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ACA Health Insurance Rates Released for 2026

Commissioner Causey urges North Carolinians to compare options early

North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey has announced the approved health insurance rates for the 2026 Affordable Care Act (ACA) plans. For individuals with ACA coverage, the average rate will increase by nearly 28.6 percent in 2026. Individual policy rate changes will range from 16.88 percent to 36.4 percent, while small group policies will rise between 12.66 percent and 17.5 percent.

Open enrollment for 2026 ACA policies runs from November 1, 2025, through January 15, 2026. Those who enroll by December 15, 2025, will have coverage beginning January 1, 2026. Enrollments completed after December 15 will take effect February 1, 2026.

“I ask people purchasing ACA health insurance to go to [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) and find which plan works best for you,” Commissioner Causey said. “Increased costs in healthcare as well as the expiration of federal subsidies result in premiums going up for many on the individual market. It’s more important than ever to begin researching your health insurance options early.”

In addition to ACA Marketplace plans, Commissioner Causey encourages North Carolinians to consider other coverage options:

- Job-based coverage: If your employer offers health benefits, you may qualify to enroll through your workplace, even if you declined coverage in the past. You may also be eligible through your spouse’s employer or, if under age 26, through your parents’ employer.
- Private insurance: Individuals may purchase coverage through an agent, broker, or directly from an insurance company. Some private plans may cost less than ACA plans but should be reviewed carefully to ensure adequate coverage.
- Student health plans: Those under 30 and enrolled in college or university may qualify for a student health plan. Contact your school for more information.

“Whatever you do, it is important to you and everyone to maintain health insurance,” Causey said.

For assistance navigating health insurance options, contact the North Carolina Department of Insurance consumer specialists at 855-408-1212, weekday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You may also use the Health Insurance Shopping Tool offered by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners at naic.org/shopping-tool.

To view the approved 2026 ACA rate filings, visit: www.ncdoi.gov/aca-rate-filings.

Anson County Residents Can Gain New Skills For Free!

SPCC Webinar Nov. 6. Learn about earning a degree for little to no cost.

South Piedmont Community College is offering Anson County residents a chance to learn about their exclusive scholarship opportunity, the Anson Advantage. A free webinar will take place on Thursday, November 6, at 6:00 p.m. During the event, Anson County residents will learn how they can earn a college degree or workforce certification at little to no cost through the Anson Advantage program.

Register for the event at spcc.edu/ansonadvantage. Attendees of the event will be entered to win a \$50 gift card.

These programs can be completed in less than a year and lead directly to jobs in high-demand fields such as: Construction • Early Childhood Education • Healthcare • Manufacturing • Truck Driving • Welding • And more!

The Anson Advantage is a scholarship program created exclusively for Anson County residents. It helps make higher education more accessible by eliminating or significantly reducing the cost of earning a college degree or completing an in-demand workforce certifications at South Piedmont Community College.

“Live in Anson County? Your college education at South Piedmont could be tuition-free. The Anson Advantage program covers tuition and fees for eligible students, removing the financial burden so you can focus on your future. Whether you’re graduating high school or changing careers, Anson Advantage makes your goals achievable,” said Vice President of Student Services Dr. JJ Evans.

The webinar will provide details on who qualifies for the Anson Advantage, which academic and workforce programs are covered, and how to apply. Participants will also have an opportunity to ask questions and connect directly with college representatives.

South Piedmont created the Anson Advantage to expand access to higher education and strengthen the local workforce by removing financial barriers for Anson County residents. Whether students are pursuing a degree, a short-term workforce credential, or a career change, the program makes it possible to start or continue their education with minimal out-of-pocket costs.

For more information about Anson Advantage visit spcc.edu/ansonadvantage.

Winterville Brings Frosty Fun to Discovery Place Kids-Rockingham

Discovery Place Kids-Rockingham is trading in flip-flops for fuzzy socks as the Museum transforms into Winterville, a festive, hands-on holiday adventure running November 18 through December 29.

Kids can glide across a sock skating rink, hurl safe indoor “snowballs,” and build frosty creations in “ice” block zones. Arctic animal encounters, winter-themed science shows, and plenty of twinkling decorations make every corner feel merry and bright.

“Winterville is a place where families can celebrate the magic of the season and learn through play,” said Angela Watkins, Museum Director.

In December, the fun gets even cooler with special programs exploring igloo engineering, the Northern Lights, and snowflake science.

Admission: Included with museum entry and free for members.

Location: Discovery Place Kids-Rockingham, 223 E. Washington St., Rockingham.

Bundle up your curiosity - winter is coming to Rockingham, and it’s snow much fun you won’t want to miss! dpkidsrockingham.org

NCDMV Launches Online Upgrade for Teen Drivers from Level 2 to Level 3

Finally, something teens can do online that parents actually approve of

The North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles (NCDMV) has rolled out a new online option that lets eligible teen drivers upgrade from a Level 2 Limited Provisional License to a Level 3 Full Provisional License - all without the agony of waiting in line at the DMV. Thanks to this digital miracle, parents can now sip coffee in peace instead of spending an afternoon watching the “Now Serving” numbers creep by at a glacial pace.

Under the new process, teens who have held their Level 2 license for at least six months with no moving violations can skip the office visit and complete everything online. It’s a simple two-step process: first, a parent or guardian logs in to the NCDMV’s payment portal, enters their information, and gives consent. Then the teen gets an email notification — yes, the same inbox that’s usually filled with memes and TikTok updates — and completes the upgrade. A temporary driving certificate is issued instantly, good until the shiny new Level 3 license arrives in the mail.

“Parents and teen drivers no longer have to take time off work or school for a simple upgrade. It’s now available at their fingertips online,” said NCDMV Commissioner Paul Tine. “This builds on our recent online renewal expansions enabled by Senate Bill 245 and keeps us moving toward becoming an exceptional customer service organization.”

The move follows NCDMV’s October launches of online renewals for non-REAL ID and REAL ID licenses, which racked up over 32,000 transactions in just four weeks — proof that people really will go to the DMV if they don’t have to actually go to the DMV.

Coming soon: consecutive online renewals for state ID cards, the final piece of Senate Bill 245, signed into law by Governor Josh Stein on September 30. Altogether, these upgrades are expected to allow 400,000 more transactions each year without anyone needing to pack snacks for the DMV line.

Note: At age 18, teen drivers can level up again — to a regular Class C license - all online, with zero waiting room boredom and no clipboard required.

Eastview Cemetery Welcomes Donations, Volunteers

Because even cemeteries need a little life in their upkeep

Eastview Cemetery on Old Lilesville Road in Wadesboro is looking better these days - thanks to some new energy, fresh paint, and a few good-hearted volunteers who aren’t afraid of a little ghostly company. Trustee Ken Caulder reports that entrances, walls, and handrails have all been pressure washed and painted, fallen trees cleared, and lawn care improved under groundskeeper Adam Pope, who’s keeping things tidy on a regular schedule.

Trustees are now eyeing bigger projects - including a new sign reading “Eastview Cemetery Circa 1805” and long-needed repairs to the cemetery’s roads. To make it all happen, they’re asking for donations from anyone with family buried there (or just a soft spot for historic Wadesboro landmarks).

“Every bit helps,” says Caulder, who notes that even the smallest contribution adds up to big improvements. Donations can be sent to Eastview Cemetery Fund, P.O. Box 274, Wadesboro, NC 28170, or by contacting Leavitt Funeral Home at 704-694-2524.

So if you want to support a local landmark that’s truly standing the test of time, Eastview Cemetery would be eternally grateful.