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THE DUKE ENDOWMENT ANNOUNCES HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY CAROLINAS; INITIATIVE WILL IMPROVE HEALTH LOCALLY

Five initial North Carolina coalitions are receiving $450,000 over three years

Grants for additional North Carolina and South Carolina communities to follow

Charlotte, N.C. — The Duke Endowment has awarded three-year grants to support five diverse coalitions aimed at improving health across North Carolina as part of its new initiative, Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas. The program takes a community-based approach to addressing chronic health issues such as unhealthy weight, diabetes and heart disease.

With future plans to expand throughout the Carolinas, Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas kicks off with awards to support community coalitions in five North Carolina regions. Local coalitions will involve leaders from a wide spectrum of area organizations in developing ways to engage residents in improving their health. The counties served are: Catawba; Chatham; Granville/Vance; Montgomery/Richmond; and Wilkes.

Rates of diabetes, heart disease and unhealthy weight are high throughout the Carolinas—in many communities, higher than the national averages. Research shows that about one in three people in the state are considered obese, with similar rates of obesity found in South Carolina. Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas recognizes that health and well-being are created and sustained not through individual and clinical efforts alone, but through the cooperation and support of the extended local community.

“We’ve long been committed to improving the health of Carolinians, but we are now adding new elements to our approach,” said Rhett Mabry, president of The Duke Endowment. “In order to improve health, we must recognize that where we work or go to school, how we spend our free time—even our ability to access fresh food and exercise in a safe environment—all contribute to our health and well-being. To improve health within a community, we have to expand how we think about what affects it locally. We need to address health improvement on the ground, at a very local level.”

Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas will provide opportunities to bring together leaders from hospitals, health departments and other health-promoting organizations, and builds upon existing work led by state leaders to improve population health. A first step being funded by The Duke Endowment’s grant is to strengthen the infrastructure of local coalitions that are coordinating efforts, so that they’re well-positioned to identify and implement interventions that work.

“The health challenges facing the Carolinas have been decades in the making,” said Mary Piepenbring, vice president of The Duke Endowment. “They cannot be solved by individuals and organizations working alone. The Duke Endowment has been a longtime supporter of statewide health improvement efforts such as the Healthy NC 2020 plan and the Alliance for a Healthier SC. Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas builds on those successful efforts by targeting resources to communities that have considerable health needs, but also proven ability to take on local challenges.”
Representatives from the five coalitions are participating in a learning collaborative to share information as they develop best practices for organizing, planning and implementing evidence-based programs known to improve health.

Population Health Improvement Partners, the North Carolina-based organization, will provide expert assistance to each local coalition in North Carolina. A team assembled by the South Carolina Hospital Association will provide assistance to coalitions in that state.

“The coalitions selected by the Endowment are intentionally diverse and unique,” said Laura Edwards of Population Health Improvement Partners. “While there will be many opportunities for exchanging ideas, each community will receive support to pave its own path forward. The hope is that the lessons of the first five coalitions can inform the work of others throughout the Carolinas.”

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*Based in Charlotte, N.C., and established in 1924 by industrialist and philanthropist James B. Duke, The Duke Endowment is a private foundation that strengthens communities in North Carolina and South Carolina by nurturing children, promoting health, educating minds and enriching spirits. Since its founding, it has awarded more than $3.4 billion in grants.*