

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

With North Carolina diabetes rate outpacing nation, free and charitable clinics join with community partners to fight epidemic among uninsured

- *Innovative initiatives help patients manage Type 2 diabetes, reduce blood-sugar levels*
- *Efforts address disparities that make low-income uninsured prone to chronic disease*
- *Partners include foundations, a university and a nonprofit founded by 12-year-old boy*

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (November 15, 2022) – North Carolina’s low-income, uninsured residents with Type 2 diabetes are getting help from the state’s free and charitable clinics through a variety of expanding initiatives designed to help them manage the deadly chronic disease.

Supporting the efforts are community partners ranging from The Duke Endowment, East Carolina University, Blue Cross NC, the North Carolina Medical Society Alliance – and Sugar Check Charity, a small nonprofit launched three years ago by a Mount Airy teen.

“Diabetes is a growing focus of free and charitable clinics because it disproportionately affects the underserved people we treat,” said April Cook, CEO of the North Carolina Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (NCAFCC). “Helping them manage this chronic disease is not only a health imperative but a health equity imperative as well.”

At 12.4%, the incidence of Type 2 diabetes among adults in North Carolina exceeds the national average of 11.3%. But at many NCAFCC member clinics, as much as 40% of the total patient caseload have diabetes due to lack of access to health care and healthy food and other factors that increase the incidence of the disease among the low-income and uninsured and underinsured people clinics serve.

New initiatives by North Carolina’s free and charitable clinics and their community partners include:

- In Eastern North Carolina, where 14.4% of adults have Type 2 diabetes and mortality rates are more than 50% higher than the rest of the U.S., clinics are partnering with **East Carolina University** on Fresh Start, a program funded with a \$365,000 grant from **The Duke Endowment**. Fresh Start provides one-on-one diabetes management coaching, fresh foods and on-site group cooking and physical activity sessions.

Community Care Clinic of Dare in Nags Head and **Albemarle Hospital Foundation Community Care Clinic** in Elizabeth City participated in Fresh Start during its first year and both saw patients’ A1c levels decline. Additional participants will join in 2023: **MERCI Clinic** in New Bern, **WATCH** in Goldsboro, and **Hope Clinic** in Bayboro.
- **Surry Medical Ministries Clinic** in Mount Airy significantly expanded outreach to underserved communities over the past year, thanks to a health disparities grant from **Blue Cross NC** and the

NCAFCC. Regular, more frequent contact with diabetic patients enabled more effective monitoring and testing and led to significant reductions of 16% or more in blood-sugar levels.

- Community Care Clinic of Dare, also a health disparities grant recipient, focused on a sample group of 90 Latinx diabetes patients, promoting nutrition through its food pharmacy and better informing them about the COVID-19 vaccine and the higher risk faced by diabetes patients. The initiative has resulted in lower A1c levels among patients in the group.
- 15 NCAFCC clinics across the state improved their ability to treat diabetes patients with new in-clinic testing equipment and supplies, thanks to a \$50,000 donation from the **North Carolina Medical Society Alliance**.
- **Sugar Check Charity** – founded by a 12-year-old boy – has delivered \$15,000 in financial donations and supplies to several clinics, including blood glucose monitors, test strips and other diabetic supplies. Founded in 2019 by Mount Airy’s Bill Rierson, now 15, Sugar Check Charity has delivered more than \$30,000 in diabetic supplies to free and charitable clinics, including 20 in North Carolina.

“We’re grateful to all of our community partners for their role in improving and expanding the diabetes care and management efforts of North Carolina’s free and charitable clinics,” Cook said. “These initiatives show how broad community support and innovative solutions can make a difference for our state’s most vulnerable residents who are struggling with this chronic illness every day.”

About North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

The North Carolina Association of Free and 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 more than 80,000 patients in 85 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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