

N.C. Free and Charitable Clinics Charge New Health Equity Task Force With Mission to Close Health Care Gap for North Carolina's Uninsured

Network of 72 clinics aims to reduce impact of social, environmental factors on health outcomes

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (January 12, 2022) – The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics announced today it has named 29 health-care professionals and policy experts from across the state to the association's new Health Equity Task Force.

The task force, announced in September as part of the association's "Journey Towards Health Equity," will help the association's 72 member clinics develop innovative ways to expand access to health care, reduce health disparities and improve the lives of the uninsured and underinsured patients they serve.

"The pandemic widened health disparities among North Carolina's underserved and historically marginalized communities," said association CEO Randy Jordan. "We need to work harder to break down the social, economic and racial barriers that limit access to health care and lead to poor health."

The task force is part of the association's effort to put health equity at the forefront of its collaboration with member clinics, which provide primary and specialty medical care, pharmacy, dental care, optometry, behavioral health, lab tests and hospital referrals to 80,000 patients in 86 N.C. counties.

Jordan pointed to the following facts that highlight the need for an increased focus on health equity:

- Up to 60% of health outcomes are affected by so-called "social determinants of health" – factors that include lack of access to healthy foods, safe housing and transportation, and cultural and language barriers.
- Due to living and working conditions, low-income Latinx workers in North Carolina are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and more likely than non-Hispanic white adults to be affected by diabetes and hypertension, the leading underlying illnesses associated with COVID-19 deaths.
- Vaccine hesitancy and lack of access to vaccinations has kept COVID-19 vaccine rates lower among North Carolina's uninsured residents, particularly Black and Latinx residents.
- Latinx North Carolinians, a significant segment of the population served by free and charitable clinics, are nearly three times more likely to be uninsured and have no medical home than the state's population overall (31% for the Latinx community compared to 11% overall).

The association and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina in August awarded nearly \$230,000 in grants to five free and charitable clinics across the state to support initiatives ranging from workplace vaccination clinics in Elizabeth City to improved use of telemedicine in Charlotte.

"Health equity has always been central to the mission of our clinics, but now we are working to become more intentional about delivering care in a way that is truly accessible to our patients," Jordan said. "We are thrilled to have such a diverse mix of expertise and lived experiences represented on the task force."

Members of the North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics' Health Equity Task Force are listed below:

Adela Campoverde (Lake Norman Community Health Clinic); **Amy Carr** (Matthews Free Medical Clinic); **April Cook** (Lake Norman Community Health Clinic), **Barbara Krcmar** (MERCİ Clinic); **Brianna Pitts** (Caring Community Clinic); **Cathy Montgomery** (The Free Clinics); **Daphne Ellison** (MERCİ Clinic);

Edwin Burkett, MD (Alliance Medical Ministry); **Giseline Martinez Ponce** (Grace Clinic of Yadkin Valley); **Isabell Moon** (HealthReach Community Clinic); **Jennifer Stoddard, MD** (Moore Free and Charitable Clinic); **John Devaney** (Cape Fear Clinic); **Judy Long** (The Free Clinics), **Lisa Kimball** (Community Care Clinic of Dare), **Lorrie Carter** (Open Door Clinic of Alamance County), **Mark DeHaven, PhD** (UNC Charlotte and UCITY Family Zone), **Melanie Jones** (Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic), **Melinda Wallace** (Moore Free and Charitable Clinic/FirstHealth of the Carolinas), **Melissa Lopez** (Surry Medical Ministries), **Morgan Hinton** (Care Ring), **Pablo Escobar** (Alliance Medical Ministry), **Rachel Zimmer** (Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist), **Rosh Foskey** (Caring Community Clinic), **Sandy Motley** (Davidson Medical Ministries Clinic), **Sonia Middleton** (Moore Free and Charitable Clinic), **Teresa Hanf** (Moore Free & Charitable Clinic), **Tim Clontz** (Community Care Center for Forsyth County), **Valerie Lewis** (Community Care Clinic), **Wendy Hunter** (Watch Healthcare).

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics is based in Winston-Salem and provides funding, education and advocacy for its member clinics from the mountains to the beaches. The Association and its clinics are expanding access to health care, working to reduce health disparities, and focusing on social determinants of health to improve patients' lives.

About North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics supports 72 member clinics in expanding access to health care, reducing health disparities and improving the health of uninsured and underinsured individuals. Member clinics are a vital part of North Carolina's safety net, providing care for 80,000 patients in 86 counties, including primary and specialty medical care; dental care; pharmacy services; optometry; behavioral health care; lab tests and hospital referrals. The association supports member clinics with education, advocacy, research, funding and collaboration, and promotes quality health care for all North Carolinians. Learn more at www.ncafcc.org.

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