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NCCARE360: What We Learn from North Carolina’s Digital Health System

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NCCARE360

North Carolina launched the groundbreaking NCCARE360 in all 100 counties a week ago. Why did the new program launch in the middle of COVID-19? “We’re thinking about not just buying healthcare,” says Betsey Tilson, the North Carolina Health Director, “but buying health.”

What is NCCARE360?

It’s [a technological platform](#) that coordinates traditional medical organizations with other health-related organizations (housing, employment and other social services) to support what its designers [call](#) “whole-person care.” The platform comes from the partnered effort of the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services

and the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation (FHLI). To back up: the Foundation includes the [Unite Us Network](#), [United Way of NC](#) and [NC 2-1-1](#). Their leverage, alongside the state's health department, made NCCARE360 the first integrated health program of its kind. It had begun working in North Carolina as early as 2019 (a few counties at a time).

But how does the system work?

In practice, NCCARE360 serves the two crucial groups of healthcare: patients and providers. Patients, by calling 2-1-1, can access dedicated staff who can connect them with the resources they need. Remember how that includes places other than healthcare settings, like food, housing, employment, and transportation services?

That wide array comes from the way NCCARE360 serves healthcare providers. Its 2-1-1 number can help patients because its back-end network connects many health organizations, social services and community resources. Those connections streamline health referrals for patients, offer real-time messaging, track patients' progress, and share patient information securely.

For instance: you might call 2-1-1 to see where you can get immediate healthcare, if you don't have health insurance. But that call may become more than a visit to clinic near you: the navigator on the phone might also connect you with the financial help to purchase affordable insurance. And if you've also struggled to find work, your local employment assistance organizations could join the conversation too.

“NCCARE360 is a model for the nation,” says Unite Us Network Director Georgina Dukes. “It breaks down silos that create barriers to needed care and services – particularly in [rural communities](#) – and exacerbate health disparities.”

Unite Us Network posted this explainer video:

Video from [Unite Us Network](#)

NCCARE360 Expanded to Meet COVID-19 Health Needs

The NC Dept. of Health and the FHLI had originally planned to reach all North Carolina's counties in January 2021. But the unprecedented health crisis of COVID-19 added unprecedented urgency.

NCCARE360 reached all 100 counties of our state on July 1, 2020. The milestone purposely came about six months ahead of time. The North Carolina Medical Society [touted](#) the program's achievement: "NCCARE360 completed its statewide roll-out six months ahead of schedule, fast-tracking the expansion in response to COVID-19."

NC Health Secretary Dr. Mandy Cohen noted how the digital health system has become crucial in the widespread challenges of the pandemic. "Having this critical infrastructure in place puts our state in a stronger position to address the devastating impact COVID-19 is having on so many residents and to help us recover," she said.

What Can You Learn from the Program's Launch?

What jumps out first? The team and organizations behind NCCARE360 shaved six entire months off their initial statewide start date, thanks to COVID-19. That urgency seemed to enable greater collaboration between all the groups and resources across the state.

Remember: the three groups under FHLI joined with countless community organizations in each community where the program has arrived (100 counties in all). From the look of the roll-out and the way its leaders described the process, the pandemic encouraged tight teamwork of various actors around one product. That product (the technological platform for referrals, data storage and resource connection) gave the right innovation to the right moment. Do your products or services give that same help right now? Could they?

But the NCCARE360 network also serves both patients and providers, a two-sided approach that increases its value. Clients can receive more help from health groups which face fewer barriers. Providers and social workers can give quicker help because they face fewer barriers. The technology assisted both stakeholders at once, which made the network more essential to each. Could your business do the same?

Make sure to keep learning about [the business strategies](#) you might need to weather COVID-19. What if all you needed was a small pivot in your existing practices?

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Though he writes and edits media and health news for NCND, his background includes substance abuse articles, medical marketing advice and public relations campaigns for a variety of brands. You can follow Kevin at @KLaTorre_Writer.

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