

\$2.8 Million Grant Funds New Indiana Fresh Start Connect SUD Screening for Pregnant Moms

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA , February 12, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A program designed to create universal substance use screening among pregnant

Hoosiers to improve maternal health through early intervention, treatment, and aftercare.



Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana (VOAOHIN) announces today it has been awarded a \$2.8 million grant from the Anthem Blue and Cross Blue Shield Foundation. The funds will be used over three years to create a new Indiana-based Fresh Start Connect program designed as a critical care pathway to meet the needs of Hoosier families by preserving the health of pregnant moms affected by substance use disorder (SUD).

According to the 2022 Maternal Mortality Annual Report, SUD was the top reason for the 40% increase in maternal deaths in Indiana from 2019 to 2020. The new Fresh Start Connect program aims to improve maternal health through early diagnosis, intervention, treatment and aftercare among pregnant Hoosier moms affected by SUD.

John R. von Arx III, Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana's president and CEO, says, "The Fresh Start Connect program has been developed to support vulnerable and underserved pregnant women in Indiana. It is a first step, at a grassroots level, for healthcare teams to diagnose affected moms early in their pregnancy so we can offer an intervention plan with wrap around support, which will continue after the baby is born. This new program connects with our Fresh Start Recovery residential treatment program, which provides residential treatment where moms get to stay with their children, five and under, during recovery. We appreciate the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation for funding this valuable program."

How will Fresh Start Connect work

The team will identify Indiana health systems to become program partners. Through the partnerships, a new team of Registered Nurse Community Educators will provide education and delivery of comprehensive screening of all pregnant women. This group of health professionals will be trained to reduce the gap in care through universal SUD screening and referred

enrollment into supportive and safe treatment programs, including VOAHOIN's Fresh Start Recovery.

"As a healthcare leader in Indiana for more than 80 years, we are committed to working with community-based organizations to address health challenges such as the impact of substance use disorder and the crisis it presents for pregnant women in Indiana," said Beth Keyser, president of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield. "This grant to Volunteers of America is part of \$6.6 million dollars our foundation is investing to improve maternal health in our home state."

There are currently four Fresh Start Recovery Centers in Indiana (Indianapolis, Columbus, Evansville and Winchester). Fresh Start Recovery residential treatment centers provide intensive treatment and support for pregnant women and mothers with substance use disorder.

The Centers are unique because they keep mothers with their children (under the age of five) during treatment and recovery. A growing network of Volunteers of America Legacy Recovery Houses, designed as recovery residences for moms and their children, is also a critical pathway to the continuum of care.

Sayward Salazar, vice president of Volunteers of America Behavioral Health Operations in Indiana, says, "Our team's goal is to intervene early to reduce pre-term birth rates, c-section rates, NICU admissions, maternal morbidity and mortality. The complete care pathway is designed to meet the needs of the whole family, preserving health and wellness, while keeping mom and her children together."

"This grant fits with our philosophy on whole health--looking beyond a person's physical health to include the behavioral and social drivers as well," said Kimberly Roop, M.D., president of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Medicaid division. "As an OB/GYN, I know early intervention, comprehensive treatment and aftercare are critical to bring about safer pregnancies, healthier mothers and a decline in Indiana's alarming rate of maternal mortality."

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The Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a philanthropic arm of the Elevance Health Foundation. The Foundation works to address health equity by focusing on improving the health of the socially vulnerable through strategic partnerships and programs in our communities, with an emphasis on maternal child health; mental health; and food as medicine. Additionally, the Foundation responds to disasters when our communities need us the most. The Foundation also

coordinates the company's year-round Dollars for Dollars program which provides a 100 percent match of associates' donations, as well as its Volunteer Time Off and Dollars for Doers community service programs. ®ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield names and symbol are registered marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. To learn more about the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation and the Elevance Health Foundation, please visit www.elevancehealth.foundation and its blog at www.medium.com/elevancehealthfoundation.

At Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana, we are dedicated to helping people achieve well-being by offering hope, restoring dignity, and transforming lives, to ensure communities thrive. For over 125 years, we have been uplifting individuals, families, and communities including veterans, homeless individuals and families, men and women returning home after incarceration, and those recovering and healing from addiction. Our work touches the mind, body, heart – and ultimately the spirit – of those we serve, integrating our deep compassion with highly effective programs and services. To learn more about our work, visit www.voahin.org.

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