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Cross-sector partnership funds equitable expansion of mental health workforce

UCare grant establishes pilot with Alluma and Wilder to support prospective mental health professionals from underrepresented, underserved communities

Minneapolis, MN – [A new report from the Minnesota Department of Health](#) outlines how health care providers across the state continue to struggle with workforce shortages brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The report indicates that the highest vacancy rates occur within mental health and substance use counseling occupations, where one in four jobs is currently open for hire.

To address the alarming shortage of mental health providers in Minnesota, health plan UCare and mental health providers Alluma and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation have developed a pilot program to make it easier for prospective mental health professionals to join the field.

“There has never been more urgency to address the shortage of mental health providers in Minnesota,” says Jennifer Garber, UCare vice president of mental health and substance use disorder services. “We are proud to invest in the community in this way and eventually provide our diverse members the opportunity to receive culturally appropriate mental health services.”

Through the partnership, UCare will fund \$100,000 in stipends for clinical interns as they complete the supervision necessary to graduate from and eventually be licensed in social work, clinical counseling, marriage and family therapy, and other mental health roles. Wilder and Alluma will provide thousands of hours of state mandated supervision at no cost. The pilot will focus on supporting clinical interns from cultural and ethnic minority groups, rural communities, and other underrepresented populations where the workforce needs are greatest.

“We know we need more clinicians from underrepresented communities, and we know there are people out there who want these jobs, but the math doesn’t add up, says Dr. Pahoua Yang, Wilder’s vice president of community mental health and wellness. “Many students hoping to enter a clinical field are attending school, working a paid job, and trying to make time for a clinical internship at their own expense, all at the same time. By offering paid internships and supervision at no cost, this program will show how we can diversify and expand our mental health workforce at this critical time.”

“Our frontier counties are struggling. It’s challenging to recruit providers in rural areas throughout northwestern Minnesota,” says Alluma CEO Shauna Reitmeier. “Although telehealth services have been

critical over the past two years, there are still services that are best delivered in person. Providing students with an incentive to do this work in rural Minnesota will have a profound impact on each student and the communities that they serve. We hope that this partnership will create a ripple effect that results in organizations across the state identifying new and innovative ways to address the workforce shortage.”

UCare, Alluma and Wilder will share their findings with state agencies, mental health providers, legislators, and colleges and universities to advocate for partnerships and policies that clear the way for more people to access the mental health workforce.

“We are confident that this pilot will provide a roadmap to build the mental health system Minnesota needs now more than ever,” says Jennifer Garber, UCare’s vice president of mental health and substance use disorder services.

About Alluma



Alluma is an inclusive Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic based in Crookston, Minnesota. Our story began in 1962 with a vision of building a community-based care system to ensure high-quality access to mental health services in the region. For nearly 60 years, we've provided evidence-based, client-focused care in northwestern Minnesota. Alluma takes an uncommon approach, integrating mental health and substance use care into overall wellbeing. Rooted in research and focused on relationships, we go above and beyond to build capacity in individuals and help clients get connected. We are open for everyone, anytime. Get to know us at allumacares.org.

About the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation



The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation is a nonprofit community organization that creates lasting, positive change rooted in people through direct services, research and community building. Wilder impacts lives across social, cultural and economic backgrounds so every person can reach their full potential and contribute to a thriving community. For more information visit www.wilder.org.

About UCare



UCare (www.ucare.org) is an independent, nonprofit health plan providing health care and administrative services to more than 630,000 members throughout Minnesota and parts of western Wisconsin. UCare partners with health care providers, counties, and community organizations to create and deliver Medicare, Medicaid and Individual & Family health plans. The health plan addresses health care disparities and care access issues through a broad array of community initiatives.