



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

NEWS RELEASE

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Blue Cross NC, UNC-CH Announce Investment in School of Medicine Physician Assistant Studies Program to Support Statewide Health Needs

\$1.2 Million Blue Cross NC investment will help program to grow from 40 to 100 students, support veterans with medical training transition into civilian health care, and improve access to primary care

Physician Assistant Studies program created through Blue Cross NC, UNC School of Medicine partnership in 2012

DURHAM, N.C. – Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) today announced a significant \$1.2 million investment in the School of Medicine’s Physician Assistant Studies (PA) program to support statewide health needs. The PA program is designed, in part, to help returning veterans with medical training work in civilian health care, and to address the shortage of primary health care professionals in rural North Carolina. This investment builds on Blue Cross NC’s 2012 investment of \$1.2 million. The 2012 investment established the physician assistant master’s degree program at the UNC School of Medicine’s Department of Allied Health Sciences.

The UNC PA program will use the Blue Cross NC investment to grow from a total of 40 students to 100 students over the next five years. Additionally, the funding will help lay the foundation for developing the rural sites needed to accommodate the increased number of students on clinical rotations in their second year of study. It will also allow the program to recruit and retain top faculty.

“Our men and women in the Armed Forces have some of the best real-world medical training. Helping them move into civilian health care is a win for our state. North Carolina gains great medical professionals, and we improve access to care,” said **Dr. Patrick Conway, President and CEO of Blue Cross NC.**

70 of North Carolina’s 80 rural counties are classified as medical deserts due to their lack of primary care. Nationwide, by 2025, the U.S. is expected to have a shortage of

between 124,400 and 312,000 physicians, and 37 percent of that shortfall is expected to be in primary care medicine.¹

This investment will further the UNC PA program's goal of addressing the shortage of medical professionals statewide by supporting scholarships for both veterans seeking physician assistant certification, and physician assistant students pursuing careers in rural parts of the state.

"We are grateful for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina's continuing partnership and support of the UNC Physician Assistant Studies program," said **Chancellor Carol L. Folt**. "This program, which graduated its first class in December 2017, embodies Carolina's commitment to service in communities across our state. With Blue Cross NC's support, this program can continue to provide training for non-traditional students, and particularly veterans with medical experience, as they confront challenges to the health and wellbeing of our citizens."

"This continued support from Blue Cross NC has bolstered our Physician Assistant Studies program at the UNC School of Medicine," said **Dr. William L. Roper, dean of the UNC School of Medicine and CEO of UNC Health Care**. "Our ongoing partnership means more North Carolinians will have access to health care, which is a critical need in our state. We are grateful to Blue Cross NC for their vision and commitment to this endeavor."

The UNC PA program works to recruit military veterans, non-traditional students and students from rural and medically underserved areas. Eight of the 20 students in the inaugural class were veterans, and one (a ninth student) was the spouse of a veteran.

Currently, 35 percent of all physician assistant students at the UNC School of Medicine are military-affiliated or veterans, with 63 percent from North Carolina and 21 percent from medically underserved populations.

The investment is part of Blue Cross NC's larger commitment to contribute [\\$50 million toward community health initiatives in 2018](#). The investment is partially funded through \$40 million in tax savings generated through the recently passed Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina improves the health and well-being of our customers and communities by providing innovative health care products, services and information to more than 3.89 million members, including approximately 1 million served on behalf of other Blue Plans. Since 1933, we have worked to make North Carolina a better place to live through our support of community organizations, programs and

¹ [The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2015 to 2030](#), Association of American Medical Colleges, 2017

events that promote good health. We have been recognized as one of the World's Most Ethical Companies by Ethisphere Institute every year since 2012. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Visit Blue Cross online at bcbsnc.com. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

About the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the nation's first public university, is a global higher education leader known for innovative teaching, research and public service. A member of the prestigious Association of American Universities, Carolina regularly ranks as the best value for academic quality in U.S. public higher education. Now in its third century, the University offers 77 bachelor's, 111 master's, 65 doctorate and seven professional degree programs through 14 schools and the College of Arts and Sciences. Every day, faculty, staff and students shape their teaching, research and public service to meet North Carolina's most pressing needs in every region and all 100 counties. Carolina's more than 323,000 alumni live in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and 149 countries. More than 169,000 live in North Carolina.

About UNC School of Medicine

The UNC School of Medicine (SOM) is the state's largest medical school graduating approximately 180 new physicians each year. It is consistently ranked among the top medical schools in the US, including 1st overall for primary care by US News & World Report, and 6th for research among public universities. More than half of the school's 1,700 faculty members served as principal investigators on active research awards in 2017. Two UNC SOM faculty members have earned Nobel Prize awards.

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