



## Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - April 30, 2024

Healthy and Connected is the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' (SCDHHS) member e-newsletter. Healthy and Connected features tips and tools to help you and your loved ones connect to resources and live healthier lives.

### Recognizing Signs of Mental Illness



Mental health disorders cover a wide range of conditions. These disorders can affect your mood, thinking and actions. Lots of people may have mental health concerns. But when there are signs or symptoms that cause stress and your ability to live a normal life, this may be a sign of mental illness. May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Trying to recognize the signs of a mental illness isn't always easy. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has

some common signs to look out for:

- Lots of worrying or fear
- Feeling very sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems learning
- Extreme mood changes
- Strong feelings of anger
- Avoiding friends or social activities
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Low energy

- Changes in eating habits like lack of appetite
- Overusing drugs or alcohol
- Thinking about suicide
- A serious fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

Learning about mental health is important. It can help you detect signs of mental illness in yourself or others. Don't be afraid to reach out if you or someone you know needs help. Read more about these signs on NAMI's [website](#). If you or someone you know is in a crisis, call or text 988 for help.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) [recently awarded](#) grants to 13 hospitals across the state. These grants will fund building specialized hospital-based emergency departments focused on behavioral health crises. These new units will help provide care right away to those experiencing a mental health and/or substance use emergency. Some of these units have already opened. All 13 are expected to open by 2026.

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## Identifying Symptoms of Autism

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects a person's behavior and ability to communicate and learn. About [1 in 36](#) children are diagnosed with ASD. It occurs in all racial and ethnic groups. It is more common in boys than girls. ASD is a spectrum disorder. This means there are many differences in the type and intensity of symptoms.

It is important for children to be diagnosed early with ASD. They can be diagnosed as soon as their 18-month checkup. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), there are several symptoms in babies that can be signs of ASD for parents to watch:

- Can't respond with a smile or happy expression by six months
- Doesn't mimic sounds or expressions by nine months
- No babbling or cooing by 12 months
- Doesn't make gestures like pointing or waving by 14 months
- Can't say single words at 16 months
- Make-believe play or pretending does not happen by 18 months
- Does not use two-word phrases by 24 months

April is World Autism Month. Healthy Connections Medicaid has many resources for understanding ASD. Those resources can be found [here](#). ASD services are covered for Healthy Connections Medicaid members. The BabyNet program also screens all

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toddlers for ASD from 18 to 24 months. For details on how to refer a child to BabyNet, click [here](#).

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## The Importance of Social Activity as We Age

Older Americans Month is celebrated in May. This year's theme is "Powered by Connection." As we get older, social connections and meaningful relationships can have a positive impact on our health and well-being.

Some older people may find themselves spending more time at home alone. Being lonely or isolated is not good for your overall health. It can lead to feelings of depression or anxiety. According to the National Institute on Aging, being social as an older adult can be helpful to your body and mind. Many older adults with an active lifestyle are happier, have a longer lifespan and may improve their thinking skills.



If you are looking for ways to become more active as an older adult, here are some ideas from the [National Institute on Aging](#):

1. Connect with friends and family. Try playing cards in person or online with friends. Join a group with people who like the same hobby as you, such as birdwatching, walking or painting.
  2. Learn something new. Get in touch with your local library. Many offer free or low-cost classes for older adults. Join a book club. Try a new physical activity.
  3. Become active in your community. Volunteer at a local school, library, museum or animal shelter. Help with gardening at a nearby park. Teach one of your skills like knitting, baking or chess to a new generation.
  4. Get moving. Take a walk around your neighborhood or go on a nature trail. Go dancing with friends or family. Teach your grandkids a game you played as a child.
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Healthy Connections Medicaid offers an optional service for members 55 and older. The Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) helps people meet their healthcare needs in the community instead of going to a nursing home. The team of health professionals through PACE work with the older adult and their family to make sure they get the care they need. PACE is offered in eight counties in the state at this time. Learn more about the program and its criteria on the SCDHHS [website](#).

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## Watching for Signs of Alzheimer's

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness month. Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that affects a person's memory and behavior. It is a progressive disease that worsens over time. Knowing the early signs and getting diagnosed can help slow the progress of the disease.

According to the [Alzheimer's Association](#), there are certain signs to be aware of:

- Forgetting newly learned information such as dates or names
- Having difficulty working with numbers or following plans
- Finding it hard to complete daily tasks like driving to familiar areas
- Getting confused with the time or day of the week
- Trouble reading
- Difficulty following a conversation
- Misplacing things
- A decrease in judgment dealing with things like money
- Withdrawing from social activities
- Changes in personality and mood swings

If you notice these signs in yourself or a loved one, it is important to see a doctor. There is no cure for Alzheimer's at this time. But there are several drugs that slow down the progress of it if caught early. They are covered by Healthy Connections Medicaid for those who qualify.

Although Alzheimer's can be a scary disease, there are several resources to help you learn more. The South Carolina Department on Aging offers education through webinars and training, so you don't feel alone. Find out more [here](#).

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## Health Risks of Excessive Drinking



Drinking too much alcohol can severely harm your health. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) found excessive alcohol use led to about 178,000 deaths in the U.S. from 2020-2021. There are different types of excessive drinking. It can mean binge drinking or drinking a lot. It can also mean drinking while pregnant or younger than 21.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. Adults should be aware of how much alcohol they drink. It's important to know the health risks drinking too much can cause.

Short-term health risks:

1. Injuries like car crashes, falls, drowning and burns
2. Self-harm or harming others
3. Alcohol poisoning
4. Risky behaviors like unprotected sex
5. Miscarriage and stillbirth among pregnant women

Long-term health risks:

1. High blood pressure, heart disease or stroke
2. Different types of cancer including breast, mouth, throat and colon
3. A weak immune system
4. Learning and memory problems
5. Mental health problems like depression and anxiety
6. Social problems that could impact your family and job
7. Alcohol use disorders or alcohol dependence

Healthy Connections Medicaid provides access to prevention, treatment and recovery services for full-benefit members. A list of [treatment providers](#) across the state is on the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) [website](#).

[More About DAODAS](#)

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## Caring for South Carolina's Foster Children

May is National Foster Care Month. Foster care is the short-term care of children who can't safely stay at home with their family. They are placed in a foster home while their parents work with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) to resolve their problems. Kids in foster care range from birth to 18 years old. Many children are in foster care for just a little while. Some are waiting for adoption. They will need a family to give them a home until adulthood. The people who open their homes to these kids are called foster parents. They are special people who know the needs of children living in a troubled family.

Healthy Connections Medicaid, along with DSS and Select Health, are part of the Foster Care Affinity Group. Select Health is the Medicaid health plan for almost all foster children in the state. The group works to lessen the time it takes for a child to first see a doctor or dentist after they are placed in foster care. Many times, those children may have complex medical, mental health or developmental needs. It is key they are seen early and often to address these needs. The group helps to make sure the child and their families are supported during the move to foster care. South Carolina was one of 11 states chosen to participate in the Foster Care Affinity Group. The program is sponsored by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a foster parent, visit the [DSS website](#).

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## Keeping Your Family on a Healthy Track

Family Health and Fitness Day is Saturday, June 8. It is a great time to add healthy living habits into daily life. Often, it can be hard to get kids moving and eating right. Below are some ways to help your family get healthier.

### **New, healthy recipes**

Summer is the perfect time to start bringing in new fruits and veggies into family meals. ChangeSC provides healthy recipes that focus on using fruits and veggies. They also help find places for you to get fresh produce. You can find out more [here](#). Eating and cooking together helps make these habits last. Try to cook healthy meals at least once a week to get started on the right track.



### **Exercising outside**

Going outdoors for physical activity is a great way to boost your mood and health. Any time spent playing outside is a good idea, even if it's small activities. Some easy options for outside play include:

- Taking hikes or walks
- Going on a bike ride
- Playing tag
- Creating a slip-and-slide with a sprinkler
- Finding a park with a playground

Little changes will create lasting habits for kids. As a parent, you can show your kids just how important healthy choices are. Getting involved in these activities together will not just provide healthier choices, but great memories too.

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## New Way to Access Services at [Apply.scdhhs.gov](https://apply.scdhhs.gov)

South Carolina Healthy Connections Medicaid has a new way to log in to your account at [apply.scdhhs.gov](https://apply.scdhhs.gov). You will now need to [create an ID.me account](#) to log in. This will allow you to use more of our online help.

These online services include:

- Viewing notices
- Reviewing your Medicaid account info
- Reporting a change in circumstance. This includes a change in address, income, job, household size or marital status
- Saving an unfinished application to complete later

You can do some things on [apply.scdhhs.gov](https://apply.scdhhs.gov) without an ID.me account. These options include:

- Applying for Medicaid
- Submitting an annual review
- Checking your annual review status or date
- Verifying eligibility status
- Updating contact info
- Uploading requested documents

Your other login info will no longer work to access your online account. Any Medicaid application that was started but not submitted before Jan. 26, 2024, will not be available. You will need to fill out a new one. Info on this change is posted on [apply.scdhhs.gov](https://apply.scdhhs.gov).

Some other agencies, such as the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce, also use ID.me to access account info online. If you already have an ID.me account, you can log in with that info.

To learn more about making and logging into your online account with ID.me, please visit the [Getting Started](#) page of the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services website.

Thank you for reading Healthy and Connected. Follow SCDHHS on our Facebook and X pages for regular updates. You can also [view the Medicaid Member Handbook](#) on



SCDHHS' website to learn more about what is covered, where to go to ask questions and more.



[www.scdhhs.gov](http://www.scdhhs.gov)

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