

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS to Expand Healthy Start Program in South Arkansas

FAYETTEVILLE — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) will expand its Healthy Start program to Ashley, Ouachita and Union counties this fall, providing essential prenatal care services to women and families in south Arkansas.

Since 2019, the UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation has offered the Healthy Start program — funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration — in Northwest Arkansas. During that time, the institute has served more than 1,700 clients and reduced preterm births among Marshallese communities by more than 3%.

Through Healthy Start, community health workers (CHWs) deliver vital services including clinical navigation, education, home visiting services and comprehensive case management. The program is designed to support women who may face socioeconomic or systematic barriers to optimal health.

“We are thrilled to extend these critical services to south Arkansas,” said Krista Langston, executive director of Community Programs at the institute. “This initiative will empower local mothers and families, ensuring they receive the support they need throughout their pregnancy journey.”

According to the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, Arkansas ranks near the bottom in the country for both maternal and infant mortality. Pregnant women in rural and low-income areas experience worse maternal outcomes, due in part to more challenging social determinants of health, such as higher food insecurity and transportation barriers. In Arkansas, Black mothers experience significantly higher maternal morbidity rates than any other race — nearly twice that of white mothers.

“Every woman deserves access to the highest quality prenatal care,” Langston said. “For this initiative to thrive, it’s essential that we hire staff from our target communities and collaborate closely with Black communities in south Arkansas. Together we can design a program that truly addresses their unique needs.”

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The Healthy Start program aligns with UAMS' broader mission to improve maternal health outcomes across Arkansas. Over the last year, the institute has launched several initiatives to meet women where they are, including digital health services, food delivery programs, and an effort to provide reproductive health services in 14 rural counties across Arkansas.

Women in Ashley, Ouachita and Union counties who are interested in enrolling in the Healthy Start program may contact uams.info/healthystart for more information. To learn more about the UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation's Maternal & Child Health programs, visit communityhealth.uams.edu.

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 or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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