



Blue&You
FOUNDATION
FOR A HEALTHIER ARKANSAS
An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

NEWS RELEASE

601 South Gaines Street | Little Rock, AR 72201
501-378-3300 | blueandyoufoundationarkansas.org

Executive Director: Rebecca Pittillo | 501-378-5628
or rapittillo@arkbluecross.com

Media contact:

Max Greenwood, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield
magreenwood@arkbluecross.com

Office: 501-378-2131 ■ Cell: 501-831-1415

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arkansas Blue Cross supports behavioral health programs in Arkansas

Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas provides \$5.29 million in grants to Arkansas programs to increase access and eliminate barriers

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (July 16, 2021) – The Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas announced today \$5.29 million in grants for behavioral health programs in Arkansas. This investment is focused on eight Arkansas programs led by six established organizations that will address the growing behavioral health crisis in the state. To meet the unique needs of Arkansans, the grants support programs that address behavioral health needs at all stages of life – from early childhood through adolescence, and into adulthood – along with helping to increase the number of behavioral health professionals serving our communities.

The Blue & You Foundation is a charitable foundation established and funded by Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield to promote better health in Arkansas.

Across the United States, behavioral health conditions, including mental and substance use disorders, have been on the rise since 2014 and have risen even more sharply since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Arkansas, the issue is particularly serious. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that incidents of suicide, along with symptoms of anxiety and depression, are prevalent in Arkansas at rates higher than the national average. There is also an unmet need for behavioral healthcare in the state with 65.7 percent of adolescents reported having not received treatment for a major depressive episode, also significantly higher than the national average.

“We believe that addressing the behavioral healthcare needs of our state requires collaboration with local organizations that have demonstrated success in increasing access, improving outcomes and reducing stigma,” said Curtis Barnett, president and CEO of Arkansas Blue Cross. “We recognize the impact behavioral health can have on the health of individuals, families, and communities as a whole. With these investments, we can help create healthier communities and give hope to those in need, while normalizing the conversation around behavioral health.”

Addressing the behavioral health crisis requires a collaborative and coordinated approach. That is why the Blue & You Foundation selected eight innovative programs to receive this investment.

The programs selected for the Blue & You Foundation grants are:

- **Arkansas Children's** – will receive \$1.5 million to integrate the nationally recognized HealthySteps program in pediatric primary care facilities in Arkansas.
- **University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences** – will receive \$1.95 million to expand The Trauma Resource Initiative for Schools and AR-Connect programs.
 - \$1.2 million will go toward the expansion of the Trauma Resource Initiative for Schools, which provides K-12 school personnel in Arkansas resources to support children who experience trauma and provide trauma-related care navigation services as well as onsite resources in times of a crisis on a school campus.
 - \$750,000 will support the growth and increased awareness of AR-Connect, which provides evidence-based care to individuals experiencing behavioral health symptoms and a crisis line that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) Endowments** – will be provided to expand the behavioral health workforce and train these specialists to practice in primary care settings.
 - A total of \$1.735 million will be provided to three universities to support their Master of Social Work programs to train LCSWs in primary care settings. Each of the following schools will receive an endowment of \$500,000 to directly support students in their Master of Social Work programs.
 - **Arkansas State University**
 - **University of Arkansas – Fayetteville**
 - **University of Arkansas – Little Rock**
 - Additionally, the Blue & You Foundation is providing funding to support start-up and administrative costs: Arkansas State University will receive an additional \$30,000; the University of Arkansas/Fayetteville will receive an additional \$100,000; and the University of Arkansas/Little Rock will receive an additional \$105,000.
- **The Arkansas Chapter of The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Arkansas)** – will receive \$105,000 to support the growth and maintenance of programs that provide resources to support individuals with mental health conditions and reduce stigma around the use of behavioral health services.
 - \$78,000 will support NAMI High School Clubs and NAMI On Campus which provides peer support on high school and college campuses for

students experiencing behavioral health symptoms, and combats stigma associated with behavioral health.

- \$27,000 will go toward the growth and awareness of NAMI Educational Support Groups that provide resources and training to build community networks that can offer support to individuals who may be struggling with mental illness or substance misuse.

“From the onset of our research and discovery process, we knew that we’d be more successful in achieving our goal to improve behavioral healthcare in Arkansas by finding established and proven programs within the Natural State,” said Rebecca Pittillo, executive director of the Blue & You Foundation. “As we engaged with organizations across the state, I was amazed at the innovative approaches to challenging issues and the tremendous results already achieved. The programs led by the grant recipients announced today will go a long way in helping provide immediate and long-term support for Arkansans in need.”

The programs awarded the Blue & You Foundation grants are designed to:

- Build life-long health, resiliency, and well-being for children and families by standardizing early intervention practices and addressing the drivers of behavioral health conditions.
- Expand the behavioral healthcare workforce and better integrate behavioral health into primary care, and
- Remove barriers to care such as long-standing stigma around receiving behavioral health treatment.

Funding is awarded and available immediately and all grant recipients/program directors will oversee the allocation of their funding to activate these solutions as quickly as possible.

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About the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas

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 20 years of operation, the Blue & You Foundation has awarded more than \$40 million to more than 2,600 health-improvement programs in Arkansas. To achieve the goal of better health for all Arkansans, the Blue & You Foundation seeks to harness the power of partnership. By strategically focusing its grant funding on community-based solutions, the Foundation hopes to nurture community health leadership, foster collaboration, and innovation, and leverage financial, human and community resources to produce a measurable, positive impact. To learn more about the Foundation’s investments, visit blueandyoufoundationarkansas.org.