



South Carolina
FOUNDATION

Grantee Highlights

Fall 2022

Current Grantee Highlights

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From the Executive Director

Hello, and welcome to our Fall 2022 Highlights Report.

In these pages, you'll learn about the outstanding health and health care programs the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation supports across our state. You'll discover incredible examples of innovation and teamwork. You'll also find inspiring success stories and gain a new appreciation for those who work tirelessly to improve the health of current and future generations of South Carolinians.

We at the Foundation are thankful we can support our partner organizations. We see it as an exciting opportunity to continue to build on those relationships, as well as those with our newest partner agencies.

It's a great privilege to serve so many dedicated programs. I'm grateful for the chance to share a few of their stories with you. I trust you'll come away from this report feeling inspired and optimistic about South Carolina's future.

Thank you.



Erika Kirby
Executive Director



Areas of Focus



Access to Care

Support safety net providers in providing primary physical and mental health care.

Implement evidence-based or innovative models to increase accessibility of health care services.



Building a Stronger Workforce for Health

Support projects to increase the number of health care professionals.

Support health care career development through evidence-based or innovative approaches to advance skills.



Improving the Quality and Value of Health and Health Care

Support quality improvement projects that yield cost and resource efficiencies through innovative approaches and solutions.



Investing in the Health and Well-Being of South Carolina Children and Families

Support projects that foster environments and settings that encourage healthy eating and active lifestyles.

Support projects that focus on the integration of mental health and adverse childhood experiences.

Support projects that focus on population health improvement through intentional collaboration across multiple sectors to connect the non-health factors that influence health.



Research/ Special Projects

Support projects to inform, influence and support our areas of focus and our mission.

These projects may fall outside of an established area of focus, yet would generate value-added information relevant to the health needs of the economically vulnerable population in South Carolina.



Mental Health: Prevention

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Children’s Trust of South Carolina	Empower Action: Road Map to Community Resilience	01/2019 – 06/2023
Mental Health America of Greenville County	Capacity-Building for 988 Implementation in South Carolina	06/2022 – 05/2025
National Alliance on Mental Illness South Carolina	Ending the Silence	06/2019 – 11/2022
National Alliance on Mental Illness South Carolina	South Carolina Youth-Centered Mental Health Awareness and Education	06/2022 – 05/2025
Pendleton Place	Foster Healthier Families	07/2019 – 06/2023
South Carolina Department of Mental Health	Planning Grant: Zero Suicide Communities of Care	06/2020 – 11/2022
South Carolina Department of Mental Health	Zero Suicide Communities of Care	01/2021 – 12/2023
SC Thrive	SC Community Impact and Mental Health First Aid	01/2014 – 12/2022
Adolescent Mental Health Grantees		
Carolina Youth Development Center	Expanding Services to Youth in the Lowcountry	01/2022 – 12/2024
Communities in Schools of South Carolina	Student Mental Health Initiative	01/2022 – 12/2024
FSG Inc.	AMH Evaluation Support	01/2022 – 12/2022
Healthy Learners	Creating Community Capacity to Support Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing	01/2022 – 12/2024
South Carolina Department of Mental Health	Roads 2	01/2022 – 12/2024
University of South Carolina: Institute for Families in Society	Raising Adolescents To Be Tomorrow’s Leaders	01/2022 – 12/2024



Adolescent Mental Health Catalyst Grants

Young people in South Carolina face a grim truth. Suicide rates among those ages 10 to 24 continue to rise, according to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Data from the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) shows the increase in suicide rates is most significant among children ages 10 to 14.

The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation hopes to change that. The nonprofit is investing in programs that focus on the mental health and well-being of young people. Five South Carolina organizations will receive adolescent mental health (AMH) catalyst grants to increase mental health resources in schools and communities:

- Carolina Youth Development Center
- Communities in Schools of South Carolina
- Healthy Learners
- SCDMH
- The University of South Carolina Institute for Families in Society

“These grantees are excited to work together to improve adolescent mental health,” said Bree Bess, program officer for the Foundation. “Already we have seen new connections and partnerships formed through this first cohort.”

Grantees gathered in June 2022 to discuss how they can work together to improve adolescent mental health. Many of their proposed projects focus on increasing access to mental health resources in communities and schools.

The scope of these projects is not limited to young people. Programs like those planned by Healthy Learners and the Institute for Families in Society aim to increase mental health awareness and access to resources for parents and community members. Other programs plan to improve awareness in schools and colleges.

“Awareness and early identification will be key to getting ahead of the curve and preventing mental health issues before they become more serious in our youth,” Bess said. “Each adolescent mental health catalyst grantee understands this and has shown through their work how committed they are to improving adolescent mental health.”

“Awareness and early identification will be key to getting ahead of the curve and preventing mental health issues before they become more serious in our youth.”



Addressing the Mental Health Provider Shortage through Prevention

Nearly 150 million Americans live in a federally designated mental health practitioner shortage area. The shortage is especially serious for adolescents, as there's growing evidence more of them need care now than ever.

One answer is to expand the circle of people, beyond psychiatrists and psychologists, who can help.

Empowering schools, peers and parents to fill the gaps

"Only 64 percent of South Carolina schools have access to full- or part-time mental health clinicians," said Bree Bess, program officer for the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation. Bess said it's difficult to fill the positions, in part because of a lack of providers. But the need is urgent. "We have seen some horrendous statistics around youth mental health," said Bess. "Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 24 in South Carolina."

The Foundation partnered with schools and community organizations to identify where it could make the most impact. The Foundation decided to invest in providing college students career pathways to work as mental health counselors in a school environment, empowering students to support their peers, and equipping parents with tools and knowledge to help their kids at home.

Preparing students for careers in school mental health

First, the Foundation funded internships and practicum experiences for college students majoring in fields like psychology and sociology. "The idea was to prepare them specifically for a school environment," said Bess. "They spend their days working alongside a mental health counselor and, in turn, help that mental health clinician find time to do more prevention work."

Interest from college students was overwhelming. "We proposed five positions and received over 100 applications," Bess said. Interns have already begun working in schools.

Empowering peers and parents

Next, the Foundation targeted schoolwide mental health awareness by starting a pilot peer support program for students in seven communities. The peers will serve as another resource for students who might be struggling.

Rounding out support for kids in school are programs for parents. "Although students do spend a lot of time in school, we wanted to empower parents to help at home," said Bess. The Foundation is supporting the University of South Carolina Institute for Families in Society, which offers a program called Teen Triple P. It offers a continuum of both universal and targeted training for parents to help them address common adolescent social, emotional and behavioral challenges. "The idea," said Bess, "is to say to parents, 'Here are things you can try at home.'"

A caring adult can change a child's trajectory

Mental health solutions for adolescents are a major focus of the Foundation's work, but that focus is on holistic solutions. "It's important to build access, to build up the workforce," said Bess. "But we also need to support all of the caring adults in an adolescent's life. It's been shown that a caring adult can mitigate the effects of childhood trauma."

Communities rally resources despite a workforce shortage

In South Carolina, communities cannot wait for the mental health care workforce shortage to ease. It's not certain the shortage will ease, or how soon, or where professionals might choose to practice. And kids need help now.

So grant-making organizations, health insurers, schools and communities are putting their heads together to rally other resources. Data from pilots will reveal what's working and what's missing. Improved mental health for adolescents and better access to help are the main goals. But some programs may bring another benefit: leading students to choose careers in adolescent mental health.

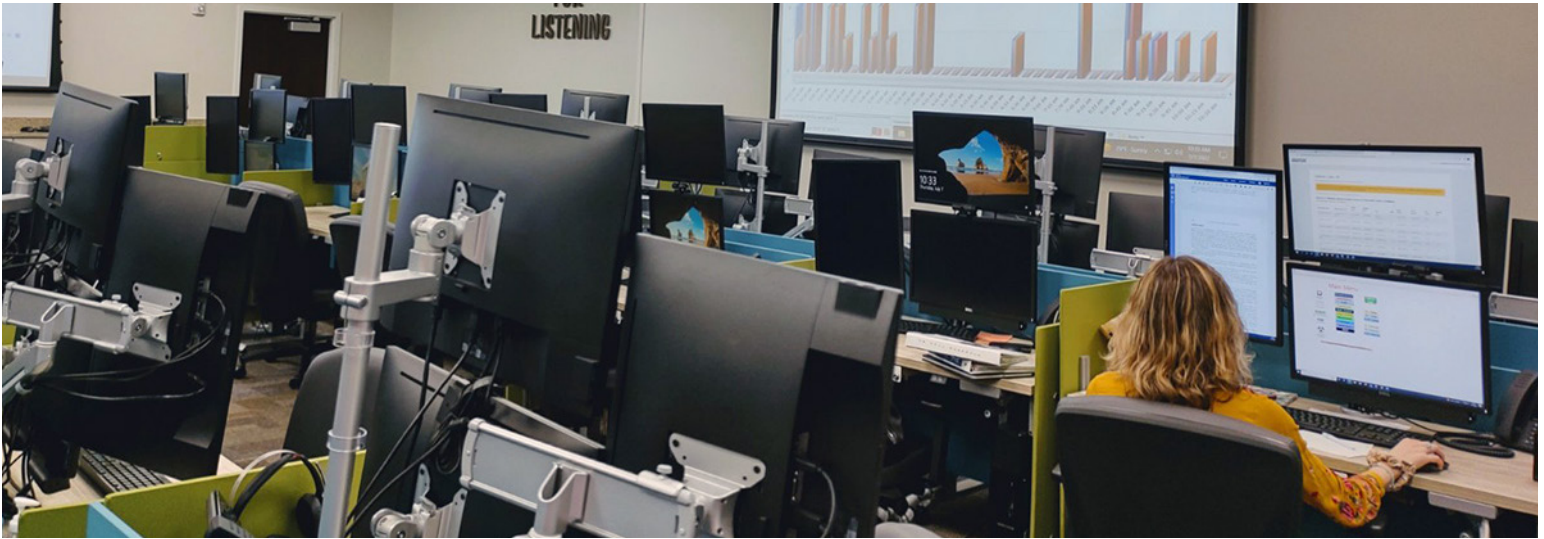
Mental Health: Treatment

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Charleston Center	Behavioral Health Counseling for Incarcerated Youth	01/2020 – 12/2022
Epworth Children’s Home	Epworth Counseling Center for Children and Families	06/2019 – 12/2022
FAVOR Greenville	Expansion of Assertive Community Engagement Recovery Coaching	07/2021 – 06/2023
South Carolina Department of Mental Health	The Mental Health/Law Enforcement Alliance Project	06/2019 – 05/2023
South Carolina Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs)	Empowering South Carolina Communities and CACs To Deliver a Best-Practice Response to Child Abuse	06/2019 – 05/2024
University of South Carolina (UofSC) School Behavioral Health Team	South Carolina School Mental Health Internship and Educational Program	06/2021 – 05/2024





Launch of the 988 Suicide Prevention Lifeline



More than 700,000 South Carolinians are living with mental health conditions. In 2020, more than 800 people in the state died by suicide. Nearly 190,000 adults in South Carolina struggled with thoughts of suicide that same year.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) launched the 988 service this year to help those struggling with thoughts of self-harm. An unfunded federal mandate required NSPL to launch the 988 service as a 24/7 universal dialing code in July. Mental Health America of Greenville County (MHAGC) is the only call center in South Carolina handling these lifeline calls.

The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation continues its support of our state's mental health through a grant to MHAGC. "The Foundation's commitment helped the 988 lifeline hit the ground running when it launched in July," says Erika Kirby, executive director of the Foundation. The goal is to create a system that can be sustained and can evolve as demand grows."

The South Carolina lifeline has seen a 261 percent increase in calls answered by MHAGC since June 2020. Volunteers with MHAGC stopped nearly 200 active suicide attempts between June 2020 and June 2021. Funding support from the Foundation will equip MHAGC with the data and technology to connect call records, increase in-state answer rates and decrease wait times.

The 988 service is meant to provide the most effective support to those experiencing mental health crises. The lifeline diverts mental health-related emergency calls from the 911 service. The goal is to reduce avoidable emergency department or hospital admissions for people in crisis. The 988 system is also designed to help avoid traumatic encounters with the criminal justice system. Nearly all NSPL calls are resolved without involving emergency services.

"The 988 service operates similarly to the NSPL, but the addition of the mental health-focused emergency response is key to providing the most appropriate response to callers in crisis," Kirby says. "The support provided by the Foundation lays the groundwork for this critical service and ensures South Carolinians in crisis can receive the help they need."

Early Childhood

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
City of Spartanburg	“Hello Family” Pay for Success	01/2020 – 12/2026
South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees	Supporting Healthy Child Development Among Underserved Latino Families With Children 0 – 5	06/2020 – 06/2022
South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association	Enhancing Child Serving Provider Competencies for Infant Mental Health	01/2019 – 12/2022
South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association	South Carolina Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Network	01/2020 – 12/2022
South Carolina Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers	South Carolina Safe Babies Court Team Collaborative Approach	10/2021 – 09/2024
The President and Fellows of Harvard College	Planning for a Longitudinal Evaluation of Health and Social Service Utilization Based on Nurse-Family Partnership’s Pay for Success Project	04/2020 – 02/2023
University of South Carolina	The EACH (Ensuring Access to Coordinated Health) Mom and Baby Collaborative	01/2021 – 12/2023



Oral Health

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Affinity Health Center	Dental Expansion Project	01/2021 – 12/2022
Beaufort Jasper Hampton Comprehensive Health Services	School-Based Oral Health Expansion — Implementation	06/2020 – 12/2024
Health Care Partners of South Carolina Inc.	School-Based Oral Health — Readiness and Planning	06/2021 – 05/2022
Medical University of South Carolina	School-Based Oral Health Expansion Initiative — Readiness and Planning	10/2020 – 06/2022
Medical University of South Carolina	School-Based Oral Health — Implementation	06/2021 – 05/2023
Medical University of South Carolina	Improving Oral Health Outcomes Through Integrated Care: Co-Location of Dental Hygienists in Primary Care	01/2020 – 12/2023
Medical University of South Carolina	MENTORS: Making Efforts Necessary To Overcome Rural and Underserved Oral Health Inequities in South Carolina	01/2022 – 06/2025
Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach Services (OLMCOS)	OLMCOS Dental Clinic Downtown Expansion	06/2020 – 05/2023
Reach Out and Read Carolinas	Reach Out and Read — Oral Health Integration Initiative	01/2021 – 12/2023
ReGenesis Health Care	School-Based Oral Health — Implementation	06/2021 – 05/2023
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control	South Carolina Oral Health Institute	01/2021 – 12/2023

Social Determinants of Health

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Clemson University	Community Food Assessments for Rural South Carolina	02/2020 – 09/2022
de Beaumont Foundation	The BUILD Health Challenge	06/2019 – 08/2022
South Carolina Community Loan Fund	Healthy Food Financing Initiative Outreach and Technical Assistance	06/2019 – 12/2022
South Carolina Department of Veterans Affairs	Veteran Services Case Management and Referral Integration	06/2021 – 05/2024
South Carolina Office of Rural Health	Community Health Transformation	01/2021 – 12/2024
University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health	Community Health Worker Institute	03/2019 – 12/2022
University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health	Community Health Worker Institute	01/2023 – 12/2026
University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health	Phase 3: Upstream Learning Collaborative To Address Social Determinants of Health	06/2020 – 10/2022
Wholespire	Community Health Transformation	01/2021 – 12/2024





Wholespire South Carolina

We believe all South Carolinians should have access to healthy choices. People can prevent or manage diabetes, heart disease and other health issues when they have access to healthy foods and options for healthy living. That's why, in 2007, the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation helped fund a new local nonprofit called Eat Smart Move More South Carolina (ESMMSC). Through new coalitions and focused work on advocacy, community action, youth engagement and consumer awareness, ESMMSC set out to advance community-led change to make the healthy choice the easy choice for every person in the Palmetto State. Over the last 15 years, the nonprofit has expanded its reach to 31 counties, collectively reaching 93 percent of South Carolina's population.

The Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project® encourages youth advocates to make a difference in the lives of people in their communities.

In 2021, ESMMSC changed its name to Wholespire, a name that executive director Meg Stanley said reflects how coming together to increase access to wellness in communities creates unification and wholeness. We sat down with Stanley to learn more about Wholespire and its local-level health initiatives in our state.

What is the mission of Wholespire? Has this mission evolved over the years? If so, how?

Wholespire's mission is to provide communities with proven and sustainable approaches to increase access to healthy choices for all people. Our mission hasn't changed much over our 15-year history. We've always focused on increasing access to healthy food and safe places for physical activity. We updated it to reflect a more holistic approach to improving health outcomes. While healthy weight through healthy eating and active living remain a cornerstone of Wholespire's work, we recognize community work must address such factors as social determinants of health.

What inspired the name change from Eat Smart Move More South Carolina to Wholespire?

Just as our mission has slightly changed over the years, so has our work. We are about more than just healthy eating and active living. We needed a new name that reflected the depth of our reach, the connection to chronic diseases, and the potential for us, our chapters and our HYPE teams to work with new and diverse partners from other chronic disease areas of public health.

We love our new name. It represents how working together to improve community wellness provides a sense of togetherness and wholeness that is distributed fairly. Our new name reflects our desire to make a long-term difference for the many people in our state who lack access to essential health services. As we inform, engage and influence decision-makers to incorporate health in policy decisions, it's a reminder to make whole health a possibility for all South Carolinians.

What are some accomplishments within local communities you are most proud of?

Through the rebranding process, we have had the chance to assess how we serve local communities. We have 13 active chapters and are focusing our staff efforts on providing support and training to them. We are proud they continue to trust us to equip them to do great work in their communities. Examples of work we're proud to support include the following:

We teamed with two groups that help the addiction and recovery communities through minigrants, funding by the Foundation, to incorporate physical activity into mental health programs.

A walking track was built in York, and a basketball court was built in Spartanburg. The walking track and basketball court, according to reports from those organizations, have helped increase morale and a sense of belonging and offered patients and families an outlet to deal with stress and isolation.



Wholespire South Carolina *Cont'd*

When a grantee continues its work after the funding ends, it understands sustainability. It's something we encourage, and that's what happened in Bamberg County. The HYPE Project encourages youth advocates to make a difference in the lives of people in their communities. We funded the HYPE team to make park improvements in the city of Bamberg. After completing the project, HYPE team leaders partnered with Saltcatcher Farms to create the Saltcatcher Youth Leadership Program. Many of the HYPE team members joined the program and participate in FoodShare distributions and other community gardening and service projects around the county. The Wholespire Aiken County coalition has recently agreed to lead a community health improvement plan (CHIP) process in their community. This process will allow Wholespire Aiken County to identify and address public health issues based on the results of a community health assessment. We are excited to see more of our Wholespire chapters get involved in the CHIP process and help lead healthy eating and active living (HEAL) efforts in their communities.

What current or upcoming projects are you most excited about?

Promoting Equity Among Coalitions Effectively (PEACE) training: This is the second year Wholespire and the South Carolina Office of Rural Health have teamed up to offer interactive coalition leadership training through funding from the Foundation. That is followed up with custom technical help for action planning and implementation. PEACE training focuses on diversity, equity and inclusion and helps participants examine their personal biases and how those biases affect the choices they make in their work.

HEAL minigrants: The next request for proposals (RFP) for HEAL minigrants will be released in June. This is also funded through the Foundation. In the last few months, we have been reviewing the grant process, including gathering a focus group of funders to help us create a more equitable process, increase technical assistance capacity and improve local health outcomes. We're looking forward to seeing how we can improve the diversity of our applications and funding opportunities.

The HYPE Project has a new logo and look as part of the organization's rebranding efforts. It is undergoing a complete evaluation and will reveal an updated curriculum this summer. Wholespire is encouraging chapters and partner coalitions to engage youth in local community work. We believe youth provide a unique perspective on the needs of their communities and can be strong leaders in community health improvement.

How has support from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation helped Wholespire in its mission?

Something communities seriously need, especially rural communities, is money to give community members the physical activity outlets and healthy food sources they so desperately want and need. Thanks to the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation, Wholespire has been able to provide minigrants to these communities across the state. We've funded recreation departments, schools, youth groups, municipalities and a host of other community-focused entities.

A minigrant is often a catalyst to form a coalition focusing on health outcomes beyond the term of the minigrant. These projects have led to capacity-building opportunities at the state and local levels, including training, partnerships and leveraging of funds. The state-level partnerships created as a result of recent support are leading to increased capacity to support the state health improvement plan.

We are very appreciative of the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation's willingness to provide operational support to the initiatives we fund. Much of the support passed on to the local coalitions comes from staff expertise in the form of training or coaching as coalitions plan and apply sustainable approaches to health.





Diabetes Free SC

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Affinity Health Center	Community Health Workers Reducing Diabetes in South Carolina	07/2021 – 06/2024
Alliance for a Healthier Generation	Healthy Schools — Key to a Diabetes Free South Carolina	06/2020 – 05/2023
Beaufort Jasper Hampton Comprehensive Health Services	Community Health Workers Reducing Diabetes in South Carolina	07/2021 – 06/2024
BlueRidge Parkway Foundation	Kids in Parks: Statewide Expansion in South Carolina	06/2022 – 05/2026
CareSouth Carolina Inc.	Community Health Workers Reducing Diabetes in South Carolina	07/2021 – 06/2024
Health Sciences South Carolina	Improving Surgical Outcomes in Patients With Diabetes by Perioperative Optimization	06/2021 – 05/2024
HopeHealth Inc.	Community Health Workers Reducing Diabetes in South Carolina	07/2021 – 06/2024
Medical University of South Carolina	Diabetes Prevention Through School-Based Wellness	06/2020 – 05/2023
Prisma Health — Midlands	Removing Treatment Barriers for Diabetic Pregnant Patients in Rural Areas	06/2020 – 05/2023
Prisma Health — Upstate	Enhancing Diabetes Care in Pregnancy Through Clinical Collaboration and Telehealth	06/2020 – 05/2023
Tandem Health	Community Health Workers Reducing Diabetes in South Carolina	07/2021 – 06/2024
University of South Carolina	Food Is Medicine SC Landscape Assessment and Evaluation Capacity Building	06/2022 – 05/2023
University of South Carolina School of Medicine	FoodShare: Supporting a Statewide Produce Distribution Network and Diabetes Prevention Model	06/2020 – 05/2025
University of South Carolina School Center for Community Health Alignment	Community Health Workers Reducing Diabetes in South Carolina	07/2021 – 06/2024



Diabetes Free SC: Women’s Health Initiative Grantees

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Clemson University	Regional Integrated Life Cycle Diabetes Program for Women	06/2022 – 05/2025
Medical University of South Carolina Foundation	Diabetes Prevention in Young Women With Obesity and at High Risk for Diabetes	06/2022 – 05/2025
Prisma Health — Midlands	Women’s Health Initiative: Women in Control of Diabetes	06/2022 – 05/2025
Prisma Health — Upstate	Wellness and Empowerment for All Women	06/2022 – 05/2025
Rural Health Services	Rural Health Services (RHS) Women’s Diabetes Program	06/2022 – 05/2025



Community Health Workers Contribute to Diabetes Treatment & Prevention

Our communities play a key role in our daily lives. The people we meet every day influence our decisions, even our health-related decisions. Community health workers (CHWs) have become a vital part of how people seek and receive care. Diabetes Free SC (DFSC) recognizes the crucial role CHWs play in the health of a community. In August 2021, DFSC announced the Community Health Worker project as a new funded program to help reduce diabetes and its complications among South Carolinians.

“CHWs are trusted members of the community who empower their peers through education and their connections to health and social resources,” said DFSC Program Director Noreen O’Donnell. “CHWs are nonclinical members of patient care teams. Their support of individuals with or at risk for diabetes is key, enabling access to necessary components of health care and educating patients about diabetes, its complications, and the steps necessary to preserve and optimize health.”

What is the CHW project?

Kimberly Rawlinson is a CHW specialist with the Center for Community Health Alignment at the University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health. According to Rawlinson, the CHW project focuses on creating a diabetes prevention and management model to improve the health of people with diabetes or prediabetes.

“The project provides core competency training for CHWs, as well as supervisor training. We also are working to develop a CHW-focused diabetes prevention and management specialty track curriculum. The Center for Community Health Alignment is providing ongoing technical assistance support and coaching on best-practice implementation to the five participating federally qualified health centers (FQHCs).”

The five participating health centers are:

- Affinity Health Center (York County).
- Beaufort Jasper Hampton Comprehensive Health Services (Beaufort, Jasper and Hampton counties).
- CareSouth Carolina Inc. (Dillon and Lee counties).
- HopeHealth Inc. (Florence County).
- Tandem Health (Sumter County).

How does the project address health disparities?

The mission of DFSC is to reduce diabetes while addressing health disparities among South Carolinians. This mission is a keystone of the CHW project.

“The CHW project is a step in the right direction in addressing health disparities,” Rawlinson said. “African Americans in South Carolina are disproportionately affected by diabetes. This project addresses those disparities by using the CHW model to build the capacity of FQHCs by developing and enhancing CHW diabetes-focused programs. The CHW model has been shown to have a significant impact in improving the health of individuals who are living with diabetes or who are at risk of developing diabetes.”

CHWs will help bridge the gap between their communities and formal health care providers.

“CHW models have been shown to be effective at reducing the impact of health disparities. The trust between CHWs and patients is critical in building support,” O’Donnell said. “CHWs work in the communities and are skilled at navigating community resources that we know impact someone’s health outcomes and quality of life but exist outside of the clinical scope. These include but are not limited to food, transportation and housing. CHWs also help to inform clinical team members on ways they can better meet patient needs based on their personal, home and community contexts.



Community Health Workers Contribute to Diabetes Treatment & Prevention *Cont'd*

What are the first steps?

The first year of the program will be focused on training CHWs in diabetes prevention and management.

“During the first year of the program, CHWs will be trained using the CHW core competency curriculum as well as a diabetes specific curriculum. CHWs will begin working with patients at all five of the FQHCs, and a program evaluation structure will be fully developed. Over the course of the project, we expect to see improvement in relevant clinical markers and quality-of-life measures,” O’Donnell said.

“We are very excited about this project and the opportunity to work alongside the FQHCs to develop the CHW-based diabetes prevention and management model,” Rawlinson said.



“CHWs are trusted members of the community who empower their peers through education and their connections to health and social resources.”





MOMs in Control of Diabetes

Prenatal Programs Put Moms in Control of Diabetes

Diabetes Free SC (DFSC) launched Management of Maternal (MOMs) programs in 2020. These efforts are part of a long-term commitment to improve the health of all South Carolinians. The MOMs programs accomplish this by improving pregnancy outcomes for women with diabetes.

Dr. Misti Leyva, project administrator of the DFSC pregnancy initiative, oversees the two prenatal programs: MOMs in Control and MOMs in Control of Diabetes Upstate. She says the programs have improved access to care for pregnant women with diabetes.

What makes MOMs different from other programs?

Poor control of diabetes during pregnancy increases the chances for almost every pregnancy problem for mother and baby. Managing blood sugar in pregnancy has many challenges. It often involves separate visits to different providers that impose time, cost and energy demands. Those demands are often impossible to meet for many pregnant women, especially those living in low-income or rural communities. DFSC's MOMs programs offer coordinated care. Care teams include maternal-fetal medicine and diabetes specialists, diabetes educators, nutritionists, ophthalmologists, and behavioral health specialists working together. This saves patients time, money, energy and stress while providing complete medical care for high-risk pregnancies.

How has the MOMs program evolved in the past year?

Community response has been overwhelmingly positive. We added clinic days to one program site almost immediately. Both program sites have expanded education and training opportunities to medical students. And we have developed new community partnerships to address patients' needs more thoroughly. Another change to both programs already proving successful is the addition of community

health workers (CHWs) to existing programs. CHWs can address needs that extend beyond the clinical environment by linking patients to community resources.

What are some notable outcomes in the past year?

An initial goal was to reach a combined total of 725 patients within three years. Just two years later, we have already exceeded that number. More than 800 women have been helped by the MOMs sites in Greenville and Sumter. Other program goals include improved glycemic control and increased use of diabetes technology and devices. Both program sites are reporting improvements in average A1C results and increased use of continuous glucose monitoring.

What is next for MOMs programs and DFSC?

DFSC and the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation recently launched a new women's health initiative. Although this is not an expansion of the MOMs program, it will complement it. This new initiative focuses on improving the health of women who have diabetes or are at risk of developing it. It will focus on women of reproductive age and on care for women before, during and after pregnancy.





Increasing Access to Healthy Food with FoodShare South Carolina

A healthy diet is key to ensuring good overall health. Eating well-rounded meals that include fresh produce can help reduce the risks of developing chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes.

But many people throughout South Carolina do not have access to healthy foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. FoodShare South Carolina was established to help bridge the gap and create greater access to healthy foods.

“We advocate for food access and food justice by supporting various initiatives within our state,” says FoodShare Executive Director Beverly Wilson. “From program design to community outreach, we take our cues from those most affected by poverty and food insecurity.”

The program receives funding from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation, which has allowed FoodShare to expand to 14 counties throughout the state. The program includes 71 hubs and partner sites that provide low-cost food boxes, and 52 of those sites are in areas designated as high-need areas by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The food boxes include about a dozen varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables and recipes to help recipients prepare their food.

“Affordable fruits and vegetables are a necessity in preventing chronic health conditions like obesity, diabetes and heart disease, along with noncommunicable diseases,” says Felicia Smith, a health and wellness coach and health promotion coordinator at BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina. Some urban neighborhoods may have grocery stores, but the availability of fruits and vegetables are scarce. You will see plenty of fast-food restaurants and corners stores that have candy, soda and chips but not fruits and vegetables. The same situation applies to rural areas but with a different setting. Rural communities may have a grocery store 10 miles away, and people might not have reliable transportation.”

Access to healthy foods is not the only barrier to eating healthy. Some South Carolinians cannot afford the fresh produce options that are available. Wilson says the mission of FoodShare is to provide affordable access. Part of the funding the Foundation provides through the Diabetes Free SC initiative allows FoodShare to prioritize recipients who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. SNAP recipients can receive financial assistance to pay for their FoodShare boxes through Healthy Bucks. This program, managed by the South Carolina Department of Social Services, helps make produce more affordable for SNAP recipients through additional purchasing power when using SNAP EBT cards at participating locations, like FoodShare.

Programs like FoodShare help eliminate inequities some South Carolinians face when it comes to access to healthy foods, Smith says. This can have a significant impact on other areas of their lives. “If people have access to affordable food, they are more likely to purchase fruits and vegetables. Their additional funds can go toward other necessities, like paying for medication, rent and utilities.”

Funding and support from the Foundation are vital to expanding FoodShare’s services throughout the state. That expansion involves more than increasing the number of food boxes delivered. FoodShare is working to add nutrition and diabetes education elements to its food box distribution services. The funding will also allow the launch of a program called Veggie Rx.

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Increasing Access to Healthy Food with FoodShare South Carolina *Cont'd*

“Veggie Rx enables health care providers to enroll patients with prediabetes or diabetes into a fresh food box program. Patients receive free produce boxes for the first six months,” Wilson says. “Hospitals and health care clinics are ideal entry points for patients to access these resources. COVID-19 has shown that food truly is medicine and that equitable access to health and protective diets is a matter of life and death to many.”

Blood sugar levels, weight, blood pressure and other self-reported health information are tracked by health care providers.

“It’s important for our health care system to recognize that food access programs such as FoodShare and the Veggie Rx model are effective and critical forms of care. Evidence suggests produce prescription programs can improve health outcomes for lower-income individuals or those who live with diet-related diseases by promoting access to healthy foods and reducing the financial burden of maintaining a healthy diet,” Wilson says.

To date, FoodShare has delivered more than 133,000 boxes of food, which is equal to more than 2 million pounds of produce. But the sky is the limit.

Wilson says, “We’re building a sustainable network of food access member hubs throughout South Carolina that will allow all residents to feed themselves and their families in a dignified manner.”

“Veggie Rx enables health care providers to enroll patients with prediabetes or diabetes into a fresh food box program. Patients receive free produce boxes for the first six months.”





Healthy Eating, Active Living

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control	Improving Fitness of South Carolina Public School Students	01/2020 – 06/2023

Wellness Inspired School Environments (WISE)

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Chesterfield County School District	Wellness Inspired School Environments (WISE)	01/2020 – 10/2022
Fairfield County School District	Wellness Inspired School Environments (WISE)	10/2020 – 10/2022
Georgetown County School District	Wellness Inspired School Environments (WISE)	03/2020 – 10/2022
Marlboro County School District	Wellness Inspired School Environments (WISE)	11/2019 – 09/2022

Safety Net Providers

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Healthy Learners	Healthy Learners' Rural Expansion: Screen/Refer/Serve	06/2020 – 05/2023
Lions Vision Services	Vision for South Carolina: A Collaborative Vision Health Initiative	01/2022 – 12/2024
Midlands Housing Alliance	Addressing the Needs of the Medically Fragile Homeless Population in the Midlands	06/2018 – 06/2023
Prisma Health — Upstate	Community Paramedicine	01/2019 – 12/2022
South Carolina Free Clinic Association	Advancing Free Clinic Care	01/2020 – 12/2023

Quality and Value

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care	South Carolina Advance Care Planning Initiative	12/2017 – 05/2022
South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services	State Opioid Response Government Performance and Results Act Data	11/2018 – 11/2022
South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health	Carolina Pandemic Preparedness Taskforce	04/2021 –08/2022

Workforce

Grantee	Project Title	Grant Period
Charleston Southern University	Community and Home-Based Nursing Initiative for BSN Students	01/2015 – 07/2023
Edward Via Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine	Underrepresented Minority Physician Scholarships	01/2022 – 12/2030
USC College of Nursing	TeleMentalScale	04/2019 – 03/2024
USC College of Nursing	Nursing Faculty Fellows Pipeline Pilot Program	01/2022 – 12/2024
USC School of Medicine at Greenville	Levi S. Kirkland Scholarships	01/2021 – 12/2031
USC Upstate Foundation	Developing Nurse Faculty To Strengthen the Nursing Pipeline	01/2022 – 06/2024



Inaugural Minority Physician Scholarship Awarded at the Virginia Via College of Osteopathic Medicine

The Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine-Carolinas (VCOM-Carolinas) has received a grant from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation. This grant will further expand access to physicians and improve health care in South Carolina by supporting VCOM-Carolinas' efforts to recruit, retain and graduate minority medical students who will remain in South Carolina to practice primary care.

Four students will benefit from this grant with each receiving full tuition throughout their four years in medical school. In exchange, the students agree to provide primary care services in South Carolina for a minimum of four years.

Educational debt is one of the greatest barriers to recruiting all medical students, especially underrepresented minorities and those from rural and medically underserved areas. The high loan burden associated with medical school can discourage these students from pursuing careers as physicians. This creates a ripple effect of widening health care disparities that disproportionately affect the accessibility of primary care physicians in underserved areas. Research shows health outcomes improve when the race and ethnicity of the patient are the same as that of the physician.

"A majority of the 46 counties in South Carolina are considered medically underserved, and the state must meet health care needs by addressing current and growing demands for primary care providers. The grant from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation will greatly help VCOM-Carolinas recruit minority physicians to practice in medically underserved areas, and this will have enormous positive outcomes for the health of South Carolina and could save lives, as many residents living in these areas often lack access to basic health care services," said Dr. Matthew Cannon, dean of VCOM-Carolinas.

Two students from the class of 2026 received scholarships due to this funding, and two students from the class of 2027 will receive scholarships.

Kanika Dunn earned a master's degree in biomedical sciences from Bluefield University-VCOM Campus and a doctor of pharmacy degree from Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. She completed a pharmacy practice residency at Winthrop University Hospital in Mineola, New York, and a pediatrics pharmacy residency at St. Joseph's Children's Hospital in Tampa, Florida. Before entering medical school at VCOM-Carolinas, she worked as a clinical pediatric pharmacist at Tampa General Hospital in Tampa, Florida.

"Money has been the biggest factor in me pursuing a medical degree. Having student loans for pharmacy school delayed me attending medical school. Receiving this scholarship is an amazing feeling, and I will now be able to live out my dream of becoming a pediatrician," said Dunn.

Shabria Williams earned a bachelor's degree in public health from the College of Charleston and a master's degree in biomedical studies from Chatham University. Before entering medical school at VCOM-Carolinas, she worked as a laboratory program adviser for the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

"Receiving this grant from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation puts me one step closer to realizing my goal of becoming a physician and returning to my native home of South Carolina to practice medicine and to care for rural and underserved patients," said Williams.





Nursing Faculty Fellows Pipeline Pilot at the University of South Carolina

The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation continues to invest in nursing education at the University of South Carolina (UofSC) College of Nursing. A grant from the Foundation will enable new faculty to be hired over the next three years to support increasing student enrollment as the college addresses a critical shortage of nurses in our state and beyond.

South Carolina can expect a 24 percent nursing staff shortage over the next few years, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Also, according to the federal Bureau of Health Workforce, the state has the lowest nurse-to-population ratio in the U.S.

The Foundation grant helped launch a new Nursing Faculty Fellows Pipeline Program in August. This fellowship will provide additional mentorship, teaching and research preparation and will increase readiness for graduates to become future faculty. During the next three years, seven to 10 UofSC doctoral students will be accepted into the Faculty Pipeline Program and hired as faculty clinical “instructors.” After completion, the fellow is eligible to apply to be an assistant professor in the College of Nursing.

College of Nursing students are in the top 1 percent of the National Council Licensure Examination pass rates in the country and have had 100 percent pass rates on nurse practitioner board exams. The college is ranked No. 1 in graduate online nursing programs by U.S. News & World Report. The college also has increased its pre-licensure junior class Bachelor of Science in nursing enrollment by 40 percent over the past six years. At the graduate level, it has increased overall enrollment by 130 percent.

“Because of our statewide and national reputation for excellence, there is a huge demand for our nursing program, with more applications at both the undergraduate and graduate level than we can admit,” said Dean Jeannette Andrews. “Our health system partners favor our expertly trained graduates, and we have a strong history of partnering on nursing workforce issues.”

Vital initiatives are underway at UofSC to address the future nursing workforce challenge in South Carolina. The number of patients and families across the state impacted from this pilot program’s additional workforce is projected in the thousands. With more than 11,000 alumni, partners, and faculty and staff, the College of Nursing will continue to lead the way in improving health outcomes and equity and solving the nursing shortage.

“While South Carolina faces challenges, the College of Nursing is rising to meet them. Learning from UofSC faculty recognized nationally and internationally for innovative research, our students become agile nurses who can thrive in a wide range of patient care settings,” said Andrews.

“Because of our statewide and national reputation for excellence, there is a huge demand for our nursing program, with more applications at both the undergraduate and graduate level than we can admit.”

The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association.