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## **Blue Cross NC Awards 17 Organizations in \$4 Million Effort to Narrow Gap of State’s Racial, Health Disparities**

- *Investments to fund projects addressing health equity and the state’s alarming maternal and infant health disparities and to support nonprofits led by or serving people of color*
- *Now accepting applications for second round of funding to improve access to behavioral health care*

**DURHAM, N.C.** – Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) announced the first round of recipients of its \$4 million commitment to address and eliminate racial, health and geographical disparities in North Carolina. Seventeen organizations across the state are being awarded grants, totaling \$3 million, for the company’s “[Addressing Maternal and Infant Health Disparities](#)” and “[Strengthen NC](#)” programs. Additional funding is now available for nonprofit organizations and public health entities improving access to behavioral health care in rural and underserved communities.

Last October, Blue Cross NC began inviting organizations to apply for awards when it announced its [three-pronged statewide effort](#) to improve the state’s maternal, infant and behavioral health outcomes and support organizations led by or serving historically underrepresented communities and people of color.

“We know the health of our state depends on the health of all our communities – and this statewide effort helps get resources into the hands of those who can make an impact,” said Cheryl Parquet, Director of Community Engagement and Marketing Activation at Blue Cross NC. “We’re proud to support deserving organizations who are on the ground creating culturally relevant solutions and supporting better and more equitable access to health care.”

North Carolina data shows that the people most impacted by health disparities belong to Black, Hispanic, American Indian, rural and other underserved communities. The state has the 11<sup>th</sup> highest infant mortality rate where Black, Hispanic and American Indian babies are up to 2.4 times more likely to die before age 1. And their birthing parents are more likely to experience increased levels of severe maternal morbidity or unexpected birth outcomes with health consequences.<sup>1</sup> The state also ranks 38<sup>th</sup> nationally in access to mental health care.<sup>2</sup> Out of its 100 counties, 27 have no psychiatrist at all and 69 are without any child psychiatrists.<sup>3</sup>

Blue Cross NC’s first round of funding will support the following efforts:

### **Addressing Maternal and Infant Health Disparities - \$2 Million**

These multi-year initiatives, led by diverse community organizations and state agencies, will help improve the experiences for birthing people and babies from historically underserved communities and contribute

to Blue Cross NC's goal of reducing racial disparities in maternal and child health in North Carolina by 50% in five years.

Organizations receiving funding of up to \$500,000 are:

- **Chatham County EMBRACe** to create a person-centered system of care oriented around women of color, their lived experiences, their full personhood and their well-being. EMBRACe is made up of: UNC Chatham Hospital, the Chatham County Department of Social Services, Chatham County Department of Public Health and Piedmont Health Services.
- **University of North Carolina at Pembroke** to improve access to quality care for expecting and parenting mothers of diverse ethnic groups by targeting health care and education professionals as systems for change within the southeastern region of North Carolina.
- **The Foundation for North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University** to support its Pathway 2 Program and implement training for more people of color to become certified internationally credited lactation consultants with the goal to open a lactation clinic to serve the minority population in Guilford County and surrounding areas in North Carolina.
- **Queen City Cocoa B.E.A.N.S.** to launch a breastfeeding education program for new and expecting families from communities of color in Mecklenburg County and a mentoring program for health care providers and/or health profession students from underrepresented communities of color who would like to become International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants.
- **Lincoln Height Community Center** to launch a grassroots prenatal program, where local expectant mothers are educated in nutrition, provided with transportation to prenatal appointments and provided with childcare for their existing children, if necessary. The Center also provides meals to expectant mothers monthly, transportation to errand runs and legal appointments, affordable housing resources, and regular wellness checks conducted by staff.
- **Nurse- Family Partnership** to support nurse education, capacity building and caseload building for nurse home visitors across North Carolina. Nurse-Family Partnership is a community health program that connects specially trained nurses to first-time parents early in pregnancy and provides advice and support via home visits and telehealth through the child's second birthday.
- **North Carolina Black Alliance** to address breastfeeding rates disparities in Eastern North Carolina by coordinating with state and local institutions to support the development of more lactation consultants in Eastern NC.

### **Strengthen NC – \$1 Million**

Through Blue Cross NC's Strengthen NC program, organizations led by or serving underrepresented communities and people of color will receive operational support and up to \$100,000 in funding from Blue Cross NC over a two-year period. The program is designed to increase organizational capacity and help build future sustainability for its participants. Organizations will also receive peer mentoring, technical assistance, training and other capacity-building support. Ten NC nonprofits with a mission of promoting health equity in maternal or behavioral health have been selected to participate.

- **Equity Before Birth** works to improve health outcomes for Black birthing people and their infants by increasing access to critical services and support.

- **MAAME, Inc.** empowers Black, Indigenous and other birthing people of color with resources, services and support for a holistic approach to maternal health and wellness.
- **H.E.A.R.T.S.**, educates and equips young pregnant and parenting adolescents with the tools needed to become independent and self-sufficient.
- **Wounded Healers of North Carolina** embraces and supports individuals reentering the community following incarceration through peer support and resources.
- **NC FIELD** works with migrant and seasonal farmworker youth and families utilizing grassroots organizing principles to teach leadership, promote education and facilitate opportunities.
- **LGBTQ Center of Durham** supports LGBTQ+ people through services, programming, resources and support networks that center their wellbeing and allows them to thrive.
- **Vecinos, Inc.** provides culturally appropriate health and wellness services for the uninsured Latinx community.
- **El Centro Hispano** empowers Latino families through education and leadership development.
- **Eustress, Inc.** raises awareness of the importance of mental health in the Black community allowing individuals to identify and overcome challenges to achieve a healthier and productive lifestyle.
- **Rural Opportunity Institute** strives to end generational cycles of trauma and poverty by preventing adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress for communities in Edgecombe County.

### **Applications now open – Blue Cross NC’s \$1 million pledge to improve access to care in rural and underserved areas**

Applications are now open for community-based initiatives that improve access to high-quality, evidence-based treatment for adults and children with behavioral health disorders in rural and underserved communities.

Proposals from organizations and public health entities are being accepted now through March 18, 2022 and must include a plan of sustainability beyond the funding period. This call for proposals stimulates collaboration to address the state’s behavioral health crisis and supports Blue Cross NC’s goal to improve access to behavioral health care in rural and underserved communities in North Carolina by 25% in five years.

More details on eligibility, the application process and informational sessions [can be found here](#).

These funding initiatives are part of Blue Cross NC’s efforts to advance health equity in North Carolina through strategic partnerships and investments. To learn more about Blue Cross NC’s long-standing commitment to advance diversity, equity and inclusion and drive health equity across the state, [visit our website](#).

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**About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina:**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) is committed to making health care better, simpler and more affordable. We have been driving better health in North Carolina since 1933, working to tackle our communities' greatest health challenges. Blue Cross NC serves its customers and communities of more than 4.2 million members, including approximately 1.1 million on behalf of other Blue Plans. Blue Cross NC is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Visit Blue Cross NC online at [www.bluecrossnc.com](http://www.bluecrossnc.com). All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/severematernalmorbidity.html>

<sup>2</sup> [Access to Care Data 2022 | Mental Health America \(mhanational.org\)](https://www.mhanational.org/access-to-care-data-2022)

<sup>3</sup> <https://nchealthworkforce.unc.edu/interactive/supply/>