



Investing to address the behavioral health crisis in Arkansas

- Record \$5.29 million investment made by Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas to innovative, Arkansas-based programs focused on behavioral health.
- Proven programs to address behavioral health needs in children, adolescents and adults, along with investment in behavioral healthcare providers in Arkansas communities with greatest need.
- The need in our state is critical. Incidents of suicide, along with symptoms of anxiety and depression, are prevalent in Arkansas at rates higher than the national average.
- Investment in the behavioral health of Arkansans along their life continuum is an important part of Arkansas Blue Cross' commitment to improving the health and wellness of our great state.

Understanding the behavioral health crisis in Arkansas

Across the United States, behavioral health conditions 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, and [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) reports that:

- The percentage of adults in Arkansas experiencing symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder is **higher than the national average** (40.4% vs. 37.7% in the United States).
- The **suicide rate in Arkansas is almost four points higher** than the national average
 - Suicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents (ages 12-17) across the United States.
- There is an unmet need for behavioral healthcare in Arkansas:
 - Only 34.4% of the need for mental health professionals is currently met in Arkansas.
 - 65.7% of adolescents who reported a major depressive episode did not receive mental health treatment, which is higher than the national average of 58.5%.
 - Many Arkansas adults with mental illness do not receive mental health treatment.
- Barriers to behavioral healthcare include:
 - Costs (of the adults in Arkansas who do not receive mental health treatment, 49.5% reported not receiving care due to costs).
 - Lack of awareness of behavioral health conditions and symptoms.
 - Lack of awareness of affordable resources available to support individuals experiencing symptoms.
 - Stigma associated with receiving behavioral healthcare.
 - Lack of healthcare resources for behavioral health.

Why is this such a concern? Behavioral health plays a major role in an individual’s ability to maintain good physical health. Mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, affect people’s ability to participate in health-promoting behaviors.

Behavioral health conditions are also directly correlated with increases in overdose fatalities, suicide, or premature death, according to [Deloitte Insights](#). And, according to [an analysis](#) from the Well Being Trust & The Robert Graham Center, the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to 75,000 additional deaths from alcohol and drug misuse and suicide by 2029.

Behavioral health conditions have substantial effects on the American economy — including workplace productivity and healthcare costs. Mental illness causes more than [200 million missed workdays and over \\$16 billion lost in productivity each year](#).

Taking action to address the behavioral health crisis in Arkansas

Through the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, Arkansas Blue Cross has the opportunity to improve access to affordable behavioral health services and the resources that meet the needs of communities across our state.

We are proud to make this \$5.29 million investment – the largest in Blue & You Foundation history – to innovative and proven programs that will address behavioral health needs at several points along the continuum of care delivery, addressing all ages.

We believe that success will come through programs with local organizations that have demonstrated success in increasing access, improving outcomes, and reducing stigma surrounding behavioral health.

Detail on investments in Arkansas-based partners

The investments will support three key areas: Early intervention, Workforce integration and Removing barriers to behavioral healthcare.

- **Standardizing early intervention**

Arkansas ranks 40th in their overall health and well-being. Our investments in this area can help promote lifelong health and resiliency and reduce the rates of serious mental illness, substance abuse, and criminality. In the process, they can reduce hospitalizations and ER visits, help contain medical costs, and lower the need for public social services.

\$1.5 million	to Arkansas Children’s to introduce a pilot project for HealthySteps, a nationally recognized program that will bring more prevention-oriented primary care services to pediatric primary care facilities in Arkansas.
\$1.2 million	to support the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences’ Trauma Resource Initiative for Schools, which trains K through 12 personnel in recognizing and supporting children who experience trauma and need help, and provides behavioral health resources during times of a school crisis.

- **Workforce integration**

Integrating behavioral health specialists into primary care settings will increase access to and awareness of behavioral healthcare. Training Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) to work in these settings will expand the behavioral healthcare workforce and support an easier integration with primary care providers.

\$1.735 million	In three grants to Arkansas State University, the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville, and the University of Arkansas – Little Rock to train more Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) and prepare them to work in primary care facilities here in Arkansas.
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- Each program will receive an endowment of \$500,000 to directly support students in their Master of Social Work studies.
- Additionally, the Blue & You Foundation is providing funding to support the start-up and administrative costs for these programs:
 - Arkansas State University will receive an additional \$30,000.
 - University of Arkansas – Fayetteville will receive an additional \$100,000.
 - University of Arkansas – Little Rock will receive an additional \$105,000.
- **Removing barriers to behavioral healthcare**
 Nine out of 10 Americans feel mental illness carries a stigma, and one-third are uncertain about how to obtain behavioral healthcare. Expanding awareness and understanding is a key step in getting these health services where they are needed.

\$750,000	to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) to support and expand AR-Connect — a statewide urgent-response system and 24-hour crisis support line that connects people with mental health needs to resources — within 24 hours of their call, by phone or online if necessary. UAMS will use this investment to increase awareness of the program among Arkansas teachers, administrators, parents and students.
\$105,000	to the Arkansas Chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI Arkansas) , to support high school clubs and on-campus peer support groups (\$78,000). This funding will also help fund the growth of other educational support groups (\$27,000). These networks help raise awareness, combat stigma, build advocacy, and train people to offer effective peer support to those with mental illness.

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.