

Funding Opportunity

Partnerships Supporting Parent/Caregiver Mental Health & Well-being

Issue Date:	July 13, 2026
Submission Deadline:	August 24, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. ET
Grant Period:	November 1, 2026-October 31, 2029
Award Size & Duration:	\$450,000 paid over three years
Contact:	info@bcbsncfoundation.org

Overview

Summary

Through its Youth Mental Health, Connectedness, and Resilience initiative, the Blue Cross NC Foundation is investing in upstream, community-based approaches that strengthen the environments where young children and their families live, grow, and connect as a foundation for lifelong mental health and well-being. This funding opportunity focuses on parents and caregivers of children prenatal to age five, recognizing that caregiver well-being is foundational to children's mental health and long-term outcomes. Parents and caregivers include individuals providing primary caretaking for a child (inclusive of biological, step, adoptive, kinship, foster and other types of caregivers). Individuals whose role is primarily to provide childcare are not included in this opportunity.

Across North Carolina, parents and caregivers of young children experience high levels of stress, isolation, and difficulty accessing support. One in three parents report feeling lonely, and more than a quarter report having no one to turn to for support. Caregiver stress and mental health conditions are closely linked to child well-being, but strong social connections and support networks can mitigate these risks. While a range of services exist to address mental health and well-being, these supports are often fragmented and difficult to navigate. At the same time, caregivers vary in what types of support they trust and use—highlighting the need for approaches that are connected, community-rooted, and responsive to family preferences.

In response, the Foundation will support local partnerships led by trusted community-based organizations to better connect, strengthen, and enhance existing mental health and well-being services and supports for caregivers. Rather than creating new programs, this opportunity is designed to integrate and align existing resources to improve caregiver well-being, increase social connection, and strengthen pathways to clinical mental health care when needed.

For the purposes of this Request for Proposals (RFP), mental health and well-being supports include:

- Strengthening social connection and a sense of community among caregivers

- Reducing stigma and fostering open, culturally grounded dialogue about stress and mental health
- Improving referral pathways to clinical mental health care when needed and/or integrating mental health and well-being supports into trusted, community-based settings

All partnerships will also contribute to identifying policy and practice opportunities that can improve systems of support for caregivers over time.

Eligible organizations include nonprofit organizations and fiscally sponsored programs. Lead applicants must be a trusted community-based organization with demonstrated trust and credibility among parents and caregivers of young children (prenatal to age five).

The Foundation will award up to five grants of \$450,000 paid over three years (\$150,000 per year) to partnerships that demonstrate:

- Strong community trust and engagement with caregivers of young children
- A clear value proposition for partnership beyond individual organizational efforts
- The ability to strengthen and sustain service coordination across systems of support
- A commitment to learning and sharing insights to inform broader systems change

In addition to funding, grantees will receive learning and evaluation technical assistance to support outcome tracking, documentation of lessons learned, and identification of policy and practice opportunities that can be shared more broadly.

Background

Advancing early intervention and prevention during the earliest years of a child's life is a key strategy for the Foundation's Youth Mental Health, Connectedness and Resilience signature initiative. By working upstream with families during a critical developmental period, we can promote good mental health and resilience, set the next generation up for success, and prevent the crisis we are seeing in today's youth. Parents and caregivers play a critical role in providing the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships that support healthy child development and well-being. Yet our current systems leave families without the comprehensive support they need to thrive, resulting in high levels of [stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression](#) among parents of young children. In North Carolina, [one in three parents report feeling lonely, and more than a quarter report having no one to turn to for support](#). Caregiver stress and mental health conditions are closely linked to child well-being, though strong social connections and support networks can mitigate these risks.

When families seek help, they often encounter fragmented systems of services that are difficult to navigate. No single organization can meet the full range of caregiver mental health and well-being needs, and caregivers vary in the types of support they want and trust. Strengthening and connecting existing services through partnerships among community organizations trusted by caregivers presents an opportunity to improve social connection, reduce stigma, and better support caregiver mental health while generating policy and practice insights that can inform the field.

This funding opportunity seeks to address this critical need through:

1. Improving connectivity within local support systems for families of young children (prenatal-5) by linking family supporting initiatives that prioritize parent/caregiver well-being and mental health.

2. Strengthening the capacity of trusted community-based organizations to meet the mental health and well-being needs of parents/caregivers as a key driver of infant and early childhood mental health.
3. Identifying policy and practice opportunities to improve parent/caregiver mental health and well-being that can inform the field and promote long term change across service systems.

Eligibility Criteria

Organization Size

- Organizations of all sizes are eligible to apply. There are no limitations or minimum requirements with regard to an entity's operating budget.

Organization Type

- **Nonprofit organization** that is exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is classified as "not a private foundation" under Section 509(a).
- OR-
- **Fiscally sponsored program** – A group or project with a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization acting as a fiscal sponsor. Please note that the fiscal sponsor is considered the grantee and is responsible for all legal aspects of the project including reporting and financial management

Organization Characteristics

- Lead applicant must be a **trusted community-based organization** that is embedded within and accountable to the community it serves with demonstrated trust and credibility among parents and caregivers of young children (prenatal to age five). For the purposes of this RFP, trust is defined by:
 - Consistent, direct engagement with caregivers through programs, services, or community-based activities
 - Evidence that caregivers view the organization as a reliable and accessible source of support
 - Culturally responsive and relationship-centered approaches to engaging families
 - Meaningful incorporation of caregiver voice, leadership, or feedback in shaping services and strategies
- Organizations that primarily operate at a systems, policy, or institutional level (e.g., universities, government entities) without direct, ongoing relationships with caregivers are unlikely to be competitive as lead applicants but may serve as partners.
- Lead applicants must have a partner organization for their proposed project with an accompanying letter of support. Applicants may include more than one partner organization but should be mindful of the proposed scope and budget as well as sustainability considerations.
- Current and past Blue Cross NC Foundation grantees are welcome to apply.

Description of Funded Work & Project Criteria

Funding is intended to support the development of new partnerships or to strengthen existing partnerships at the local level that bring together or enhance the services offered by each organization to support the mental health and well-being needs of parents and caregivers of young children (prenatal to five). Parents and caregivers include individuals providing primary caretaking for a child (inclusive of

biological, step, adoptive, kinship, foster and other types of caregivers). Individuals whose role is primarily to provide childcare are not included in this opportunity. Funding is not intended to start new programs, but rather to integrate, connect, enhance, or expand supports and services that are already available.

For the purpose of this RFP, mental health and well-being supports include strengthening social connection and a sense of community among caregivers to reduce parent/caregiver isolation; fostering open dialogue around stress and mental health to reduce stigma, promote awareness, and build parent/caregiver coping skills; and strengthening connections to clinical mental health care for caregivers through trusted settings. We recognize that parents and caregivers want and prefer a range of supports, and that clinical and non-clinical services both play an important role in meeting a family's needs. Proposed partnerships must focus on the following (examples in parentheses are illustrative):

- **Cultivating supportive social connections among parents and caregivers that promote well-being and resilience** (e.g., bringing parents/caregivers together to share experiences and ideas and support each other; building networks of parents/caregivers that center community care and connection)
- **Identifying policy and/or practice opportunities that can improve mental health and well-being outcomes for parents/caregivers of young children.** *Note: Identification of policy and practice opportunities will be supported through learning and evaluation technical assistance provided through a consultant (see Additional Activities and Opportunities)*

In addition, proposed partnerships may support one or more of the following that align with the needs of the parents/caregivers served by the partnership:

- **Fostering open dialogue about parental stress, mental health, and well-being in ways that are grounded in the culture of the community served** (e.g., partnering with trusted messengers such as faith leaders, educators, and health care professionals to lead discussions about parental stress and mental health needs among groups or individuals with whom they have influence)
- **Integrating mental health and well-being supports into existing parent/caregiver programs and services** (e.g., co-locating a mental health professional or trained community peer in spaces parents already convene)
- **Establishing or strengthening referral pathways for caregivers to clinical mental health care**

Use of Funds

Funds are intended to support the programmatic infrastructure and staff time necessary to build and strengthen a partnership that will sustain beyond the grant period. Proposed activities/budgets should also support family engagement and leadership in improving available supports and services and in identifying policy and practice barriers and opportunities. Some examples include staff time, planning, and implementation efforts to connect, streamline, and/or integrate services; stipends for caregiver leadership engagement; building shared data and/or communication systems; relevant staff training, skill building, and coaching; and ongoing coordination efforts. Funds may be distributed to project partners by the lead applicant/grantee.

While funds may be used to support collaborative implementation of direct services, they may not be used to pay the cost of treatment services for individuals. Funds may not be used for capital projects

such as construction or renovation. Please note: **Blue Cross NC Foundation funding cannot be earmarked for, or directly support, lobbying*, lobbying related activities, and/or partisan activities.**

Assessment of Applications

In addition to eligibility requirements, applicants will be assessed on the degree to which they:

- Present a compelling case for the potential of the partnership to strengthen parent/caregiver well-being and mental health beyond individual organizational efforts and to improve coordination across services and sectors
- Articulate clear, feasible goals for the partnership that align with the goals, requirements, and scope of this RFP
- Detail how decisions and actions of the lead organization are driven by the needs, voices, and interests of families and offer concrete, forward-thinking plans to engage family wisdom in the partnership.
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of what is needed to make the partnership successful and sustainable, including anticipated challenges or barriers to partnering.
- Demonstrate a commitment to learning and sharing insights to inform broader systems change

Additional Activities and Opportunities

In addition to funding, the Foundation will provide grantee organizations with learning and evaluation technical assistance support through a consultant, with a focus on tracking outcomes, documenting policy and practice learnings, and capturing and communicating impact that can be shared with funders, policymakers, and practitioners to encourage broader adoption of effective caregiver well-being approaches. Interactions with the consultant may include regular virtual and/or in person meetings for each grantee and periodic in person and/or virtual group convenings with other grantees for shared learning.

Language access support (translation and interpretation) for engagements with the Foundation and the consultant will be provided for participants as needed.

Anticipated Outcomes

At the initiative level, the Foundation will be tracking progress toward the following outcomes:

1. Strengthened collaboration at the local level to meet the mental health, connectedness, and well-being needs of parents of young children.
2. Identification of public and private sector policy or practice opportunities that can improve systems.
3. Decreased stigma around mental health/seeking help.
4. Improved caregiver well-being, connectedness, and belonging.
5. Improved pathways to clinical mental health care when needed.

Awarded organizations will track progress toward grantee-defined outcomes that align with one or more of the above outcomes as relevant to their proposed work. Grantees will also be expected to work with a learning and evaluation technical assistance provider to support project-related learning and evaluation (see *Additional Activities and Opportunities*).

How to Apply

All applications must be submitted online through the [grants portal](#) by **August 24, 2026, 5:00 p.m. ET**.

Please be advised that the grant portal will not open until **July 13, 2026**. Applicants will be asked to complete and submit the following:

1. **Project Narrative.** See Application Questions for narrative preview below. Narratives should be no more than 5 pages in length.
2. **Letters of Support.** Submit a letter of support from each key partner(s) named in the application confirming their role in the proposed collaboration.
3. **Project Budget.** The project budget should reflect the three-year grant period. Project budgets may be submitted for a total of \$450,000 (\$150,000/year) and should make clear the distribution of funds to project partners. High-level budget line items are sufficient.
4. **Organizational Financials.** Use the provided template to provide information on your current fiscal year financials, reserves, and internal controls.

Application Questions

1. **Organizational Background & Qualifications.** Describe your organization, the community you serve, and how your organization meets the RFP definition of a trusted community-based organization.
2. **Partnership Value & Potential for Impact.**
 - a. Describe your proposed partnership including the goals for the partnership over the grant period, and the specific gap(s) or opportunities your partnership will address.
 - b. How will this partnership strengthen caregiver well-being and mental health beyond what each organization could accomplish independently?
3. **Proposed Work and Implementation Plan.**
 - a. Describe the key strategies and activities you will implement to achieve your goals and how these strategies align with the RFP's focus on cultivating supportive social connections among parents and caregivers.
 - b. As relevant, describe the strategies and activities that align with the RFP's additional areas of focus (i.e., fostering open dialogue about parental stress, mental health, and well-being in ways that are grounded in the culture of the community served; integrating mental health supports into existing parent/caregiver programs and services; and/or establishing or strengthening referral pathways to clinical mental health care). Regardless of the partnership focus, be specific about which programs, services, and/or resources the partnership will connect, enhance, integrate, or expand.
4. **Caregiver Voice, Leadership, and Co-Design.**
 - a. Describe how your organization currently incorporates caregiver voice, needs, and interests into decision-making.
 - b. How will caregivers shape decisions, strategies, or implementation in this partnership moving forward?
5. **Anticipated Challenges and Mitigation Strategies.**
 - a. Identify potential barriers or risks to successful collaboration (e.g., coordination challenges, data sharing, engagement barriers).
 - b. How will you proactively address these challenges?

6. Sustainability and Systems Impact.

- a. Describe how the partnership—and the strengthened connections across service systems—will be sustained beyond the grant period.
- b. How might learnings from your work contribute to improvements in policies, practices, or systems of support for caregivers?

7. Outcomes.

- a. What outcomes or indicators are you currently tracking, or interested in tracking, related to caregiver well-being, connection, and access to support?
- b. What support would help strengthen how you track and learn from these?

Following the application deadline, Foundation staff and external reviewers with related experience will review and score all submissions according to the criteria outlined in this RFP. Award notifications will be made by **October 5, 2026**, with an anticipated grant start date of **November 1, 2026**.

Timeline

- **RFP release:** July 13, 2026
- **Question Submission Deadline:** July 31, 2026
- **FAQ Publication:** August 10, 2026
- **Application Deadline:** August 24, 2026
- **Award Notifications:** October 5, 2026
- **Grant Start:** November 1, 2026
- **Grant End:** October 31, 2029

How to Learn More

Ask Questions (optional): Organizations interested in this opportunity are encouraged to submit questions about the funding opportunity **by July 31, 2026**, to info@bcbsncfoundation.org. A FAQ will be posted to the Foundation website by **August 10, 2026**.

Key Terms

Clinical Mental Health Conditions: Diagnosable disorders that significantly impact an individual's thinking, mood, and/or behavior.

Lobbying: The IRS defines lobbying as communication with a legislator that expresses a view about specific legislation. Grassroots lobbying is defined as communication with the public that expresses a view about specific legislation and includes a call to action. Nonprofit organizations may legally engage in lobbying activities within certain bounds. No Blue Cross NC Foundation grant funding can be earmarked for lobbying.

Stress: A state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stressors can be internal (e.g., unrealistic expectations, self-doubt) or external (e.g., financial hardship, family disruptions) and may exacerbate existing mental health conditions or challenges, leading to increased symptoms or difficulties in coping.

Well-being: A positive state that encompasses quality of life as well as a sense of meaning and purpose.

About the Foundation

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is a private, charitable foundation established as an independent entity by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina in 2000. Over the past two decades, the organization has worked with - and supported - nonprofit organizations, government entities, and community partnerships across the state, investing \$290 million into North Carolina through more than 1,700 grants, collaborations, and special initiatives.