



\$500K Grant to Expand Substance Use Peer Recovery Program to Free Clinics Across Virginia

RICHMOND, Va. (September 1, 2023) – A new \$500,000 grant from the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation will help the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (VAFCC) expand substance use disorder peer-based recovery programs in the Commonwealth to six clinics over the next three years. The Health Wagon, a charitable clinic located in Wise and serving Southwest Virginia, has been selected to initiate the effort in the first year and the remaining five clinics will be chosen in year two and three.

Almost half a million adults in Virginia have a substance use disorder, [according to statewide data](#). For more than a decade, fatal drug overdoses fueled by opioids like fentanyl have been the leading cause of unnatural deaths in the Commonwealth.

The grant will help fund the replication of a proven peer-focused recovery model pioneered at the Bradley Free Clinic in Roanoke called The HOPE Initiative. Launched in 2018, the program incorporates Certified Peer Recovery Specialists, advocates with lived experience in long-term recovery from substance use disorder who connect patients to a trusted network of treatment and recovery services, while helping people access holistic healthcare services.

“One important aspect of the HOPE’s program success is that it operates at a free clinic,” said Rufus Philips, CEO of the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics. “Free clinics earn the trust of thousands of Virginians every year as they provide comprehensive, quality, and compassionate care to patients. We are thankful for the opportunity to bring the Bradley Free Clinic’s proven treatment and recovery model to more clinics thanks to this generous grant.”

Unlike traditional recovery programs that operate from substance use disorder facilities or treatment centers, the Peer Recovery Specialists work with patients from within the structure of the Bradley Free Clinic, a community-based healthcare nonprofit. The peer specialists leverage their lived experience to build trust and provide non-clinical, trauma-informed, and strengths-based support for patients during their recovery.

HOPE Peer Recovery Specialists work collaboratively with the Bradley Free Clinic’s medical, dental, pharmacy and behavioral health treatment teams to reduce barriers to care and serve as patient advocates and supports. Over the years, HOPE has supported over 2,000 people and more than 80% of its patients have completed treatment or recovery. Data from the HOPE

program shows improved access to care and treatment outcomes, as well as increased patient engagement and reduced relapse rates.

“The HOPE Initiative is making an important impact in the Roanoke Valley,” said Bradley Free Clinic executive director Janine Underwood. “Integrating trusted Peer Recovery Specialists into every aspect of our clinic helps patients feel more comfortable, which results in better patient outcomes and improved quality of life. We’re excited to help other clinics implement this successful model.”

In addition to connecting people to care, association leaders expect the program expansion to help reduce emergency room utilization for patients experiencing substance use disorder in Virginia.

“Anthem has been serving Virginia for almost 90 years, and improving the health of humanity is at the core of what we do,” said Jennie Reynolds, President of HealthKeepers Plus, Anthem’s Medicaid group. “This grant represents one of three selected by the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation to receive a total of \$1.4M over three years to address mental health with an emphasis on substance use disorder and we are proud to support the work of the Virginia Association of Free & Charitable Clinics and The Bradley Free Clinic to improve the health and lives of our future generations.”

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About VAFCC

For 30 years, the VAFCC has been the only nonprofit organization whose mission is focused solely on the issues and needs of free and charitable clinics -- and the patients they serve in Virginia. In this role, VAFCC provides essential advocacy, support, and resources to the Commonwealth’s free and charitable clinics, helping to ensure Virginia’s medically underserved have access to quality health care. To learn more about VAFCC, our membership, and who they serve, visit www.VaFreeClinics.org.

About Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation

The Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a philanthropic arm of the Elevance Health Foundation. The Foundation works to address health equity by focusing on improving the health of the socially vulnerable through strategic partnerships and programs in our communities with an emphasis on maternal child health; mental health; and food as medicine. Additionally, the Foundation also responds to disasters when our communities need us the most. The Foundation coordinates the company’s year-round Dollars for Dollars program which provides a 100 percent match of associates’ donations, as well as its Volunteer Time Off and Dollars for Doers community service programs. ®ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield names and symbol are registered marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. To learn more about the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation and the Elevance Health Foundation, please

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