

Peach State Health Plan and the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University Celebrate 2025 Peach State Scholars -
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Fifth cohort of Peach State Scholars enters accelerated pathway to bring care to Georgia's underserved communities

AUGUSTA, Ga., Aug. 18, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- [Peach State Health Plan](#), a leading care management organization serving Georgia and a Centene Corporation subsidiary, and the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University (MCG) proudly recognized the newest cohort of Peach State Scholars during a special pinning ceremony.

"These are students who have been selected from rigorous competition to be our next cohort of 12 into a primary care specialty, do their residency in Georgia and then practice in an underserved area, which is most of Georgia," said David Hess, MD, dean of the Medical College of Georgia. "In return for their service, Peach State Scholars receive a medical school scholarship, which removes the financial barrier of student loan debt and makes primary care a more viable and appealing path. It's a win-win, for the students and for the communities who gain access to the care they deserve."

Georgia continues to face a shortage of physicians in rural regions, impacting health outcomes and access to care. Currently, 143 of Georgia's 159 counties are designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) according to the [Cicero Institute](#), a stark reminder of the need for initiatives like the 3+ program, which directly aligns student opportunity with community need.

"We are honored to support these students as they dedicate themselves not only to medicine but to serving where they are needed most," said Clyde A. White, President and CEO of Peach State Health Plan. "This program is about more than producing doctors – it's about building healthier communities and expanding access to care for all Georgians."

Meet the 2025 Peach State Scholars and their chosen specialties:

- Sadie Abernathy (*Gainesville, GA*) – Emergency Medicine
- Tofunmi Adewumi (*Kennesaw, GA*) – Pediatrics or Family Medicine
- Cole Anderson (*Augusta, GA*) – Family Medicine
- Maddox Benedict (*Buford, GA*) – Psychiatry
- Austin Buntin (*Ellijay, GA*) – Internal Medicine
- Oscar Meza (*Brunswick, GA*) – Psychiatry
- Madison Crawford (*Monroe, GA*) – Emergency Medicine
- Andrew Ji (*Effingham, GA*) – Family Medicine
- Elizabeth Bowman Ketchem (*Marietta, GA*) – Emergency Medicine
- Leja Lizunaite (*Johns Creek, GA*) – Obstetrics and Gynecology
- William Ngo (*Norcross, GA*) – Internal Medicine
- Nikul Parikh (*Moultrie, GA*) - Internal Medicine

The pinning ceremony marks a symbolic step in each scholar's journey and reinforces their shared commitment to the health and wellbeing of Georgia's most vulnerable populations. The pin represents more than a program – it is a symbol of hope, access, and opportunity for underserved Georgians.

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 [Centene](#) company, a leading healthcare enterprise committed to helping people live healthier lives. For more information visit www.pshpgeorgia.com.

About Augusta University

As one of Georgia's four public research institutions, Augusta University offers customizable, accessible education on campuses in Augusta and across the state. Augusta University aims not only to be different, but also to make a difference — to reimagine and recreate the future of art, technology, education and health care. Home to Georgia's only public academic medical center and designated by the state as a health sciences center of excellence, Augusta University is dedicated to creating a safer, healthier and more equitable Georgia.

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