

**UAMS News Bureau**

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**Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas  
Awards Grants Totaling \$1.95 Million  
for UAMS K-12 Behavioral Health Programs**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has received grants totaling \$1.95 million from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas to support two key behavioral health programs.

Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the largest health insurer in Arkansas, established the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas in 2001. Since then, it has awarded more than \$36 million to nonprofits and governmental agencies for 1,922 health-improvement programs in 248 communities and in all 75 Arkansas counties.

Grant support of \$1.2 million over three years will create and sustain the UAMS Arkansas Trauma Resource Initiative for Schools (TRIS), a program in cooperation with the Arkansas Department of Education and multiple statewide partners designed to build trauma-informed schools in which all staff, students, families and community members recognize and respond to traumatic stress.

The Blue & You Foundation also committed \$750,000 over two years to support AR-Connect, a free, round-the-clock service overseen by the UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute offered to all Arkansans in need of urgent behavioral health care, regardless of health insurance or the ability to pay. The program has been extremely successful since its inception in spring 2020, receiving about 70 calls a week and providing services for about 60 patients, many of whom are experiencing additional stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding from Blue & You will launch a comprehensive marketing campaign to increase access and improve immediate and long-term mental health outcomes among our state's K-12 teachers, staff, administrators, parents and students.

“I want to thank the Blue & You Foundation for their outstanding commitment to improving access to mental health care in our state,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA. “The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the need for trauma-informed care. Through this new initiative and the success of AR-Connect, Arkansans will have more mental health resources available than ever before.”

“For more than 70 years, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield has been focused on improving the health and well-being of individuals and families in all the communities we serve,” said Curtis Barnett, president and chief executive officer, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield. “We understand the critical role behavioral health plays in an individual’s overall well-being and are acutely aware of the unique needs of our Arkansas population. We are grateful to partner with UAMS in a shared mission to improve access to and awareness of behavioral health resources in the communities we call home.”

Using a multidisciplinary team specializing in childhood trauma, TRIS will develop and disseminate trauma-related knowledge, teaching strategies and policies designed to support K-12 children across Arkansas, including consultation and online and in-person training. Specialists will help families gather information on each child’s symptoms and needs, identify treatment and walk them through the steps of accessing treatment through the mental health system. Led by Nikki Edge, Ph.D., professor in the College of Medicine, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, the program will also utilize the newly expanded AR-Connect to put trauma-informed care within reach of school personnel and parents.

TRIS comes at a time of urgency for access to mental health care.

Before reaching adulthood, approximately two-thirds of children will experience at least one potentially traumatic event, and Arkansas children experience these events at substantially higher rates than the national average. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised additional concerns, adding new adversities on top of preexisting trauma.

Growing evidence suggests that children impacted by trauma are at increased risk for a variety of health and social problems as they reach adolescence and adulthood. In Arkansas, more than 50% of referrals for the state’s expulsion prevention system involve challenging behavior from children known to have experienced trauma.

Research shows that participation in evidence-based trauma treatment improves a child’s symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety as well as improvements in behavioral problems and social skills. In addition to these benefits, TRIS will help state schools be responsive to potentially traumatic events such as natural disasters, community violence and death of a student or staff member.

“AR-Connect is an amazing program that is providing mental health resources and treatment to underserved Arkansans, but we are not reaching as many children and adolescents as we would like,” said John Spollen, M.D., interim director of the Psychiatric Research Institute and interim chair for the Department of Psychiatry. “This grant will allow us to get information about the program to parents and teachers across Arkansas so that we can better reach children with urgent behavioral health needs, especially those exposed to trauma.”

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](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com). Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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