

News Release
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Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas Gives Grant to Address COVID-19 in Hard-to-Reach Communities

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (June 22, 2020) – The Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas announced a \$286,000 grant to the Northwest Arkansas Council Foundation to address the recent spike in COVID-19 transmission in the Latinx and Marshallese populations in Northwest Arkansas.

The funds will be used to hire and train community health navigators to conduct outreach within Latinx and Marshallese communities. This grant is part of a larger program intended to limit the spread of COVID-19 through a coordinated response for testing and other support in hard-to-reach populations of Northwest Arkansas.

“Since the pandemic began, the Blue & You Foundation has worked to rapidly respond to the needs across the state resulting from COVID-19,” said Patrick O’Sullivan, executive director of the Blue & You Foundation. “Since April, we’ve funded more than \$2.4 million to organizations fighting the spread of the virus, but the Northwest Arkansas crisis is a need unlike any challenge our state has experienced thus far. The Blue & You Foundation provides this grant to the Northwest Arkansas Council Foundation with gratitude for their planning and dedication to finding solutions in their region of the state.”

The grant will support 10 community health navigators, who will be hired from within the Northwest Arkansas communities especially hard hit by the pandemic. Six navigators will be bilingual in Spanish and English, and four will be bilingual in Marshallese and English. With recent spikes in COVID-19 cases, it is estimated that more than 80 bilingual navigators and contact tracers are needed.

The community health navigators will be employed, trained and supervised by the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus (UAMS) and Community Clinic. Each of these organizations have long-term experience and strong relationships with the Marshallese- and Spanish-speaking populations in Northwest Arkansas.

“Northwest Arkansas is a diverse region and is home to large Latinx and Pacific Islander populations who make significant contributors to the state’s overall economic success and cultural diversity,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., vice chancellor of the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus. “Unfortunately, these communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, having rates of infection that are about 400% higher than the general population. We are pleased that Blue & You Foundation has announced the first investment in our efforts to reduce the COVID-19 disparities in the Latinx and Marshallese communities. This grant will help us begin the process of lowering those infection rates.”

As part of the local community, the community health navigators will be able to connect with people, give advice and link them to community resources. The navigators will also provide translation and interpretation services, help with access to resources (such as food and medication) that will allow people to self-isolate, connect people to testing services for themselves and other family members, and provide support for contact tracing.

This grant will complement existing activities being undertaken in the region by the Northwest Arkansas Council’s Healthcare Transformation Division. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the division has served as a coordinating body to establish a collective, region-wide response to the pandemic.

“This grant will provide significant immediate resources to help curb infections in these hard-to-reach communities in Northwest Arkansas,” said Nelson Peacock, president and CEO of the Northwest Arkansas Council. “We are grateful for the coordination and support from the state of Arkansas and other funders to help implement a robust testing and tracing strategy for the region.”

“COVID-19 has left no community untouched, but we’re seeing it take an especially dramatic toll on our ethnic populations, particularly our Latinx and Pacific Islander populations in the northwest region of our state,” said Curtis Barnett, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield president and chief executive officer. “We are pleased to support the Northwest Arkansas Council as it implements its COVID-19 Response Plan. We believe having trusted health navigators from within the community who can help overcome language barriers and address critical social needs will be key to successfully controlling the spread of COVID-19 within these populations.”

About the Northwest Arkansas Council

Established in 1990 by Sam Walton, Don Tyson, J.B. Hunt and 30 other business leaders, the Northwest Arkansas Council is a private, nonprofit organization working to advance job opportunities, talent recruitment, physical infrastructure and quality of life in the region. Most of the Council’s more than 100 members are companies, including Walmart, Tyson Foods, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc., Simmons Foods and George’s, Inc.

About the Northwest Arkansas Council Health Care Transformation Division

The Northwest Arkansas Council established its Health Care Transformation Division in 2019 to facilitate collaboration among health care providers to make the region a destination for health care. Susan Barrett, retired president of Mercy Health System, chairs the division that includes eight major health care organizations: Arkansas

Children's Northwest, Mercy Northwest Arkansas, Northwest Health, University of Arkansas, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks, Washington Regional Medical Center and the Whole Health Institute.

About the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health.

About the Blue & You Foundation

The Blue & You Foundation, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, serves the state of Arkansas and is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. In its 19 years of operation, the Blue & You Foundation has awarded more than \$39 million to more than 2,400 health-improvement programs in Arkansas. Founded in 1948, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, is the largest health insurer in Arkansas. Arkansas Blue Cross and its affiliates have more than 3,000 employees. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association is comprised of 36 independent, community-based and locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans that collectively provide healthcare coverage for nearly 106 million members – one in three Americans.

About Community Clinic

Community Clinic's mission is to help people lead healthy lives by providing health care for all in Northwest Arkansas. Community Clinic has provided quality care to our low-income and uninsured neighbors for over 20 years. As a non-profit and Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), Community Clinic is a patient centered medical home providing quality, affordable care and offering discounts to low-income uninsured and underinsured patients. Our focus is on prevention and wellness. As a healthcare safety net in Northwest Arkansas, the clinic is able to reduce the need for more costly care such as ER visits or hospitalizations. Community Clinic provides quality, affordable health care to over 39,000 Northwest Arkansas residents. In addition to primary acute care, Community Clinic offers women's health, prenatal, pediatric, dental, physical therapy and behavioral health across our 14 locations.

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