



Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - Oct. 29, 2025

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.

Breast Cancer Risk Factors



Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer for women in South Carolina. Screenings and early detection have greatly helped improve long-term survival rates in the last few decades. Different people have different types of symptoms for breast cancer. Warning signs include swelling, irritation, redness, change of size, pain or a new lump in the breast.

But these symptoms can also happen with other conditions that aren't cancer.

There are certain [risk factors](#) that can make breast cancer more likely. Some factors are out of the person's control. Other factors, though, can be controlled.

Unchangeable risk factors:

- Getting older. The chances of breast cancer increase with age. Most cases are diagnosed after age 50.
- Reproductive history. Beginning menstrual periods before age 12 and menopause after age 55 can raise the risk of breast cancer. Factors that

expose breast tissue to high levels of hormones for longer times like having a baby at a later age can also pose a higher risk.

- Having dense breasts. Dense breasts have more connective tissue than fatty tissue. This could make it harder to see tumors on a mammogram.
- Family history. If a woman has a mother, sister, daughter or family members on either parent's side who have had breast cancer, this poses a higher risk.

Risk factors that can be changed:

- Not getting enough exercise. Women who are not physically active have a higher chance of getting breast cancer.
- Being overweight or having obesity. Older women who are overweight pose more of a risk than those at a healthy weight.
- Taking hormones. Some forms of hormone replacement therapy taken during menopause can raise the risk if taken longer than five years.
- Drinking alcohol. The more alcohol a woman drinks, the higher the chances of breast cancer can become.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Healthy Connections Medicaid benefits cover breast cancer screenings and treatment. People who are not eligible for other Medicaid categories could still qualify for Healthy Connections Medicaid's Breast and Cervical Cancer program. It covers treatment for those with breast cancer who meet the program's requirements. Learn about it [here](#).

Managed Care Organizations' Annual Star Rating

Healthy Connections Medicaid has five managed care organizations (MCOs). An MCO is a healthcare company, also called a health plan. They cover a variety of providers like doctors, hospitals and specialists to meet Medicaid members' health needs. Most members may choose to enroll in one of the five MCOs. The options are:

- Absolute Total Care
- Healthy Blue by BlueChoice of South Carolina
- Molina Healthcare of South Carolina
- First Choice by Select Health
- Humana Healthy Horizons in South Carolina

Each MCO is different. Members can choose which one is best for their own health needs.

All MCOs are reviewed each year by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). The NCQA grades health plans on the quality of care patients receive. They also rate how happy patients are with their care. All factors go into the final scores.

The 2025 ratings are listed below:

MCO		Star Rating				
Molina	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
BlueChoice	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
Select Health	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
Absolute Total Care	3.5	★	★	★	★	★
Humana	3.5	★	★	★	★	★

Read more about MCO coverage at [SCChoices.com](https://www.sccchoices.com).

Autism Screening and Referral Updates

One in 31 children has autism in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Early intervention and getting needed care are key to helping these kids have a better quality of life. Yet, accessing autism care in South Carolina can be hard.

To better support efforts to connect our members to this needed care, Healthy Connections Medicaid updated its autism spectrum disorder (ASD) policy. As of Sept. 1, doctors can screen, diagnose and refer their patients to autism services. This includes applied behavior analysis therapy (ABA). Some frequently asked questions are answered below.

I've heard my child needs an "ADOS" to diagnose autism. Is this true? No, the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) is just one of the tools Medicaid accepts to get an ASD diagnosis.

Can my doctor diagnose autism? Yes. Medicaid will accept an autism diagnosis from your doctor. This is part of the updated medical necessity criteria. Your doctor can also give a referral to ASD services.

Do I need to repeat autism testing if my child already gets autism services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at their school? What if they get autism services through the South Carolina Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities? No. Please do not repeat testing to confirm a diagnosis of autism. Medicaid's ASD policy accepts screenings that lead to a child getting services through an IEP. *More autism testing is not medically needed to get referred for ASD services.*

Are telehealth autism screenings valid? No. Autism testing through telehealth can't be used to get ASD services.

Does my child need to have an autism diagnosis to get therapy? Children ages 18 to 36 months who are at risk for ASD may be able to get ABA therapy while waiting for a diagnosis. The child's doctor must be confirmed by Medicaid or BabyNet to administer an eligible autism screening tool.

Members should check with their doctor with any questions about autism. This includes getting an autism diagnosis and reviewing past screenings. They should also check with their provider about referrals to ASD services while waiting on an autism confirmation.

Mental and Physical Health Maintenance During the Holidays

The holiday season can be an exciting time for families. The changing leaves, cooler weather and gatherings with loved ones are parts of the season many look forward to. But November and December aren't always happy times for everyone. There can be both mental and physical strains people feel through the holidays for many reasons.



Stress can play a big factor in bringing us down this time of year. Sometimes making sure the house is clean, wrapping presents or cooking for a large group can be

overwhelming. This can bring us anxiety or frustration during a time meant for happiness. Take steps to plan ahead, say no to some holiday commitments if needed and share your feelings with others. Read all [nine tips](#) to help with holiday stress.

[Seasonal affective disorder \(SAD\)](#) is a type of depression related to changes in season. Most people with SAD get symptoms in the fall that stay through the winter months. It can leave you feeling moody, sad or down most of the day. You may find it hard to concentrate or lose interest in activities you enjoyed. You may also find yourself overeating. If you think you could be experiencing SAD, talk to your doctor.

Lots of us are indoors more during the fall and winter. This could lead us to being closer in distance to others. Being around groups of people could [increase the chances](#) of catching viruses that cause colds, the flu or COVID-19. Dry winter air can also weaken natural mucus barriers in our nose, mouth and lungs. This makes it easier for viruses to enter the body. To help reduce the spread of viruses, wash your hands frequently. Wipe down surfaces around you with a sanitizing cleaner. Keep your distance from others who are sick. Stay hydrated and get enough sleep.

Each year, seasonal flu causes thousands of hospitalizations and related deaths. The CDC [recommends](#) a yearly flu vaccine for everyone six months old and up. Healthy Connections Medicaid full-benefit members can get a flu shot for free. Kids can get the shot from their doctor. Adults can get their shot from any in-network pharmacy or their primary care doctor.

Risk Factors of SIDS

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the unexplained death of a baby. When this happens, usually the baby is less than a year old and seemed to be healthy. The cause of SIDS is unknown. It often happens during sleep. There are both physical and sleep factors that can put a baby at risk of SIDS. But these factors vary depending on the child.

Physical factors associated with SIDS are:

- Brain defects. Some babies are born with problems that could make them more likely to die of SIDS. In this situation, it could be that the part of the brain that controls breathing and waking up hasn't developed enough to work the right way.
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- Low birth weight. When a baby is born early, it could increase the chance their brain hasn't fully developed. The baby might not have as much control over automatic processes, like breathing.
- Respiratory infection. Many infants who die from SIDS recently had a cold, which could lead to problems breathing.

A baby's sleeping position or items around them could increase the risk. Sleep factors associated with SIDS are:

- Sleeping on the stomach or side. This could make it harder to breathe than babies on their backs.
- Sleeping on a soft surface. Fluffy comforters, soft mattresses or waterbeds can block a baby's airway when face down.
- Sharing a bed. Babies should not share a bed with parents, siblings or pets.
- Overheating. Being too warm while sleeping can raise the risk of SIDS.

October is Safe Sleep and SIDS Awareness Month. Creating a safe sleep environment is one of the best ways to help lower the chance of sleep-related causes of infant deaths. It's important for parents and caregivers to know how to practice safe sleep for their baby. Read about doing what you can for SIDS prevention from the [Mayo Clinic](#).

Dental Hygiene: More Than Just Cleaning Teeth



It's easy to not think much about your oral health. That is, until something goes wrong. This could be anything from a cracked tooth to bleeding gums. October is National Dental Hygiene Month. It's a time to remember how important clean teeth are to our overall health. Neglecting our oral health could play a part in [other conditions](#) in our bodies.

This can include:

Endocarditis. This is when the inner lining of the heart chambers or valves get

infected. It often happens when germs from another part of the body, like the mouth, spread through the blood and attach to the heart. This infection is rare, but it can be fatal.

Cardiovascular disease. It is thought heart disease, clogged arteries and stroke could be linked to the infections germs in your mouth can cause.

Pregnancy/birth complications. Gum disease called periodontitis has been linked to some instances of premature birth and babies with low birth weight.

Pneumonia. Some kind of germs in the mouth can go into the lungs. This could cause pneumonia and/or other respiratory diseases.

There are easy ways we can take care of our mouth each day. This includes brushing our teeth at least twice a day and flossing. Choose to eat healthy and don't use tobacco products. Remember, seeing your dentist for checkups and cleanings is also an important part of having good dental hygiene.

Healthy Connections Medicaid covers some dental care services for adults and children. This includes a cleaning once a year for adults and every six months for kids. Learn more about what services are covered by calling DentaQuest (888) 307-6552. You can also visit [DentaQuest.com](https://www.dentaquest.com).

ADHD in Children

Every child is full of energy, curiosity and big ideas. But for some kids, staying focused or sitting still can feel harder than it should be. That's where attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) comes in. ADHD is one of the most common conditions in children. It affects how they learn, play and grow.

Signs your child might have ADHD include:

- Trouble staying focused in school or when at play
 - Not listening, even when spoken to directly
 - Fidgeting, tapping hands or feet or squirming in their seat
 - Getting distracted by other things instead of finishing a task
 - Forgetting daily activities, such as showering or doing chores
 - Losing items like toys or school supplies
 - Being impatient or having problems waiting their turn
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It's important to remember many kids can't keep their focus for long. They may be hyperactive or impulsive at times too. For instance, preschoolers tend to have short attention spans. Older kids and teens can show more focus. How much may depend on their interest level.

According to the Mayo Clinic, children should not be labeled with having ADHD just because they are different from friends or siblings.

The good news is with the right help, children with ADHD can succeed at home, in school and in their communities. If you are concerned your child may have ADHD, talk to your pediatrician or family healthcare professional.

Healthy Connections Medicaid can cover screenings for kids. If diagnosed, some ADHD medication is covered.

To learn more about ADHD in kids, visit the [Mayo Clinic's website](#).

How to Watch for Type 2 Diabetes

More than 530,000 adults in [South Carolina](#) are estimated to have been diagnosed with diabetes. Type 1 diabetes happens when a person's body doesn't make insulin. Type 2 diabetes occurs when someone's body has problems using the insulin it makes. This causes sugar to build up in the person's blood. High blood sugar in type 2 diabetics can cause damage.



Over time, it can hurt the eyes, kidneys, nerves and heart. There are different causes of this type of diabetes. They include having excess body fat and being physically inactive. Eating highly processed foods and genetics are risk factors too.

Many can live with this type of diabetes and not know they have it. [Symptoms](#) usually develop slowly over time. They can include:

- Increased thirst
 - Urinating more frequently
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- Hungrier
- Weight loss
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Slow healing cuts or sores
- Frequent infections
- Numbness or tingling in hands or feet
- Patches of darkened skin. These are often near or on the neck and armpits.

If you think you may have type 2 diabetes, speak with your doctor. There is no cure. There are ways to help manage it though. This includes losing weight, eating healthy foods and getting more exercise. Sometimes, that may not be enough to manage blood sugar. If that's the case, there are also diabetes medicines or insulin treatment.

Blood sugar monitoring devices can help with your care. These are covered for full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members. Members ages 35-70 who are overweight or obese may receive a pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes screening. Members may also qualify for diabetes management services.

HIV and AIDS Awareness

Dec. 1 is recognized as World AIDS Day. [AIDS](#) (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is the most serious stage of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). This is where the body loses too many of the cells that fight off disease. HIV is a virus that harms your body's immune system. Your immune system protects your body from getting sick. When HIV weakens it, it is easier for you to get sick more often. Even minor illnesses could seriously affect your body. Over time, HIV can cause so much damage that it turns into AIDS.

How does HIV spread?

- Through sex and by contact with bodily fluids. This includes blood, breast milk and semen.
 - During pregnancy and delivery if the mother has HIV.
 - By sharing needles for drug use, piercings and tattoos.
 - If HIV-infected fluid gets into an open cut or sore on your body.
 - HIV is NOT spread through saliva, sweat or touch. Kissing, sneezing, sharing food and hugging will not increase your chances of getting it.
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Early symptoms of HIV/AIDS may feel like the flu. This could be chills, body aches and fever. Symptoms are the same in men and women. However, women may also have changes in their period, pain during sex or more yeast infections. Read more about symptoms [here](#).

While there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, there are some common treatment options. ART (antiretroviral therapy) lowers the amount of HIV in the body. With successful treatment, HIV can become so low that it can't be spread through sex. PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a medicine that people without HIV can take to lower their chances of getting it. Though the number one way to help prevent HIV is to use a condom every time you have sex.

Treatment for HIV/AIDS is covered for full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members. There are also more coverage and treatment options. The [HIV/AIDS waiver](#) serves South Carolinians or those planning to move here diagnosed with HIV and who are at-risk of hospitalization level of care criteria. The waiver's goal is to promote the best possible health for its participants in the setting of their choice for as long as they choose and can participate.

Pediatric HIV clinics deliver special care to Healthy Connections Medicaid members under 21 years old and their families who are HIV-infected or exposed. The clinics are located at the [Medical University of South Carolina](#) and Prisma Health Children's Hospital in the [Midlands](#) and in [Greenville](#).

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.