Commonwealth-Funded Transportation Initiative Aims to Address Barriers to Accessing Care for Uninsured Community Health Center & Free Clinic Patients

Henrico, VA (February 18, 2026) – Virginia Community Healthcare Association (VCHA) and the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (VAFCC) today announced the awardees of the Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) Pilot Program, a statewide initiative funded through a $1 million grant from the Commonwealth of Virginia. The program is designed to expand transportation options for uninsured Virginians in rural and medically underserved areas and to test innovative solutions that can improve access to timely healthcare.

In many Virginia communities, long distances and limited public transit make it difficult for patients to keep appointments or receive routine care. By evaluating scalable transportation models, the NEMT pilot aims to identify practical approaches that reduce missed appointments, improve health outcomes, and guide future healthcare policy across the Commonwealth.

2025–2026 NEMT Innovation Grant Awardees

- Community Health Center of the New River Valley – $75,000
- Tri-Area Community Health – $75,000

2025–2026 NEMT Micro-Grant Awardees

- Blue Ridge Medical Center – $75,000
- Central Virginia Health Services – $50,000
- Community Health Center of the New River Valley – $17,500
- Daily Planet Health Services – $50,000
- Hampton Roads Community Health Center – $25,000
- HealthWorks for Northern Virginia – $50,000
- Highland Medical Center – $15,000
- Lunera Health – $50,000
- Johnson Health Center – $50,000
- Mel Leaman Free Clinic – $50,000
- Neighborhood Health – $50,000
- Northern Neck Middlesex Free Health Clinic – $50,000
- Rockbridge Area Health Center – $75,000
- Shenandoah Community Health Center – $50,000
- Southern Dominion Health System – $75,000
- Tri-Area Community Health – $17,500

"Transportation should never be the reason a patient goes without care," said Tracy Douglas, Chief Executive Officer of VCHA. "These CHCs and free clinics are stepping forward with solutions that meet their patients where they are, whether that means bridging long rural distances, coordinating volunteer drivers, or implementing new transportation models. VCHA is proud to support their work to strengthen access to essential health services across Virginia."

Awardees plan to use transportation funds in creative, patient-centered ways, including expanding multi-modal ride options through rideshare and local transport vendors, adopting AI tools to predict patient no-shows, building centralized systems to streamline scheduling and tracking, utilizing vehicles to deliver medications, and helping patients experiencing homelessness reach healthcare and social-service sites - transforming transportation into a flexible extension of clinical care that improves access for uninsured and rural patients.

"This initiative recognizes that access to healthcare is about more than clinical services, it's about removing the practical barriers that prevent patients from even walking through a free clinic's door," said Rufus Phillips, Chief Executive Officer of the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics. "For free clinics in particular, this funding strengthens their capacity to coordinate community partnerships, leverage volunteers, and create patient-centered solutions that reflect the realities they face every day."

The NEMT Innovation Grant is part of VCHA's and VAFCC's broader commitment to strengthening community-based healthcare systems across Virginia. The initiative supports innovative, locally driven solutions that ensure vulnerable populations can receive timely and consistent care.

About Virginia Community Healthcare Association
Virginia Community Healthcare Association (VCHA), established in 1980, is a non-profit membership organization that serves as the primary care association for Virginia's community health centers and look-alike health centers. VCHA's mission is to advocate on behalf of, educate and elevate our member health centers by enhancing their ability to provide affordable, accessible, quality healthcare to the communities they serve regardless of their ability to pay. For more information, visit www.vcha.org.

About the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
Founded in 1993 and headquartered in Richmond, the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (VAFCC) has been leading the healthcare safety net in Virginia for more than 30 years by bringing healthcare leaders, professionals, community members, and stakeholders together to partner in support of our mission so Virginia's underserved have access to comprehensive, quality health care. For more information, visit www.vafreeclinics.org.