UNITED HEALTH FOUNDATION

United Health Foundation and East Carolina University: *Expanding Youth Mental Health Services in Rural and Underserved Areas of North Carolina*

East Carolina University (ECU) is a public university located in Greenville, North Carolina. ECU's Center for Telepsychiatry is the home for the North Carolina Statewide Telepsychiatry Program (NC-STeP), which connects more than 50 hospital emergency departments and health departments across North Carolina with psychiatrists to provide assessments and consultations to patients using telemedicine technologies.

In North Carolina, youth experience significant challenges accessing mental health services due to lack of providers in many parts of the state. To address this challenge, the United Health Foundation, the philanthropic foundation of UnitedHealth Group, announced a multi-year, $3.2 million grant partnership with ECU in 2023. The grant expands NC-STeP to five community-based pediatric care clinics in rural and underserved parts of the state. Through the program all children visiting these clinics are screened for behavioral health disorders and anxiety. Behavioral health providers are embedded in the clinics to help connect young people diagnosed with mental health issues to a psychiatrist for case consultation and care planning via telepsychiatry. The grant also supports the development of interactive tools to support peer-to-peer engagement and education about mental health for youth.

COMMUNITY IMPACT*

55,507
mental health screenings provided to children and adolescents

14%
of children and adolescents screened demonstrated an increased likelihood of a behavioral health disorder

18%
of children and adolescents screened demonstrated at least a "mild to moderate" level of anxiety

849
children and adolescents are receiving integrated health care, which includes behavioral health consultations

92%
satisfaction rating by parents/guardians of children and adolescents receiving mental health services

*as of 9/30/26

WHY IS THIS WORK CRITICAL?

> Mental health – including psychological, emotional and social well-being – is a vital part of a child's overall health. This expanded program will provide access to mental health services for children in their established pediatric or primary care setting, removing stigma sometimes associated with mental health care, and, through telemedicine, will offer expert consultation support for clinicians."

DR. SY SAEED
ECU Center for Telepsychiatry and Founding Executive Director of NC-STeP