

NC Free and Charitable Clinics Team Up with Blue Cross NC to Fight Impact of Health Disparities, COVID-19 on State's Most Vulnerable

Five clinics awarded \$230,000 in grants to knock down barriers to care and improve health

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (August 26, 2021) – North Carolina's free and charitable clinics are partnering with the state's largest health insurer to improve access to care and the overall health of the state's underserved communities and those hit hardest by the pandemic.

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics (NCAFCC) and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) have awarded nearly \$230,000 in grants to five clinics to support initiatives that will reduce health disparities by addressing drivers of health, such as access to healthy foods, safe housing and transportation, and cultural and language barriers.

"Our clinics see every day how racial, social and economic factors negatively affect people's health, and the pandemic only widened health disparities in our communities," said Randy Jordan, CEO of the NCAFCC, which represents 72 member clinics serving uninsured and underinsured patients in 86 counties across the state. "We are grateful that Blue Cross NC supports our clinics' efforts to address the underlying causes of these health disparities and to increase health equity."

The grants are part of NCAFCC's broader focus on the needs of historically marginalized populations that are disproportionately impacted by chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension that put them at greater risk to contract infectious diseases. The grants also support Blue Cross NC's priority to ensure every North Carolinian has greater access to quality health care, including those living in underserved and rural communities.

"Blue Cross NC is committed to making health care better, simpler and more affordable – and the state's free and charitable clinics are working to do just that," said Cheryl Parquet, director of community engagement and marketing activation at Blue Cross NC. "These organizations serve low-income individuals and families who might otherwise fall through the safety net. They also strive to collaborate and innovate to increase their overall impact."

Free and charitable clinics served by the NCAFCC have played a key role in the state's health care response to the pandemic, providing testing and administering more than 32,000 COVID-19 vaccines. They saw a surge of more than 20,000 new patients in 2020, some infected by COVID-19 and many who lost jobs and health insurance. Association data shows the health of established clinic patients living with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension declined during the pandemic, as many struggled to maintain regular testing, counseling and medication regimes.

Grant recipients are finding creative new ways to improve their patients' health. Recipients include:

- **Albemarle Hospital Foundation** in Elizabeth City will expand its vaccine clinics on-site at large employer facilities. The vaccine clinics were launched this year after community data showed Black and Latinx residents were significantly underrepresented among those vaccinated. The clinic redoubled efforts to boost health equity by addressing racial and ethnic health disparities after the shooting death of Andrew Brown Jr.

- **Care Ring** in Charlotte will incorporate telehealth services in a targeted way to advance health equity, making care available to patients who don't have transportation, child care or flexible work schedules.
- **Community Care Clinic of Dare County**, which serves many working in tourism jobs, will focus on a sample group of 90 Latinx diabetes patients to better inform them about the COVID-19 vaccine and promote nutrition through its food pharmacy program.
- **Surry Medical Ministries** will build deeper relationships with patients in Surry County and improve care through outreach by a team of community health workers. The clinic will measure results through independent evaluations, patient surveys and patient health metrics.
- **The Hunger and Health Coalition** in Boone, which provides food and medicine to low-income residents of rural western North Carolina, is collaborating with High Country Community Health to expand by five times its free medication program to patients with limited access to health care.

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About North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

The North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics supports 72 member-clinics in expanding access to healthcare, 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 healthcare; lab tests and hospital referrals. The association supports member clinics with education, advocacy, research, funding and collaboration, and promotes quality healthcare for all North Carolinians. Learn more at www.ncafcc.org.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) is committed to making health care better, simpler and more affordable. We have been driving better health in North Carolina since 1933, working to tackle our communities' greatest health challenges. Blue Cross NC serves its customers and communities of more than 4.2 million members, including approximately 1.1 million on behalf of other Blue Plans. Blue Cross NC is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Visit Blue Cross NC online at www.bluecrossnc.com. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

Media: David Coburn at Coburn Communications, david@coburncomm.com, 704.408.4276
 Blue Cross NC Media Line: 919-765-3005
 Blue Cross NC Online Newsroom: <http://mediacenter.bcbsnc.com>