

North Carolina Board of Recreational Therapy Licensure, NCBRTL

Year-End Summary Report

Timeframe: July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

2024 NCBRTL MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Joan L. Sutton, MS, LRT, CTRS, CDP, FDRT

Email: joan@ncbrtl.org

CONSULTANT:

Becky Garrett, MS, LRT, CTRS, FDRT

Email: becky@ncbrtl.org

NCBRTL BOARD CONSISTS OF 8 MEMBERS SERVING 3-YEAR TERMS CITE: GS90C-5

Board Chair: Amy Albritton, LRTA

Board Vice-Chair/Treasurer: Claire Salisbury, LRT, CTRS

Board Secretary: Abena Jones-Boone, MS, LRT, CTRS

GOVERNOR APPOINTEES (4):

LRT Engaged in Training (RT Educator): Brent Hawkins, PhD, LRT, CTRS, FDRT

University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW), Wilmington, NC

Email: hawkinsb@uncw.edu

Appointment Start Date: 7/1/2023

Appointment End Date: 6/30/2026

Ethics Training: 07/24/2025

Practicing LRT: Dolly Williams, LCMHC, NCC, LRT, CTRS

New Hope Treatment Centers, Rock Hill, SC

Email: dollyw@newhopetreatment.com

Appointment Start Date: 10/30/2024

Appointment End Date: 6/30/2027

Ethics Training: 10/24/2026

Practicing LRTA: Amy Albritton, LRTA

ECU Health Medical Center, Greenville, NC

Email: aalbritt@ecuhealth.org

Appointment Start Date: 11/29/2021

Appointment End Date: 06/30/2025

Ethics Training: 01/04/2026

Physician: Nadyah John, MD

Lakeside Psychiatric Hospital/Walter B. Jones ADATC, Greenville, NC

Email: nadyah.john@dhhs.nc.gov

Appointment Start Date: 10/31/2024

Appointment End Date: 6/30/2027

Ethics Training: 03/25/2027

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE APPOINTEES (2):

Practicing LRT: Abena Jones-Boone, MS, LRT, CTRS

Durham VA Health Care System, Durham, NC

Email: abena@ncbrtl.org

Appointment Start Date: 03/30/2023

Appointment End Date: 6/30/2026

Ethics Training: 04/19/2027

Public Member and Consumer: Joey “Michael” Atkins

Raleigh, NC

Email: wheelchairwolf@gmail.com

Appointment Start Date: 07/1/2022

Appointment End Date: 06/30/2025

Ethics Training: 05/15/2027

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE APPOINTEES (2):

Practicing LRT: Claire Salisbury, LRT, CTRS

UNC Hospitals, Hillsborough, NC

Email: claire.salisbury@unchealth.unc.edu

Appointment Start Date: 07/01/2023

Appointment End Date: 06/30/2026

Ethics Training: 01/13/2026

Public Member: Wendy Chavez

Email: wchavez0202@outlook.com

Appointment Start Date: 07/16/2019

Appointment End Date: 06/30/2025

Ethics Training: 07/10/2026

ANNUAL REPORT

As of June 30, 2025, the North Carolina Board of Recreational Therapy Licensure oversees a total of 982 credentialed individuals:

- Licensed Recreational Therapists (LRTs): 885
- Licensed Recreational Therapy Assistants (LRTAs): 31
- Licensees on Inactive Status: 66

NCBRTL continues to see a steady number of applicants, including an increase in out-of-state applicants, up by five from the previous year. Recreational Therapy remains one of the few healthcare professions that enable individuals to become both licensed and nationally certified with a four-year undergraduate degree. It is also among the more affordable licensed

professions in terms of annual fees and ongoing professional development costs, including continuing education, certification renewal, and association membership fees.

There are more recreational therapy academic programs in North Carolina than in any other state. Despite a comprehensive review of educational program quality, efficiency, and alignment with state needs by the UNC System, all six in-state university RT programs, one private college, and one community college remain operational. These programs are vital to maintaining a robust pipeline of future licensees.

The 2024–2025 fiscal year workforce trends and challenges saw a slight decline in overall licensees, primarily due to the retirement of many experienced recreational therapists. Educators also report that a growing number of students are pursuing graduate programs in related disciplines—such as occupational therapy, social work, and doctoral programs—after completing their RT degrees.

Additionally, some graduates are entering non-licensed behavioral health job roles that offer higher starting salaries than licensed RT positions, particularly those outside the state system. This is occurring even as job openings increase across several North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services facilities, such as Broughton Hospital, Central Regional Hospital, Cherry Hospital, and Blind Services.

To better address workforce planning, NCBRTL is collaborating with researchers at the UNC-Chapel Hill Program on Health Workforce Research and Policy, supported by the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMHDDSUS). This partnership will contribute to the development of a comprehensive dataset on North Carolina’s behavioral health workforce. The project, implemented in conjunction with the Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center at the Sheps Center, will document the role of recreational therapists across the state.

NCBRTL has seen an increase in requests to post and share job openings, especially among new graduates. While it is not the purpose of the licensing board to share employment opportunities, it has been determined that this uptick appears to be related to leadership and communication transitions within the North Carolina Recreational Therapy Association (NCRTA), a statewide membership association. As requests are received, the NCBRTL Executive Director continues to share job openings with the university faculty, helping new licensees and alumni connect to opportunities as the membership organization restructures.

NCBRTL Board Operations and Governance: The Board Treasurer continues to support administrative efficiency by handling mail and making bank deposits, with most payments processed securely online via a third-party platform.

In June 2024, the terms for Board members Cari Sipe Owens and Dr. Augustus Parker expired. The Governor approved the appointments of Dolly Williams and Dr. Nadyah John as replacements, and the transition has proceeded smoothly.

Annual Licensing and Application Updates:

- New Licenses Issued: 103 (down one from last year)
- Out-of-State Licenses Issued: 25 (↑6 from last year)
- Active Applications Pending: 12
- Inactive Requests: 66 (↑25 from last year)
- Reinstatements (within 60 days): 6
- Reissues (after reinstatement period): 7
- Applications Denied: 0
- Reciprocity Licenses Issued: 0
- Military-Trained Licensees Issued: 0

There is still no Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Training for recreational therapy in the military. NCBRTL does have a Rule, 21 NCAC65 .0902 Military Exemption, to accept any MOS military applicants if received, ten licensees identified as veterans of military service.

Inactive requests are carefully reviewed to ensure the individual is no longer working in a clinical capacity. Common reasons include family caregiving, health issues, or career changes. Interestingly, licensees who move out of state often maintain their North Carolina license for career advancement, increased compensation, or due to the absence of licensure in their new state. Currently, only the District of Columbia, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Utah have licensure.

Annual New Licensees by University/College**New Licensees from North Carolina 4-Year Programs (LRT Level):**

- ECU: 21 (↓6)
- UNCG: 19 (↑1)
- UNCW: 12 (↓15)
- WCU: 15 (↑2)
- WSSU: 3 (↓7)
- Catawba College: 3 (↓5)
- NCCU: 1 (↓2)

NC 2-Year Program (LRTA- Assistant Level):

- Western Piedmont Community College: 4 (↓1)

Out-of-State Programs:

- Total: 25 (↑6)- from schools such as: Arizona State University, Brigham Young University, Clemson University, Florida International University, Indiana University, Lincoln University, Longwood University, Penn State University, Slippery Rock University, Southern Illinois University, Temple University, Texas State University, University of New Hampshire, and University of Toledo.

On average, NCBRTL approved nine licenses per month, with May, June, and August being the highest-volume months, directly tied to internship and academic graduation timelines.

The Board remains committed to supporting licensees, strengthening workforce data, and advancing public understanding of recreational therapy as a healthcare profession, and to its mission to protect the public and uphold professional standards in recreational therapy across North Carolina.

Disciplinary Actions taken in 2024-2025:

Letters of Education (Non-Violations or Minor Infractions)

- 9 Licensees – Reinstated with a Letter of Education due to missed maintenance.
- 4 Licensees – Reinstated with a Letter of Education due to missed renewal.
- 1 Licensee – Self-disclosure; no violation; no action beyond record.
- 1 Licensee – Letter of Education sent to the agency.
- 1 Licensee – Missed C&E training in first 2 years; self-reported and registered; and attended next training.
- Multiple educational emails were sent to an ECU graduate student who applied for the LRT credential but has already obtained the NCTRC CTRS credential using the alternative path (no internship). The graduate student and the University department chair were made aware of Chapter 90C licensure laws and requirements (internship course credit on the official transcript and passage of the CPASRF form). The graduate students' LRT application is still pending.

Letters of Reprimands/Probations/Suspensions:

- 4 Licensee(s)- 1 LRT gave incorrect medication dose to camper, while another LRT signed off on medication admin policy. The LRT supervisor and others involved (4 in total) were all placed on probation. An ongoing disciplinary review was conducted to address medication errors and to review staffing protocols. The RT department provided updated policies, staff training, and legal review with the county administration. Once new policies were in place, the board voted to remove disciplinary action after full compliance had been achieved.
- 1 Licensee- worked 10 days with an expired license, suspended 10 days, and attended the next available C&E training.
- 1 Licensee- missed renewal, failure to submit employment form, placed on probation for three months, and attended the next available C&E training.
- 1 Licensee- Failed to attend required C&E after reinstatement, placed on probation until completion of C&E training.
- 1 Licensee- practiced with an expired license (6 days); reinstated, placed on probation until next available C&E training (will complete in August 2025) and standards of practice workshop (will complete in September 2025).

- 1 Licensee- missed C&E training requirement for first-year licensees, placed on probation with no supervision of interns/staff for one year; must attend August C&E training (2025), employer was informed of probationary requirements.

Continuing Education Trainings:

In 2024–2025, the Board finalized updates to the ATRA Standards of Practice Workshops and will offer training beginning in September 2025. These sessions aim to help licensees better understand and comply with Chapter 90C and distinguish between general activity programming and clinical therapy, particularly in light of job title inconsistencies (e.g., “Activities Therapist” roles in healthcare settings, which may misrepresent unlicensed staff as therapists).

NCBRTL is also engaging with RT professionals in private practice and school-based roles to support broader integration of recreational therapy services.

NCBRTL Compliance and Ethics Training (C&E Training) continues to be provided three times a year and provides LRTs/LRTAs with four credits of continuing education units (CEUs). This four-hour training helps licensees better understand Chapter 90C, 21 NCAC 65, and the annual requirements for the LRT/LRTA credential. This year, NCBRTL updated the Code of Ethics training to incorporate more current examples. NCBRTL continues to require C&E training to be completed during the first year for all new licensees. Marketing materials are emailed to all LRTs/LRTAs, who are recommended to participate in this training every three years to be aware of the law and current requirements.

NCBRTL’s Compliance and Ethics Training was offered virtually via Zoom to 144 participants during the 2024-2025 period. The feedback has been positive, so the board plans to present these trainings using Zoom for the 2025-2026 period.

NCBRTL updated its Internship Supervisor Training and presented it to 24 licensees in June at UNC Greensboro’s Recreational Therapy Lab. This in-person internship training helped educate licensees in various settings on best practices for developing an internship program, creating an internship manual, and designing a practical internship learning experience. The board is prepared to offer this training at least two times a year.

GOALS ACCOMPLISHED DURING 2024-2025:

During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the North Carolina Board of Recreational Therapy Licensure (NCBRTL) completed several key initiatives that supported regulatory compliance, professional development, and strategic growth of the profession. These included:

Board Members: The Governor's Office appointed two new members (one practicing LRT and one Physician). These individuals were recommended and appointed to join the Board at the November and December 2025 meetings.

Licensure Rulemaking: Initiated the Periodic Rules Review and Rules Review Committee (RRC). Determined all 22 rules to be Necessary, per PERIODIC RULE REVIEW, November 26, 2024. APO Review: January 26, 2025.

Public Guidance & Declaratory Rulings: Issued clarifying communication regarding extension requests for licensees in Western North Carolina, directing them to contact NCBRTL for individualized assistance. Executive Order 318: NCBRTL reviewed and responded to the Governor's Executive Order 318, providing Board input on proposed flexibilities for professional licensing boards. These responses were submitted to the State for public dissemination.

Educational and Training Initiatives: Offered Internship Manual Development Training to educators and supervisors. Finalized training materials for ATRA's Standards of Practice will be made available to licensees in September 2025.

Website and Communication Enhancements: Updates were made to the NCBRTL website, including transferring all contact information and communications from the retired ED to the new ED to maintain consistent access and clarity for licensees and stakeholders.

Outreach and Representation: Participated and presented in multiple state conferences, provided support for the Educators Luncheon, and continued efforts to engage with academic partners and professionals in the field.

Higher Education Program Accuracy: Contacted the College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) to update Recreation Therapy program listings, including the removal of inaccurate information about Shaw University and the addition of North Carolina Central University (NCCU). Coordinated with Shaw University regarding course descriptions that inaccurately reflect Recreation Therapy licensing eligibility.

Workforce Data Collaboration: Participated in a state-funded initiative to improve documentation of Recreational Therapists in Behavioral Health. This collaboration with the Cecil G. Sheps Center ensures greater visibility of RTs in North Carolina's behavioral health workforce data.

FUTURE GOALS OF NCBRTL 2025-2026

- Start working on tasks related to the permanent rules process proposed readoption schedule (October 2026).
- Launch Standards of Practice Training: Begin offering ATRA Standards of Practice Training statewide to educate licensees on the scope of practice and compliance with Chapter 90C. Encourage licenses to develop internal policies and procedures aligned with these standards.
- Train new board members- waiting on appointments for two public members, as these terms have become open (July 2025).
- The board plans to conduct a comprehensive review and update of the NCBRTL Operations Manual, including detailed disciplinary response procedures.

- The Board plans to update the website, including new links for Internship Supervisor Appeal forms, updated links/information on reinstatement steps, and connections for university course options for applicants needing the 6th RT/TR course.
- Enhance Communication and Transparency: Improve marketing and outreach efforts to licensees, educators, and employers. Continue collaboration with university programs to ensure future licensee readiness.