

NEWS RELEASE



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**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation Extends
Partnership with North Carolina's Free Clinics**

\$10 Million Investment Continues Efforts to Increase Impact and Expand Reach

- Unprecedented, second five-year collaboration to increase statewide access to health care
- Expanding free health care services currently offered by 74 clinics in 79 counties

Chapel Hill, N.C. – The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation announced today that it is extending its partnership with the North Carolina Association of Free Clinics (NCAFC) with an additional \$10 million investment starting in 2009. With the extension, the BCBSNC Foundation is furthering its commitment to increase the impact and expand the reach of North Carolina's free clinic network.

"Free clinics do an incredible job of helping to address the health care needs of North Carolina's underserved and uninsured," said Bob Greczyn, chairman of the BCBSNC Foundation. "We are very proud of the success of our initial five-year collaboration, and we believe strongly in continuing to support the work that they do."

In June, BCBSNC Foundation and NCAFC will enter the final year of an initial five-year, \$10 million partnership that began in 2004. Since that time, the number of free clinics and counties served have each grown by 32 percent. Currently, 74 clinics are providing services to individuals and families in 79 North Carolina counties, an increase of 18 clinics and 19 additional counties. Total patient visits have increased by almost 50 percent since the partnership began. Over the last three years alone, the amount of health care services being provided totals \$186 million, an increase of nearly two-thirds.

"We couldn't offer the quality health care services we do to help people with their basic medical needs without the support of the community," said Mike Darrow, executive director of the NCAFC. "The BCBSNC Foundation is an unparalleled ally in ensuring that North Carolinians have access to the quality health care they need and deserve."

This is the first time in the seven-year history of the BCBSNC Foundation that a second grant has been distributed at this level and to the same organization. According to a Wake Forest University study¹, every dollar invested in a clinic results in \$4.42 in care, which means the return on investment is more than four times the initial grant.

"The results demonstrated since our partnership began speak volumes about the need for access to health care in our individual communities, the quality of care the clinics give and the ability they have to help people live healthier lives," said Kathy Higgins, president of the BCBSNC Foundation.

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The average annual budget for individual clinics has increased by more than 50 percent since 2003. In fact, 90 percent of clinics have leveraged the initial BCBSNC Foundation investment to secure additional funding for their clinics.

To meet the increasing demand for health care services, the number of clinics providing at least 40 hours of care a week has more than doubled since 2003. In that same amount of time, the number of clinics providing interpreter services has more than tripled to nearly 80 percent.

North Carolina has the nation's largest association of free clinics. On April 29 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., all 74 member clinics of the NCAFC will be simultaneously hosting open houses in recognition of Cover the Uninsured Week.

Free clinics provide a combination of medical and dental care, as well as prescription medications. A percentage of patients who attend free clinics do so for the management of chronic illnesses. Many free clinics offer basic diabetes and cardiovascular disease management services, including foot exams, glucose and blood pressure monitoring.

Clinics are private, nonprofit, community-based organizations that provide health care access to North Carolinians through the use of volunteers and partnerships with other health providers. Free clinics receive no federal, state or other third-party reimbursement for services.

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About NCAFC:

The North Carolina Association of Free Clinics, founded in 1998, is a private, nonprofit, 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization that conducts advocacy, research, public relations, resource development, training and technical assistance on behalf of its member free clinics and the people they serve. Headquartered in Winston-Salem, the Association received its largest two grants to date for \$10 million each from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, in order to expand and strengthen the free health clinic network across the state. To learn more about the work of the Association, visit www.ncfreeclinics.org or call (336) 251-1111.

About BCBSNC Foundation:

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation (BCBSNC Foundation) is a separate, independent, private, charitable foundation with the mission of improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians. Its focus is on improving the health of vulnerable populations, supporting physical activity and nutrition programs, and helping nonprofit groups improve their organizational capacity. The BCBSNC Foundation funds programs and services in response to grant requests and proactively creates initiatives or partners with organizations to address specific needs. It also coordinates several signature programs, among them, the Breast Health Project and Healthy Community Institute for Nonprofit Excellence. Since its inception, the Foundation has invested more than \$33 million through 235 grants to organizations throughout North Carolina. More information is available at www.bcbsncfoundation.org.

¹ Year Four Evaluation of the BCBSNC Foundation's Monetary Contribution to NCAFC: (Wake Forest University, September 2007)