunities, and strengthen systems related to health and healthcare in WNC. In particular, panels addressed the impacts, opportunities, and challenges relating to North Carolina’s recent Medicaid expansion along with the unique needs of the health/healthcare workforce in WNC.

The event also featured a spotlight on Impact Health/WNC Healthy Opportunities Pilot (HOP), a Medicaid innovation program that funds support for non-medical social needs (food, housing, transportation and safe family/violence prevention) to eligible members, as a model for the future of upstream/prevention-focused health and healthcare in NC and beyond.

In addition to health and healthcare leadership from across WNC, eight NC General Assembly members were in attendance at this year’s event: WNC Health Policy Initiative Expert-in-Residence Senator Ralph Hise; Senators Julie Mayfield and Warren Daniel; and Representatives Eric Ager, Lindsey Prather, Mark Pless, Mike Clampitt, and Donny Lambeth.

Opening remarks were delivered by Kimberly van Noort, PhD (Chancellor of UNC Asheville), William Hathaway, MD (CEO of MAHEC – *see transcript below*) and John F.A.V. (Jack) Cecil, MIB (President of Biltmore Farms and Board Chair of the Dogwood Health Trust). The event emcee was Dionne Greenlee-Jones, MPA, Senior Director of Innovation & Equity Development of Impact Health (network lead for the WNC HOP).

In his opening comments, Jack Cecil summed up the day’s intention: “We’ve focused here on health because it [is] so important. We need to focus on advocacy and policy changes that complement the work that we do, because we’re all in this together...it’s a collective opportunity and a collective responsibility for everyone in this room.”

[Go here](#) to access event papers, panel bios and other resources. A transcript of Dr. William Hathaway’s opening remarks follows.

Transcript of MAHEC CEO Dr. William Hathaway's opening remarks

[View video here.](#)

It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of MAHEC and in partnership with UNC Asheville and Dogwood Health Trust.

MAHEC has long considered itself a collaborator with people in the region, and to see all of our fellow collaborators represented in some way, shape, or form here is really a privilege. I'm pleased to welcome the esteemed legislators who are with us and other guests to what is our second annual Western North Carolina Health Policy initiative [Legislative Caucus].

Your engagement and participation are profoundly appreciated, especially as MAHEC this year celebrates its 50th anniversary. In 1974, we welcomed our first class of four Family Medicine residents, and today is Residents Match day and we are welcoming 93 new residents who will join us in June in a wide variety of disciplines.

Since our inception in 1974, we have striven to be at the forefront of addressing the health needs of our community, with a focus on the underserved and rural populations. Our dedication to training, research, and delivering innovative health care practices is driven by a vision of equitable health care for all and equitable access for all. Your legislative support and the support of others in the community has been a cornerstone of our ability to grow and influence these efforts, and we're greatly appreciative.

Our educational programs stand as a testament to our commitment to preparing healthcare professionals who embody compassion, competence, and a deep commitment to community service. Through residency programs and continuing education, and in our affiliation with the UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, and the schools of Dentistry, Public Health, Pharmacy and Medicine, we are proud to cultivate a workforce that is ready to face the evolving health challenges of our times.

Since MAHEC's inception in 1974, over 50% of our physician graduates have stayed in the state of North Carolina, and 80% of those have stayed in Western North Carolina, with each physician who enters a community contributing overall over two million dollars annually to the economic growth of that community. We have not only a wellness benefit, but an economic benefit in addition.

In addition to education and workforce development, community outreach and direct patient care remain at the core of what we do, providing comprehensive health services that span from Family Medicine to mental health support, and so much in between. We recently joined many colleagues in the room as a Federally Qualified Health Center look-alike about two years ago, and that demands that we focus on equitable care, access to care, and addressing the social determinants of health, which are so vital to keeping our community healthy.

This legislative caucus today presents a valuable opportunity for dialogue and collaboration as we look toward the future. We are eager to continue our partnership with each of you and especially the legislators (but not exclusively) and to build on our rich history of collaboration.

We want to be a collaborator. We want to work with everyone to improve the health of our region. Your support and advocacy not only fuel our progress, but also reinforce our shared commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those in Western North Carolina. Thank you.

About the WNC Health Policy Initiative:

The WNC Health Policy Initiative is co-hosted by the NC Center for Health and Wellness and MAHEC and is supported by the Dogwood Health Trust. It brings together policy makers, industry experts, clinical and public healthcare professionals, community leaders, researchers, and others engaged in regional health practice to discuss some of the most challenging issues related to improving the health of Western North Carolinians. To learn more, visit www.wnchealthpolicy.org/