

UAMS News Bureau

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**Program to Address Physician Shortage in Arkansas
Receives \$2.83 Million in Additional Funding**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has received \$2.83 million in additional funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to improve access to quality health care in rural Arkansas by expanding efforts to train and retain primary care physicians.

This award is for fiscal year 2021, which began in July. Previously, the program had been awarded \$4.6 million spread over four years beginning in fiscal year 2020.

The Arkansas Medical Education Primary Care Partnerships project aims to increase the number of primary care physicians practicing in rural areas and other medically underserved parts of the state. It also includes specific efforts to create pipelines to medical education for minority students. The grant comes from the Health Resources and Services Administration.

“The number of available physicians per population in the Natural State is among the lowest in the nation and providers of all specialties are facing a serious shortfall, especially in Arkansas’ rural communities,” said U.S. Sen. John Boozman of Arkansas, who is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. “Our current public health emergency puts an emphasis on the need to overcome this shortage. The funds from this award will help more UAMS students prepare for residencies in Arkansas, keeping more top talent in our state and helping to close the gap on the doctor shortage in Arkansas.”

The project is a partnership among the UAMS College of Medicine, UAMS Regional Campuses across the state, and the UAMS Department of Family & Preventive Medicine. The effort to increase medical education for minority students is a partnership between UAMS, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Philander Smith College.

“At UAMS, it’s part of our mission to improve the health of all Arkansans, and one way we are working to meet that goal is by recruiting and training a diverse group of future health care professionals from across the state,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA. “It’s a big job that we cannot do alone, making programs like these built on

community partnerships all the more important. Together, we are ensuring a healthier future by laying the groundwork today.”

Program Director Richard H. Turnage, M.D., UAMS College of Medicine executive associate dean for clinical affairs, is assisted by co-directors Marcia Byers, Ph.D. RN, director of clinical innovation for UAMS Regional Campuses; Daniel Knight, M.D., associate professor in the Department of Family & Preventive Medicine; and Leslie Stone, M.D., M.P.H., director of Medical Student Education for the Department of Family & Preventive Medicine.

“The additional funding will provide an important boost for our efforts to draw more Arkansas students into the pipeline for becoming physicians and other health care professionals,” Turnage said. “We greatly appreciate Sen. Boozman’s partnership and advocacy for an initiative we believe will be transformative for rural and underserved Arkansans for decades to come.”

Over 500,000 Arkansans — over one-sixth of its population — live in an area defined by the federal government as lacking the adequate number of health professionals to serve the population. According to the Arkansas Department of Health, 50 out of 75 counties in the state fully or partially meet that definition.

The program addresses the issue of physician shortages from several angles, including strengthening the pipeline for students interested in health care careers by supporting them at each stage of their education through a series of programs. This specifically targets students from rural and underserved areas of the state.

One such program works in direct partnership with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Philander Smith College to increase the number of students from the network of historically black colleges and universities who pursue higher degrees in medicine and health care. Renisha Ward, project manager for the HBCU Med Track program, is working with 35 students from freshman to graduate school at UAPB and 21 students from Philander Smith.

Sixteen program participants took the MCATs (the test to enter medical school) during summer 2020 and several participants are part of the College of Pharmacy Class of 2024, which has the largest percentage of minority students in the college’s history.

“Philander Smith College is pleased to further extend its community partnership with UAMS aimed toward targeting the shortage of physicians and other health care professionals in Arkansas,” said Philander Smith College President Roderick Smothers, Ph.D.

“With this additional funding, Philander Smith is poised to bolster its support to our scholars who aspire to pursue higher degrees in health care. Collaborating more intentionally with UAMS will help PSC fill the pipeline with more talented, diverse and qualified professionals who are equipped to serve the medical needs of the state’s underserved and rural communities.”

Laurence B. Alexander, chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, said he was pleased that the UAMS grant would support future health professionals at UAPB.

“The UAMS-HBCU partnership is poised to impact physician shortages and address health disparities throughout the state, including in the Arkansas Delta,” said Alexander.

"The HBCU Med-Track Program, in particular, continues to provide additional resources and support for UAPB students interested in medical careers and allied health professional training at UAMS."

The overall program also creates more opportunities for medical students to experience primary care practice in rural and underserved communities across Arkansas through service projects, mentoring, and a new Honors Program in Rural and Urban Underserved Primary Care.

Central to the success of these programs is close collaboration with the Community Health Centers of Arkansas and the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership. These partnerships will allow for increasing the number of rural clinical rotation sites and preceptors available to teach medical students in federally qualified health centers, critical access hospitals and other rural clinics and settings, while providing training and faculty development opportunities for new clinical faculty and preceptors at these new clinical sites.

In addition to the main UAMS campus in Little Rock, UAMS Regional Campuses sites can be found in eight locations across the state and UAMS programs reach almost every county in the state.

"Our Regional Campuses and programs are perfectly positioned to have a broad impact across all of Arkansas," Byers said. "This grant allows us to strengthen our partnerships and enhance rural opportunities to turn today's bright students into future health care champions for their home communities."

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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