

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund establishes NC Center of Excellence for Integrated Care with DHHS Division of Medical Assistance

Center of Excellence will serve as model for integration of medical and mental health care

Raleigh, NC – The North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) awarded \$1,001,736 to the North Carolina DHHS Division of Medical Assistance (NCDMA) to form the North Carolina Center of Excellence for Integrated Care, a ground-breaking initiative that moves toward coordinated care using a model that combines the delivery of medical and mental health care services.

The North Carolina Center of Excellence will be managed by the North Carolina Foundation for Advanced Health Programs and will build upon ICARE (Integrated, Collaborative, Accessible, Respectful, and Evidence-based Care), a partnership created in 2006 addressing the need to combine mental health treatment with medical care in primary care settings. The project started with primary care practices, where 40% of all patients present with mental health issues. If untreated, these conditions can result in increased use of health care services and emergency department visits. The Center of Excellence will continue to work with primary care offices and expand this effort of integrated care into other health care systems such as hospital emergency departments and mental health agencies. The Center will also ensure that consistent standards of care are adopted across different health care settings.

“The North Carolina Center of Excellence for Integrated Care is building on the excellent work of ICARE in the integration of behavioral health treatment and medical care to improve patient outcomes,” said Dr. Chuck Willson, HWTF chair. “Extending this model of integrated care will not only save health care dollars, it will increase access to vital services for many of our state’s most vulnerable citizens.”

“This innovative new center does precisely what we need to be doing in health care today,” said Gov. Bev Perdue. “It will deliver better care and do so more efficiently.”

NCDMA will match HWTF’s funds to create the Center of Excellence. This partnership will support educational opportunities that improve the quality of care for high-risk and high-cost Medicaid patients. The Center is envisioned as a critical resource to help hospital emergency departments, area mental health agencies, and other providers serving patients with mental health and medical conditions implement integrated care techniques. The Center will operate with a small interdisciplinary team working with experts in multiple fields of medicine, mental health, emergency care and health care management. The Center’s goal is to assist providers in meeting the physical and mental health needs of their patients in one location.

The ICARE Partnership, led by the North Carolina Foundation for Advanced Health Programs, helped North Carolina to become a national leader in integrated care delivered in primary practice settings. This broad coalition of medical and mental health providers, state agencies and patient advocacy groups, including the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, the North Carolina Pediatric Society, the North Carolina Psychiatric Association, and the Southern Regional Area Health Education Center (AHEC), provided intensive training and technical assistance to help primary care providers continue to successfully integrate medical and mental health care into their practices.

ICARE also partnered with the NC Office of Rural Health and Community Care to implement pilot projects at practices across the state. Results from the pilots indicated that access to outpatient mental health care improved and that many patients benefited from integrated care, showing improvement in their physical and mental health statuses.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$199 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$116 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.