



NEWS RELEASE

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Blue Cross NC Awards \$1 Million to NC Community Colleges to Combat Opioid Epidemic

Investment will go to Brunswick, Lenoir, Rockingham, South Piedmont and Wilkes County Community Colleges

DURHAM, N.C. – Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) has invested \$1 million with the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) to help fund associate degree programs in emergency medical science (EMS) at five community colleges across the state. The investment will address health care needs across North Carolina, including the opioid epidemic, by supporting student academic success, faculty recruitment, retention and professional development; and state-of-the-art equipment and technology, such as simulation manikins that give students real-time feedback.

Like much of the country, North Carolina has seen dramatic increases in addiction and overdose rates in recent years. Since 2010, deaths resulting from heroin overdoses in North Carolina increased 884 percent.¹ The dramatic increase in overdoses emphasizes the importance of adequately trained and sufficiently resourced emergency medical personnel.

“We want to ensure access to quality emergency medical care for all North Carolinians, and that starts with training the next generation of first responders,” said Patrick Conway, MD, President and CEO of Blue Cross NC. “This investment will provide students with required resources and technology necessary for academic success.”

The investment aims to specifically target combating the opioid epidemic in the state’s most distressed areas, based on statewide data. These areas have some of the highest unintentional opioid deaths in the state. The five colleges awarded the funding are Brunswick, Lenoir, Rockingham, South Piedmont and Wilkes. The investment will:

- Support advanced coursework for EMS faculty, with a focus on targeting best practices for patient treatment, clinician safety, and understanding of the opioid crisis – both in safety for health care providers and safety for patients.
- Replace outdated training equipment and technology, including low and high-fidelity manikins, to expand opportunities for clinical practice.
- Expand funding for subject matter expert tutors, simulation lab faculty and student scholarships and emergency funds.

¹ *Opioid Overdose and North Carolina’s Public Health and Prevention Strategies, 2016*

Health professionals that train in rural and underserved settings are more likely to choose to practice and remain in such settings.² Community colleges provide affordable educational opportunities for persons living in these geographic areas, allowing students to remain close to home while pursuing a degree, and offer rewarding career opportunities for graduates once they complete their education.

Annually, the NCCCS provides education and training for the majority of Registered Nurses (RNs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), and EMS personnel in North Carolina. Over the past eight years, the NCCCS has had 45,412 emergency medical technicians (EMTs), 6,749 Advanced EMTs, and 16,346 paramedics enrolled in EMS programs.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina:

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) improves the health and well-being of our customers and communities by providing innovative health care products, services and information to more than 3.8 million members, including approximately 1.1 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 events that promote good health. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Visit Blue Cross NC online at bluecrossnc.com. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

About the NC Community College System

With 58 colleges across the state, the North Carolina Community College System is the third-largest such system in the United States. It educates about 700,000 students through degree, diploma and certificate programs, and helps workers acquire or upgrade skills through continuing education. The system assists with economic development by providing customized training to new and expanding businesses and helping small businesses grow. Community colleges also help adults without a high school diploma to complete their education and acquire the skills needed to enter college or start a career.

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² [Predictors of Primary Care Physician Practice Location in Underserved Urban and Rural Areas in the United States: A Systematic Literature Review](#), *National Center for Biotechnology Information*, 2016