

**UAMS News Bureau**

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**News Release**  
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**Arkansas Attorney General Provides \$600,000 Grant  
to Support Women’s Mental Health Fellowship**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences has received a \$600,000 grant from Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin to support a women’s mental health fellowship in an effort to address the impact of the opioid epidemic on women and to help reduce the state’s maternal mortality rate.

The grant will be used to train a new generation of psychiatrists in the treatment of women with opioid use disorder and other psychiatric conditions, specifically during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

The Women’s Mental Health Program, based in the UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute, has the state’s only three psychiatrists specializing in women’s mental health. The program recorded 3,758 patient visits between January 2023 and August 2024, 40% of which were for substance use disorders.

Mental health conditions, including drug overdoses and suicide, are among the leading underlying causes of pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. Arkansas ranks third in the nation in maternal deaths, behind Mississippi and Alabama, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics compiled from 2018 to 2022.

The increasing need for specialists in women’s mental health makes this fellowship, one of fewer than 20 in the country, so vital, according to Jessica Coker, M.D., the medical director of the Psychiatric Research Unit’s inpatient units.

“Women have been uniquely affected by the opioid crisis and in general are more prone to psychiatric illnesses including depression and anxiety. Hormonal changes during pregnancy and the postpartum period also increase rates of psychiatric illness,” said Coker. “Having specialized psychiatrists that understand the hormonal nuances and can balance the risks and benefits of treatment is crucial for women during this vulnerable time. We are excited to be able to train more psychiatrists in this area who will be able to serve patients across the state and beyond.”

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Fellows in the program will train in UAMS’ outpatient clinics, both psychiatric and obstetric, and the inpatient women’s psychiatric unit, one of only five in the country, as well as with physicians in the neonatal intensive care unit who care for babies with opioid withdrawal.

“The UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute is providing outstanding specialized services for pregnant and postpartum women with opioid use disorder,” Griffin said. “I have made a point in my role managing Arkansas’s portion of opioid settlement funds to prioritize programs and initiatives that will make a real difference in the fight against opioid abuse. I’m proud to support this fellowship and look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have.”

“This support from the Attorney General will be used to provide this critically important care and to train the next generation of psychiatrists to bring the needed expertise to treat women struggling with opioid use disorder. We are incredibly grateful for this visionary grant from Attorney General Griffin,” said Laura Dunn, M.D., the director of the Psychiatric Research Institute and chair of the UAMS Department of Psychiatry.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and eight 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, Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,485 students, 915 medical residents and fellows, and seven dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s, 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](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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