

Peach State Health Plan and the Centene Foundation Announce \$2.2 Million Commitment to Georgia Southern University for Rural Healthcare Workforce Development Program - Dec. 11, 2023

*Public-private partnership designed to bring more healthcare professionals to rural Georgia through accelerated impact of workforce development program*

ATLANTA, Dec. 11, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- [Peach State Health Plan](#) (PSHP) a care management organization that serves the needs of Georgians through a range of health insurance solutions and a wholly owned subsidiary of Centene Corporation [Centene Corporation](#) (NYSE: [CNC](#)), announced a new partnership with Georgia Southern University (GS) to provide education and training for healthcare professionals needed in underserved areas of rural Georgia.

[Centene Foundation](#), the philanthropic arm of Centene Corporation, and PSHP will invest \$2.2 million to fund the expansion of a workforce development program designed to support rural healthcare through enhancement to GS' existing nursing, physicians' assistants and addiction recovery specialists programs.

"PSHP is committed to increasing access to high quality health professionals for all Georgians. We have a history of developing public-private partnerships that bridge the gaps in healthcare access and coverage throughout Georgia," said Centene's Chief Growth Officer and Plan President and Chief Executive Officer of PSHP, Wade Rakes. "GS has the experience and capacity to provide residents in rural and underserved areas of the state with the trained medical professionals that help keep Georgia healthy. With this funding, Georgians will soon see increased access to maternal, behavioral and chronic care professionals. We are excited for the potential of this partnership and believe that, together, we can have a meaningful impact in our rural communities."

According to the Georgia Department of Community Health, 88% of Georgia counties qualify as Medically Underserved Areas (MUA) and 94% qualify as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA). These communities disproportionately face barriers that include poverty, education, transportation and access to affordable, quality healthcare. In MUAs and MHPSAs, shortages of trained medical and mental health professionals prevent many Georgians from getting the care they need. Through this new public-private partnership, PSHP will work with GS's Institute for Health Logistics & Analytics (IHLA) to support data-driven, targeted programs at the university to address these critical shortages and improve the health and well-being of the community.

"GS is delighted to partner with PSHP on a project aimed at enhancing our capacity to bring a greater number of high-quality healthcare professionals to the rural regions of Georgia," stated Kyle Marrero, President of GS. "Rural Georgia is facing a significant shortage of nurses, mental health specialists, and addiction counselors. To address this critical need, it is imperative that we streamline the educational pathways for students pursuing these fields. This strategic partnership is poised to set us on a trajectory to make a meaningful impact on the healthcare landscape across rural Georgia."

In the Waters College of Health Professions, GS will expand recruitment, enrollment, retention and graduation of Bachelors in Science Nursing (BSN) students, with a focus on students in rural Georgia. Funding will be used to develop and implement a Certified Nursing Assistant Program (CNA) that will serve as an early pipeline for the BSN program that will primarily focus on nursing student recruitment and retention.

In the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, funding will be used to expand the addiction recovery program. This expanded program will allow GS to provide more staff and supervised post-graduate training opportunities in rural Georgia to increase the overall number of Certified Level II Addiction Counselors in Georgia.

"This new partnership with PSHP marks a significant step forward in the capabilities of Waters College of Health Professionals to build a robust health care workforce in rural Georgia," said Dean of the Waters College of Health Professions, Whitney Nash, Ph.D." The imperative to deploy dedicated healthcare professionals in our underserved areas that specialize in nursing, counseling and abuse intervention cannot be overstated. This partnership will be a critical inflection point for growing the number of these health specialists."

"As a student hoping to enter the healthcare workforce, I am thrilled to see Georgia Southern partnering with PSHP to create more and better opportunities to advance my education," said Suzanna Forehand, a junior pre-med student at GS. "These expanded programs and student support network will equip us with the skills, knowledge and support network needed to finish school and make a positive impact in rural healthcare."

### **About Georgia Southern University**

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers approximately 140 different degree programs serving more than 25,500 students through 10 colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia with expert faculty, the University is focused on public impact research and engaging learning opportunities through knowledge and know-how that prepare our students to take ownership of their lives, careers and communities. Visit [GeorgiaSouthern.edu](https://www.GorgiaSouthern.edu).

### **About Peach State Health Plan**

Peach State Health Plan is a Care Management Organization that serves the needs of Georgians through a range of health insurance solutions. Peach State Health Plan serves the Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids® population in partnership with Georgia Families. The organization also focuses on under-insured and uninsured individuals through its federal insurance marketplace plan, Ambetter, and its Medicare Advantage Special Needs Plan. Peach State Health Plan is a wholly owned subsidiary of Centene Corporation, a leading healthcare enterprise committed to helping people live healthier lives. For more information visit [www.pshpgeorgia.com](http://www.pshpgeorgia.com).

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