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Western Carolina Medical Society Receives Investment from UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of North Carolina to Expand Programs and Serve More Patients

Asheville, NC – Western Carolina Medical Society (WCMS) is delighted to announce that UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of North Carolina has provided a \$510K investment to expand access to care. UnitedHealthcare’s investment in WCMS ensures that access to free, specialty healthcare remains secure and available to those who need it most in an ever-changing healthcare landscape. In addition to supporting expansion of WCMS’ Project Access®, this investment will support the WCMS Interpreter Network (WIN) and the Healthy Healer Program.

The investment will assist WCMS in strengthening and expanding its core initiatives, particularly Project Access®, which connects low-income, uninsured individuals who are ineligible for Medicaid with essential medical care. Project Access® currently operates in Buncombe and Madison Counties, collaborating with local medical providers to offer access to free, specialty healthcare. Expanding this program will allow for services to support even more western North Carolinians.

Additionally, Project Access® utilizes the region’s largest interpreting network, WCMS Interpreter Network (WIN), to ensure patients receive care in their home language. This investment will also fund interpreter training courses and job shadowing opportunities, increasing the number of certified medical interpreters, and creating local jobs across WNC. In 2025, WIN scheduled more than 7,000 appointments in over 40 languages.

WCMS’ Healthy Healer Program (HHP) will grow to serve more physicians, residents, and physician assistants across western North Carolina, particularly in rural areas, offering free, confidential therapy and coaching. In addition to free therapy and coaching, the HHP will support providers through educational events and wellness retreats. By supporting the mental health and well-being of our medical providers, this program ensures that those who care for all of us can continue to do so with strength, compassion, and resilience.

“Every individual deserves access to high quality and affordable healthcare,” said Anita Bachmann, CEO, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of North Carolina. “We are proud to invest in WCMS and its community-centered work to expand specialty care, strengthen language services and support the medical professionals who are working alongside of us to build healthier and stronger communities.”

In 2024, WCMS saw an increase in the demand for specialty healthcare. In response, the WCMS board voted to remove all age restrictions for Project Access, hired additional bilingual staff, conducted a needs assessment, and collaborated with community partners to launch patient wraparound support services such as a Diabetes Intervention Pilot. In 2025, WCMS was awarded with the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Good Health, Good Business Award for its efforts to create a healthier community. This investment is a testament to the critical services that WCMS provides to the region.

“As our lobby fills daily with hardworking individuals trying to access healthcare, I feel profound gratitude for UnitedHealthcare’s belief in WCMS. We are a small nonprofit, but our impact is great. Each day, we move medical mountains to support care for our community and meet Social Determinants of Health such as food, housing, and more,” said Karen Wallace-Meigs, Executive Director of WCMS. “This investment empowers us to sustain and expand essential healthcare services for neighbors when healthcare is financially out of reach for more and more of our community members.”

About The Western Carolina Medical Society

The Western Carolina Medical Society is a membership organization of more than 700 physicians and physician assistants. Its mission is to advocate for healthy communities, increase access to affordable healthcare and promote wellness in WNC. Since 1885, WCMS has been respected for its leadership and innovation in addressing issues of access to affordable health care, disparities in health, and wellness promotion. WCMS is unlike any medical society in the country. Throughout its history, WCMS has been at the forefront of working collaboratively with area organizations to address health challenges facing our community’s residents. Indeed, Project Access was the original program of its kind at its inception 30 years ago and has been replicated around the country in hundreds of locales.

For more information about the Western Carolina Medical Society, contact Niki Duff, Director of Development & Communications at niki@mywcms.org or visit www.mywcms.org.

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