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IMPROVING ORAL HEALTH IN THE CAROLINAS IS AIM OF NEW \$35+ MILLION COMMITMENT

The Duke Endowment is joined by the Blue Cross NC Foundation and the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation to support range of new approaches

Three southeast philanthropies are collaborating to improve oral health in the Carolinas. The Duke Endowment and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation will invest more than \$35 million combined to increase access to oral health care and improve outcomes in North and South Carolina. Blue Cross NC Foundation funding will focus exclusively in North Carolina whereas The Duke Endowment will invest in efforts in both states. The BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation will provide additional funding to extend the work further in South Carolina.

“Oral disease is highly preventable, yet millions living in North and South Carolina still suffer from it, affecting chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and stroke, as well as school and work attendance, health care costs, and overall quality of life,” said Stacy Warren, program officer for health care at The Duke Endowment. “As philanthropists committed to improving health in our region, we recognize that oral health is closely tied to all aspects of wellbeing and an area of health where the opportunity to affect change is ripe.”

The foundations say the need for action is pressing, with more than 4.1 million North and South Carolinians living in areas without adequate access to oral health services. According to the American Dental Association, both states rank in the bottom third of all states when it comes to the number of dentists per resident.

The funders’ investments will support a range of oral health efforts to increase accessible and affordable preventive care, including:

- **Initiatives to improve the oral health of children in the Carolinas.** Oral health is the number one reason for school absences in low resourced communities and tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children. In response, foundation grantees in both states—including health departments, safety-net providers, and non-profit organizations—will launch school-based oral health programs to deliver preventive services and address certain restorative treatment needs for children in rural and underserved schools.
- **Efforts to research and promote evidence-based solutions.** This includes funding for the [North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative](#) to lead a diverse coalition in exploring and promoting new policies and practices that spread evidence-based improvements in delivering oral health care.

- **Care models that incorporate oral health.** This includes support for projects that spur effective partnerships to integrate dental and medical care, increasing the value of care with the potential to ultimately lower costs.

“We know that early intervention can be very powerful in affecting health outcomes overall. An increased focus on promoting good oral health habits and improving oral health status, especially for children most at risk of poor oral health, can have profound consequences for long-term health status,” said Erika Kirby, executive director of the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation.

The foundations say that while the collective investment will have a positive impact, philanthropy alone cannot create widespread, long-lasting change.

“Sustainable improvement in oral health will ultimately depend on changes at the policy and systems level that support more widespread impact. We are excited about the level, and diversity, of engagement by stakeholders seeking systemic change in our state,” said Katie Eyes, vice president, program and strategy at the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation. “When health care providers, government, philanthropy, schools, consumers and others work together, we can better prevent oral disease and ensure more access to much needed oral health care.”

To learn more about this funding investment, visit:

<https://dukeendowment.org/our-work/supporting-oral-health>

<http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org/strategy/health-care/oral-health-strategy/>

<https://www.bcbsscfoundation.org/health-focused-grants>

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Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is an independent, private foundation with the mission of improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians. Since its founding in 2000, \$135 million has been invested into North Carolina communities through more than 1,000 grants. In its grantmaking, the organization strives to address the key drivers of health, and takes a flexible approach designed to meet identified needs in partnership with the community. The Foundation also works closely with our grantees, and other nonprofits, to support their growth through capacity building, training, and leadership development opportunities. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, go to www.bcbsncfoundation.org.

BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation

Headquartered in Columbia, the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Its mission is to promote and support healthier South Carolinians, particularly the economically vulnerable, by supporting solutions to address gaps in health care and serving as an agent of change to support innovation and value-added public-private partnerships. For more information, go to www.bcbsscfoundation.org/.

The Duke Endowment

Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, 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 distributed more than \$3.7 billion in grants. The Endowment shares a name with Duke University and Duke Energy, but all are separate organizations. For more information, go to www.dukeendowment.org/.