

# FALL

## COMMUNITY FORUM

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2025  
9:00AM-12:00PM

## PROGRAM

**9:00AM** Welcome

**9:10AM** State of Access to Care Presentation + Q&A



**NATALIE MARLES**  
NC Benefits Navigator  
Program Manager & Paralegal  
Advocate



**JULIEANNE TAYLOR**  
Director of the Family  
Support & Health Care  
Program

**9:45AM** Keynote Speaker: Her Story and Violence Prevention



**QUANEKA FALLS, MHA**  
Founder  
Connecting the Gap

**10:15AM** Break

**10:30AM** Human Trafficking Presentation + Q&A



**KARLA HIGGINBOTHAM, MD**  
Board-certified Family Physician

**11:05AM** Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Presentation + Q&A



**ERICKA ELLIS-STEWART**  
Deputy Director  
Mental Health America of Central Carolinas

**11:35AM** Closing Remarks and Lunch

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## QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

1. What was the most interesting statistic/data point that you learned?
2. What is something that inspired you?
3. Name something you learned that you would share with others.
4. What is something you didn't expect to learn?
5. Name something you learned that you could apply to your work/role.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOW DID WE DO? PLEASE COMPLETE OUR SURVEY TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE!**

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## MEET THE SPEAKERS



**NATALIE MARLES**

Natalie Marles is the NC Benefits Navigator Program Manager and a Paralegal Advocate with the NC Benefits Navigator Program at Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy. Drawing on her personal experience as a Latina and immigrant, Natalie is passionate about helping others navigate healthcare access and public benefits in North Carolina. Since joining the Advocacy Center in 2016, she has led a dedicated team that supports individuals and families in seeking to improve their quality of life through education, access to healthcare, and public benefits.

Natalie holds a Paralegal Certification from Charlotte School of Law and a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, magna cum laude, from ECPI University. A registered nurse trained in Colombia. Her leadership and advocacy have earned her recognition, including the 2019 Woman of Achievement Emerging Leader Award from YWCA Central Carolinas. Beyond her professional work, Natalie is deeply involved in her community, serving as Co-Founder and the Board of Director Chair for El Puente Hispano, and in the past served as Chair of Enlace's Board of Directors, and a member of the Governor's Advisory Council on Hispanic/Latino Affairs.



**JULIEANNE TAYLOR**

Julieanne Taylor is Director of the Family Support & Health Care Program at the Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy. In her 11 years with the Advocacy Center, Julieanne has provided legal representation to low income families in several public benefits programs including Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP, Social Security, SSI, TANF, and child care subsidies. Julieanne has participated in litigation against North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services to ensure Medicaid beneficiaries are not illegally terminated through the redetermination process; successfully advocated for the expansion of the Breast & Cervical Cancer Medicaid program in North Carolina; and was a key player in creating and implementing the North Carolina Medicaid Ombudsman, a statewide resource to help Medicaid beneficiaries to better understand and navigate their health care. In her time at the Advocacy Center, Julieanne has managed the Health Insurance Navigator Program and was the lead for the Advocacy Center's Ombudsman team. Julieanne continues to provide direct legal representation for clients, engages in systemic advocacy around health care access, and supervises a team of advocates representing clients in their benefits appeals.

Julieanne previously served as a member of the Medlink of Mecklenburg executive committee, as secretary, and has been a member of Medlink for 10 years.

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**QUANEKA FALLS, MHA**

Quaneka Falls is a dedicated public health leader, grief advocate, and community connector based in Charlotte, North Carolina. With over 14 years of experience serving Mecklenburg County, she currently works as a Health Program Supervisor with the Office of Violence Prevention, where she leads community-based initiatives focused on reducing violence and promoting healing across neighborhoods.

As the founder of Connecting the Gap, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Quaneka empowers youth and young adults who have experienced the death of a parent by connecting families to mental health, economic, and relational support. Her lived experience as a survivor of parental loss drives her passion for creating safe spaces for grief, healing, and resilience.

Quaneka holds a Bachelor's degree in Community Health Education from the University of North Carolina Wilmington and a Master's in Healthcare Administration. A proud mother of two toddlers, she enjoys spending time outdoors and creating meaningful experiences with her family.



**KARLA HIGGINBOTHAM, MD**

Dr. Karla Higginbotham is a board-certified family physician with multifaceted experience spanning clinical practice, medical education, and corporate healthcare. As a third-generation physician, she carries forward a legacy of healing while blazing a modern path in health empowerment. Dr. Higginbotham strives to empower patients and communities to understand their health and manage chronic conditions through evidence-based lifestyle choices. She firmly believes that while pharmacologic treatments have an essential role, lifestyle medicine should be the cornerstone of care for many of today's most common and debilitating illnesses. Through relatable, culturally relevant storytelling, she makes complex medical concepts accessible and inspires action across diverse audiences. Dr. Higginbotham's mission is to equip individuals and organizations with the knowledge and tools to make informed, practical decisions that improve health outcomes and, when possible, reduce reliance on medications.

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**ERICKA ELLIS-STEWART**

Ericka Ellis-Stewart is a passionate advocate for public education, environmental justice, and mental health. As the Deputy Director of Mental Health America of Central Carolinas (MHA-CC), she serves as a senior leader overseeing the organization's daily operations and guiding its efforts to promote mental wellness, advance community awareness, and influence public policy.

With more than 25 years of nonprofit leadership, including seven prior years of service with MHA, Ericka has led several Charlotte-based organizations, including Right Moves for Youth, the Johnston YMCA, and the Charlotte CROP Hunger Walk. She also served eight years as an at-large member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, where she worked to expand educational access and equity.

A dedicated community leader, Ericka has held roles on the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) national steering committee and has served for 7 years on the Clean Air Carolinas Board of Directors, including 3 years as board president. She currently serves on the Community Collaborative Board for CA-LINC, a culturally adapted suicide prevention initiative for Black youth.

In 2019, Ericka was honored as Mental Health Advocate of the Year by the Black Mental Health Symposium. She is also a Suicide Prevention Master Trainer with the QPR Institute, a certified yoga instructor, and a Reiki practitioner—blending her leadership and healing practices to foster wellness in others.

A proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and a devoted mother of two, Ericka earned her undergraduate degree from Queens University of Charlotte, where she later served as president of the Alumni Association and as a member of the Board of Trustees. She is currently pursuing her Master of Social Work degree at UNC Charlotte, continuing her lifelong commitment to learning, service, and community transformation.