ECHO *(Enhancing Collaborative Health Options & Opportunities) through* HOPE *(Hope and Healing Opportunities with Proactive & Preventive Education)*

MESSAGE FROM MZCD STAFF



Dr. Ronald Caldwell, Kontia Grant, Sapphire De'Bellott, and Barbara Anderson.

Health Problems Related to Preterm Birth

Important growth happens throughout pregnancy, including in the final months and weeks. For example, the brain, lungs, and liver need the final weeks of pregnancy to fully develop. Unless there is a medical need, delivery should not be scheduled before 39 weeks of pregnancy.

Babies born too early (especially before 32 weeks) have higher rates of death and disability. In 2022, preterm birth and low birth weight accounted for about 14.0% of infant deaths (deaths before 1 year of age).

Babies who survive may have breathing problems, feeding difficulties, cerebral palsy, developmental delay, vision problems, and hearing problems. Preterm births may also take an emotional toll and be a financial burden for families.

Source: CDC

NATIONAL DIABETES MONTH

Preventing or Managing Diabetes

November is National Diabetes Month, a time to raise awareness about diabetes and the importance of preventing related health problems. This year's focus is on taking action to reduce the risk of complications and improve long-term health.

Diabetes occurs when blood glucose, or blood sugar, is too high. About 38 million Americans, including adults and children, live with diabetes. Over time, the disease can damage the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and heart and is linked to certain cancers.

People are at greater risk for type 2 diabetes if they are overweight, age 35 or older, physically inactive, have prediabetes, or have a family history of the disease. Risk is also higher among African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic or Latino, and Pacific Islander populations.

Managing blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol can help prevent serious health problems. Healthy eating, regular physical activity, enough sleep, taking medications as prescribed, maintaining a healthy weight, and caring for mental health all play important roles. Working with health care professionals and adopting healthier habits can improve quality of life and overall well-being.

Source: National Institutes of Health

Prematurity Awareness Month

Preterm birth is when a baby is born too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy have been completed. In 2022, preterm birth affected about 1 of every 10 infants born in the United States.

Many times, we do not know what causes women to deliver their babies early. Several factors may increase the likelihood that a woman could deliver early.



In the US, 1 in 10 babies is born prematurely.

Factors Associated with Preterm Birth

Demographic or Social Characteristics*

- Teens.
- Women who become pregnant over age 35.
- Black women.
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women.
- American Indian or Alaska Native women.
- Women with lower incomes.
- Women experiencing stress.

Pregnancy and Medical Conditions

- Women who have had a prior preterm birth.
- Women with an infection, including Covid-19.
- ... Women carrying more than one baby (twins, triplets, or more).
- Women with high blood pressure conditions during pregnancy.

Behavioral Characteristics

- Women who use tobacco.
- Women who use drugs.

Talk with your doctor about signs of preterm labor and what to do.

**Race is used to describe and categorize groups of people by physical characteristics. It is not a biological driver of differences in preterm birth.*

Source: CDC

A Lifetime of Caring

Project NAF Honors Denise Duckett's Legacy of Service

This year, Project NAF is honoring Denise Duckett, a longtime care manager and social worker whose nearly four decades of service have helped countless families navigate some of life's most difficult challenges.



Denise Duckett, Care Manager, Buncombe County HHS

Duckett currently serves as a Care Manager with Buncombe County Health and Human Services, where she has spent much of her career connecting individuals and families with essential health, social, and community resources. Her work has been guided by a simple belief: everyone deserves access to the support they need to live healthy and stable lives.

A graduate of Warren Wilson College, Duckett has earned a reputation as a trusted advocate throughout Western North Carolina. In 2026, she received the Mountain Area Health Education Center Development Zone Corporation's Excellence in Community Service and Certificate of Impact Award, recognizing her longstanding commitment to community well-being.

Her connection to Project NAF extends beyond her day-to-day work. As a member of the organization's Community Advisory Board, she helps guide efforts to improve health outcomes and strengthen partnerships across the region.

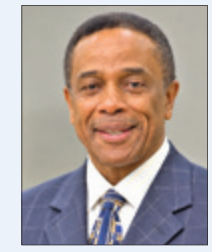
For 38 years, Duckett has worked in care management and care coordination, focusing on maternal health, public health, and services for adolescents. During that time, she built lasting relationships with healthcare providers, social service agencies, and community organizations. For the past 34 years, she has worked closely with MAHEC OB/GYN providers and staff while maintaining a broad network of professional partnerships that benefit families across the region.

Duckett began her career in social services at Eliada Homes in Asheville, where she served in several leadership roles from 1988 to 1992. In 1992, she became the inaugural social worker for the Buncombe County Health Department's "Baby Love" program, a pioneering maternal and child health initiative. Hired by and under the supervision of Belinda K. Grant, she helped establish services for pregnant women and families facing economic, health, and social challenges. Over the years, she continued that work through several organizations, including Community Care of Western North Carolina, before returning to Buncombe County Health and Human Services in 2019.

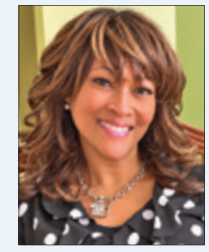
Throughout her career, colleagues and clients have known Duckett as someone who works tirelessly to connect people with the resources they need. As the current care management program concludes and retirement approaches, she will spend her final months working with Buncombe County Social Services.

Project NAF's recognition of Denise Duckett honors a lifetime of service that has strengthened families, supported mothers and children, and expanded access to care across Western North Carolina. Her legacy lives on in the people, partnerships, and communities she has helped build.

MOUNT ZION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, INC.



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in appreciation of past services

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Project Empower

Education Means Power – in collaboration with community partners to impact the opioid crisis.

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