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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CALOPTIMA HEALTH GIVES \$25M TO BOLSTER SAFETY NET, REDUCE HEALTH DISPARITIES AND EASE WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

*Grants to support development and education of future nurses and caregivers,
Aims to provide equitable care to one in three Orange County residents*

ORANGE, Calif. (April 9, 2024) — CalOptima Health’s Board of Directors has approved nearly \$25 million in workforce education grants to seven institutions in Orange County. These grants mark the first phase of the \$50 million Provider Workforce Development Initiative, the largest workforce grant ever awarded by CalOptima Health. The Initiative will help to address health disparities and better secure the future delivery of medical and behavioral health care by safety net providers. It also seeks to ease predicted shortages and gaps in the Orange County health care workforce that serves the Medi-Cal population.

CalOptima Health provides essential health care to about one in three Orange County residents. Both California and Orange County are facing a workforce shortage of trained health care professionals, particularly in community health centers and safety net providers. One major barrier to increasing the health care workforce is the lack of economic support for education, training, recruitment and retention of safety net health professionals. By providing this economic assistance, it is our hope that more individuals can pursue careers in health care.

The Provider Workforce Development Initiative is intended to increase access to high-quality, equitable care for members by investing in strategies to close gaps in Orange County’s future health care workforce.

“CalOptima Health recognizes that our mission to serve members begins with having a strong health care workforce to deliver quality care,” said Michael Hunn, CEO of CalOptima Health. “The challenge of health care worker shortages at organizations across Orange County drove CalOptima Health’s landmark community investment in a \$50 million Provider Workforce Development Initiative.”

Orange County-based institutions receiving grant awards in the first phase of funding are as follows:

1. **Cal State Fullerton** will receive a \$5 million grant to increase concurrent enrollment program admissions and the number of associate degree nursing to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students. The funds will also support an expansion of the BSN program, based on Board of Registered Nursing approval.

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2. **Chapman University** will use its grant of \$5 million to provide full tuition physician assistant (PA) scholarships for first-year and second-year students in training, and local practice PA education for academically qualified, low-income students.
3. **Coast Community College District** will receive \$2.04 million to expand the registered nurse pipeline at Golden West College by 40 students per year and to develop a pathway to the radiologic technology certificate program at Orange Coast College for 30 students per year.
4. **Concordia University Irvine** will receive \$5 million in grant funding to expand the Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) program and provide more scholarships to pre-nursing and ABSN students.
5. **Orange County United Way** will receive a grant of \$1.36 million to expand its UpSkill OC program, focusing on gaps within the health care workforce, and provide career coaching, connections to paid training and certification programs, and job placements in the health care industry. An additional 25 clients will be served each year.
6. **Santiago Canyon College** will receive \$1.2 million to increase the behavior technician program from 25–50 students to 50–100 students annually. Its medical assistant program will expand from 50 to 175 students annually. The college will develop a licensed vocational nursing curriculum and attain program accreditation to produce more than 60 licensed graduates annually.
7. The Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing at the **University of California, Irvine** will be awarded \$5 million for a program to provide a one-year externship to prelicensure nursing students and other activities that address Orange County’s shortage of registered nurses.

“Our grants to educational institutions will tackle the problem at its roots by funding training and education for tomorrow’s caregivers for the Medi-Cal population,” explains Hunn. “Closing workforce gaps and building provider diversity is the foundation of health care equity for our members.”

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About CalOptima Health

A county organized health system, CalOptima Health provides quality health care coverage for low-income children, adults, seniors and people with disabilities in Orange County, California. CalOptima Health’s mission is to serve member health with excellence and dignity, respecting the value and needs of each person. CalOptima Health serves more than 934,000 members with a network of nearly 10,700 primary care doctors and specialists and 39 acute and rehab hospitals.

About the Provider Workforce Development Initiative

The five-year, \$50 million CalOptima Health Provider Workforce Development Initiative is designed to increase access to high-quality, equitable care for members by investing in strategies that aim to close gaps and shortages in Orange County’s health care workforce. Through a competitive process, grantees will receive funds that increase opportunities for education, training and development, recruitment, and retention of health professionals needed to serve CalOptima Health’s diverse members.

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Quotes From Grantees

Cal State Fullerton

“The health care system nationwide is facing a severe shortage of workers across multiple specialties. We are excited to partner with CalOptima Health and local community colleges to expand our capacity to educate more nurses in Orange County. It takes partnerships and collaborations like this to fully respond to the needs of our region.”

— *Sylvia Alva, Cal State Fullerton President*

Chapman University

“This recognition from CalOptima Health, through the Provider Workforce Development Initiative, reaffirms Chapman’s central role in helping shape the future of health care in Orange County. It also underscores Chapman’s commitment to our local community and to creating opportunities for a world-class health care education for talented students from our own backyard.”

— *Daniele C. Struppa, Chapman President*

“The CalOptima Health grant represents a pivotal opportunity for Chapman University to not only broaden the diversity of our health care workforce but also to address the pressing need for health care professionals in underserved areas. We are not only dedicating resources to the future of health care but also cultivating a dedication to community service and ensuring fair access to care.”

— *Janeen Hill, Dean of Chapman’s Crean College of Health and Behavioral Sciences*

Coast Community College District

“Our job is to provide educational opportunities and support for our students that lead to high-paying, high-quality careers that respond to the needs of the community. I want to thank our team, with members from Golden West College, Orange Coast College and the District Office, who prepared the grant application and will administer it. This grant brings needed new resources to our exceptional health programs. I would also like to thank CalOptima Health for its continued partnership and for providing this significant funding and support.”

— *Dr. Andreea Serban, Vice Chancellor of Educational Services and Technology, Coast Community College District*

Concordia University Irvine

“Concordia University Irvine is extremely honored and privileged to partner with CalOptima Health in addressing the health care profession workforce shortages in Orange County. With this grant, Concordia will continue our efforts to diversify enrollment in our Nursing program and increase our reach within the community. The grant will allow us to provide more robust scholarships and increased academic support to aspiring health care professionals so they can live out their callings. Through this partnership with CalOptima Health, we are confident that the grant will make a significant difference in the lives of those we serve and create lasting positive change for health care outcomes in our community.”

— *Dr. Terry Olson, Dean, School of Health and Human Sciences, Concordia University Irvine*

Orange County United Way

“We are grateful to CalOptima Health for this generous new funding that will help us expand our UpSkill OC program to focus on gaps in the health care workforce through a partnership with the Hospital Association of Southern California and local training institutions. Not only will we be able to provide valuable career coaching and connection to paid training and certification programs, we will also be able to place a diverse array of qualified candidates into critical health care industry jobs.”

— *Susan B. Parks, President and CEO of Orange County United Way*

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Santiago Canyon College

“Santiago Canyon College is proud to be the recipient of three CalOptima Health grants, totaling \$1.2 million. The award exemplifies our college’s unwavering commitment to creating career education pathways that lead to high-wage, high-demand jobs in Orange County. We extend our deepest gratitude to CalOptima Health for their belief in and support of our commitment to workforce development for the medical field.”

— *Jeannie G. Kim, Ph.D., Santiago Canyon College President*

“This grant funding will allow Santiago Canyon College’s Continuing Education to expand our services and enrollments through the improving of existing classroom space and the construction of new instructional health care labs. We look forward to using this grant funding to serve more community members seeking medical occupations certification to meet regional workforce needs.”

— *Chrissy Gascon, Santiago Canyon College Dean of Instruction and Student Services, Continuing Education*

University of California, Irvine

“The NURSE-OC program emphasizes excellence and dignity in addressing nursing workforce shortages, with the goal of fulfilling the critical need for providers in Orange County. Our diverse student body reflects the communities in which they serve, and this grant will support the program’s goal of advancing health care equity and expanding access to the most vulnerable populations.”

— *Mark Lazenby, Dean of the University of California, Irvine Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing*

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