



RESPONDING TO THE OPIOID AND SUBSTANCE USE CRISIS IN NORTH CAROLINA'S RURAL COASTAL COMMUNITIES

September 19, 2025

Carteret Community College Hospitality
and Culinary Arts Center
The Elizabeth & Doug Townsend Event Hall
3915 US-70
Morehead City, NC

About the Conference

North Carolina's rural coastal communities have been uniquely affected by the escalating opioid and substance use crisis, where limited access to care, limited treatment resources, and stigma present daily challenges for individuals and families. This conference brings together those on the front lines—local mayors, county sheriffs, peer support specialists, and policy makers—for a dynamic conversation grounded in lived experience, evidence-based solutions, and collaborative leadership.

Panel discussions will spotlight community-driven strategies that are making a difference. Attendees will gain insights from public officials championing change, peer support specialists providing resources and connection, and policy experts working to fund and implement sustainable interventions.

The keynote presentation will feature Kelly Crosbie, Director of the North Carolina Division of MH/DD/SUS who will provide an update on the current state of Substance Use and Mental Health in North Carolina.

This empowering conference brings together cutting-edge approaches in treatment, progressive law enforcement strategies, grassroots recovery efforts, and impactful policy discussions. Attendees will engage in meaningful connections and collaborative conversations aimed at tackling the opioid and substance use crisis in eastern North Carolina. Together, we'll reimagine the journey of addiction—from despair to hope, health, and healing.

This conference is being jointly provided by Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina and Eastern AHEC. Hope Mission is a non-profit organization serving 15 counties in eastern North Carolina by providing food, shelter, emergency financial assistance, support, mentoring and counselling for anyone with a substance use issue. Their mission is to address the needs of poverty, homelessness, and substance use by providing a sense of belonging and hope.

Agenda

8:00 a.m. CHECK-IN

Continental Breakfast and Networking

9:00 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

John Sotirkys, CEO, Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina
Senator Norm Sanderson, NC Senate District 2

9:30 a.m. Assessing the State of Substance Use and Mental Health Crisis in North Carolina

Kelly Crosbie, MSW, LCSW,
Director, North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services



10:00 a.m. Promising Strategies: What is Working at the City and County Level

North Carolina Rural and Coastal Town Mayor's Panel

Facilitator: Michelle Laws, PhD
Mayor E. Kirk Rivers, Elizabeth City
Mayor Sharon Harker, Beaufort
Mayor Jeffrey Odham, New Bern
Mayor Gerald Jones, Morehead City

11:00 a.m. BREAK

11:15 a.m. Responsive Law Enforcement: How Law Enforcement is Helping to Drive Recovery Solutions

Panel of North Carolina Sheriff's

Facilitator: Sheriff Charles Blackwood, Orange County
Sheriff Ruffin, Bertie County; Sheriff Hughes, Craven County; Sheriff Thomas, Onslow County
Sheriff Buck, Carteret County; Shatarra Williams, Rehabilitation and Reentry Coordinator for the Eastern Region, Department of Adult Corrections

12:15 p.m. LUNCH (provided)

Networking

1:00 p.m. The Synergy Between Providers and Policy Leaders: Best Practices and Promising Strategies

Facilitator: Michelle Laws, PhD
Maggie Sauer, MHA, Director, Office of Rural Health, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Christie Edwards, MS, MBA, Chief Operating Officer, Trillium Health Resources
DeDe Severino, MA, Assistant Director, Addictions and Management Operations Team, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Ryan Estes, MBA, LCSW, LCAS, CCS, Chief Operations Officer, Coastal Horizons

2:00 p.m. Nothing About Us, Without Us

Reflections from Peer Support Specialists

Facilitator: Jamie Tripp, Director of Recovery Services, Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina
Benjamin Horton, Director of Outreach, Veteran Services of the Carolinas, Asheville Buncombe Christian Ministries
Hayes Houston, Peer Support Specialist, Outreach Specialist, Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina
Melissa Taylor, Peer Support Specialist, Outreach Specialist, Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina
Guy Murrell, Program Director, Loaves and Fishes Counseling

3:00 p.m. Closing Remarks and Benediction

Recognition and Celebration of Summer Peers On The Beach Peer Support Specialists
Door Prizes

John Sotirkys, CEO, Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina
Pastor Gene McLendon, CEO Emeritus, Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina

3:30 p.m. ADJOURNMENT

Objectives

- Showcase successful local initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by rural coastal communities
- Discuss best practices to improve access to behavioral health services, treatment, and harm reduction programs
- Strengthen partnerships and align strategies to expand prevention and recovery efforts in coastal communities

Target Audience

- Substance Use Clinicians
- Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselors
- Marriage and Family Therapists
- Peer Support Specialists
- Community Health Workers
- Program Administrators and Directors
- Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Personnel
- Policy Makers
- Advocates
- Case managers
- Psychotherapists
- Counselors
- Social Workers
- Health Educators
- All interested behavioral health professionals
- All those interested in addressing the opioid and substance use crisis in rural coastal communities

Credit

Contact Hours

Certificates reflecting 5.0 contact hours of education will be awarded at the completion of the program.

Substance Abuse Counselor Credit (SAC)

Application has been made to the North Carolina Addictions Specialist Professional Practice Board for up to 5.0 hours of Substance Abuse General Skill Building hours.

Registration Information

Please register early to avoid disappointment as seating is limited.

Registration is online only at www.easternahec.net and requires a current MyAHEC account. Registration will close the morning of the program.

Registration Fee: \$75.00

The registration fee includes credit, continental breakfast, and lunch.

NC AHEC Photo Policy

Attendance at this activity grants permission for Eastern AHEC to use any photographs, audio, video, or other images from this activity for promotional or educational purposes. Please notify an AHEC staff member if you have concerns.

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Eastern AHEC Cancellation Policy

- Cancellations must be in writing (easternahec@ecu.edu).
- Registrants canceling between two weeks and two full business days prior to the first day of the event are refunded at 70% of the registration fee subject to a minimum \$25 cancellation fee.
- No refunds or credits will be given for cancellations received less than two full business days prior to the event.
- Cancellations greater than two weeks prior to the event will receive 100% refund.
- No vouchers will be issued in lieu of a refund.
- Transfers/substitute(s) welcome (notify in advance of the program).

Americans with Disabilities Act



Individuals requesting accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should contact the ADA coordinator at least five days prior to the event at 252-737-1018 / ada-coordinator@ecu.edu.

Handouts & Evaluations

Handouts will be available online only. One week prior to the program, registrants will receive a confirmation email with instructions to access handouts along with other program information.

Evaluations will be emailed after the program. Once the evaluation has been completed, your certificate will be available.

If you would like more information on the program, please contact Mental Health Education at **(252) 744-5215** or truesdell22@ecu.edu.

For questions about the venue or Hope Mission, please contact Michelle Laws at michelle@hopemissionnc.org or Jamie Tripp at jamie@hopemissionnc.org.