

# ANCHORING COMMUNITIES





**Dennis Matheis**  
President & CEO  
Sentara Health

## WELCOME

At Sentara, we know that there is more to health than healthcare itself. The health and wellness of our patients and members and the broader community are influenced by multiple factors beyond direct medical care. This is why we are proud to partner with local organizations, community leaders, and other stakeholders to address social health factors such as housing, food security, skilled career training, and equitable access to care.

Together with our trusted partners, we listen to our patients and members to better understand the unique needs and challenges facing the communities we serve. We then work with these partners to provide the medical, behavioral health, and other key social resources needed to help individuals and communities thrive.

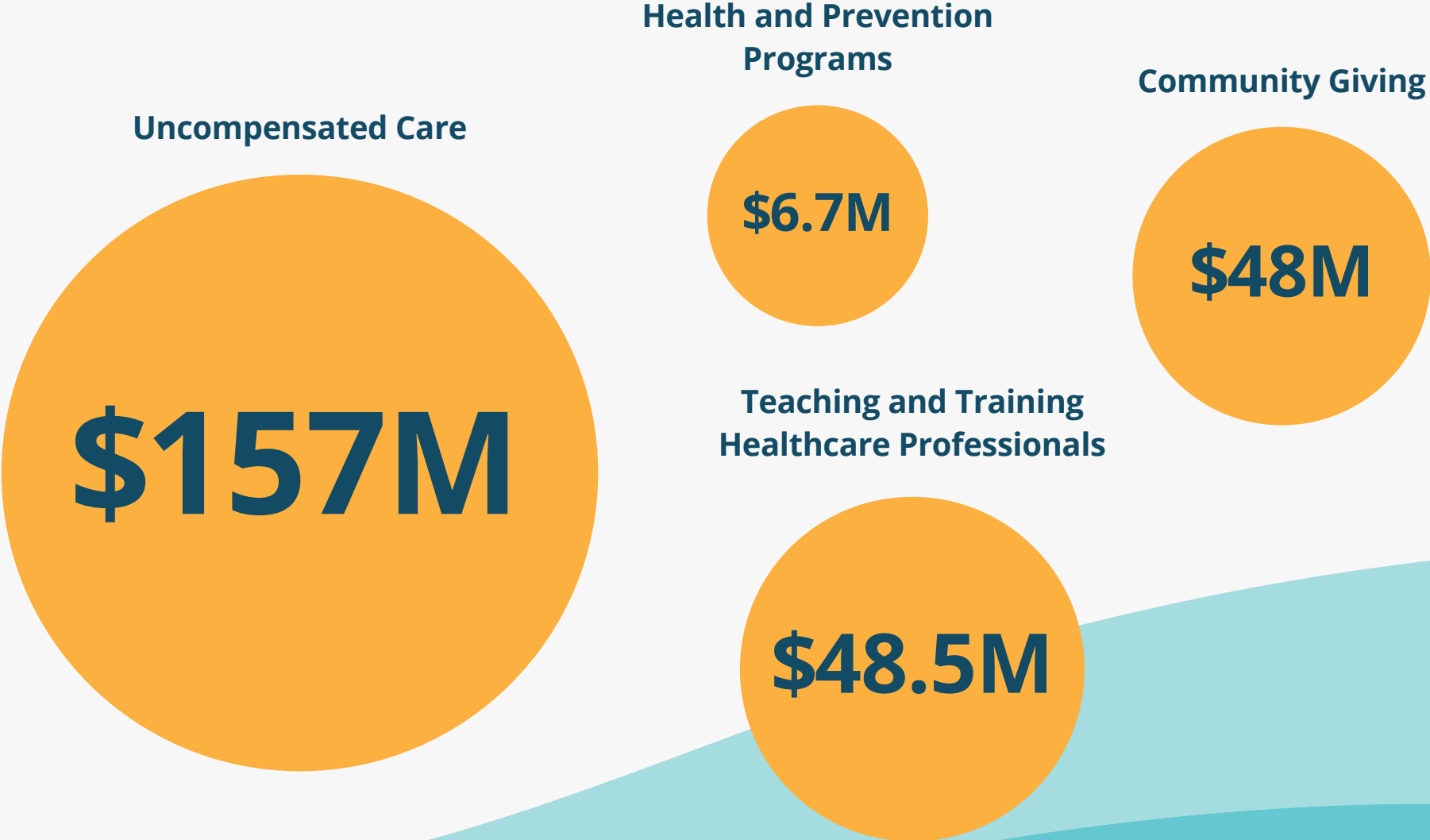
The results of these efforts are seen in this year's Sentara Cares Impact Report, which tells the personal stories of the direct and positive effects Sentara can have when we unite the skills and talents of our incredible Sentara Health colleagues and collaborate with our community partners. By working together closely, we can better address the healthcare needs of our communities and provide comprehensive and compassionate care to those in need.

I am incredibly proud of these efforts and am deeply grateful for every Sentara team member and community partner doing this important work. Together, we are creating a healthier future for all.

**Dennis Matheis**  
President & CEO  
Sentara Health

In 2022, Sentara invested more than **\$260 Million** in our communities.

We Improve Health Every Day.



# Driving Action

**Sentara Community Health Needs Assessments enhance our understanding of every community we serve in Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina and guide our mission to improve health every day.**

As a provider of both direct patient care and health plan coverage, through our Optima Health and Virginia Premier subsidiaries, Sentara interacts with hundreds of thousands of residents throughout Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina every day.

And whether we're administering an annual check-up, preparing patients and their families for a surgical procedure or reaching out to a community services provider on behalf of a plan member, one certainty often rises to the top. There's always more to the story when it comes to a person's health, and we must use our knowledge and resources to understand and influence how that story evolves for individuals, families and entire communities.

As we have throughout our history, we embrace the process of understanding our communities' needs and priorities through our Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA). In 2022, we completed our most intensive assessments to date.

## **WHAT OUR COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENTS ACCOMPLISH**

Though our daily interactions with patients and plan members provide an intimate knowledge of the many factors influencing their total health and well-being, additional region-specific knowledge helps us act with more intentionality.

- By examining demographic trends, for example, we can assess and project the extent to which aging-related services will be needed or whether cultural or linguistic barriers may need to be better addressed.
- Key health status indicators related to the prevalence of chronic diseases, risk factors, hospitalizations, access to services and many others — combined with the demographic factors listed above — help us pinpoint health inequities and tailor services.



- And through a closer look at data detailing gaps in access to care, as well as social drivers of health, the daily lives of individuals and families come into clearer focus.

We use this data to construct an evidence-based, sustainable foundation for our work. But the full story emerges when we take the time to listen and engage beyond the numbers.

- ◀ Our Community Health Needs Assessments asked respondents to consider top health concerns for children in their communities, with annual checkups, immunizations, access to fresh foods, healthy eating and exercise most often topping the list.

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## WHAT OUR COMMUNITIES ARE SAYING

Through multiple surveys and focus groups, we sought to understand the care, services and supports that are most effective in empowering us to achieve our healthiest and most fulfilling lives, as well as the barriers inhibiting access to those services.

Members living in communities across Virginia and North Carolina consistently listed behavioral and mental health as their top concern. Additionally, access and availability of services is the most consistent barrier cited in our communities.

“The message rings loud and clear when 50 percent of our community members say their family’s emotional health is worse now than it was over a year ago,” says Dr. Jordan Asher, Sentara Health Executive Vice President and Chief Physician Executive. “We need to do more, and that starts with equitable and affordable access, not simply to primary care and behavioral health services, but to nutritious foods to eat, to safe places to sleep, to meaningful, well-paying jobs — to all of those human needs, the ‘dis-eases’ of life, that negatively impact our daily well-being when they’re not met.”

For long-time Sentara partners like Debbie Oswalt, Executive Director of the Virginia Health Care

Foundation, improved access to services, particularly behavioral health, requires coordinated solutions to workforce capacity and other systemic challenges.

“So many of Virginia’s mental health professionals are nearing retirement age, and the pipeline is not robust enough to replace them,” Oswalt says. “This is at a time when there is a greater need than ever for mental health services.”

In fact, cost of care, lack of insurance, language barriers, inadequate transportation, childcare challenges, lack of convenient locations, and the inability to take time off from work all rest under the umbrella barrier of access and availability.

These findings are reinforced by the fact that more than 93 percent of localities served by Sentara are federally designated as Medically Underserved Areas, contain federally designated Underserved Populations or are classified as Health Professional Shortage Areas.

“The CHNA process uncovers the state of an area’s health and well-being, identifying gaps where we need to make further inroads,” says Dr. Asher. “Combining this knowledge with the daily data and insights we glean through our clinicians and health plans will help us continue making a meaningful difference and improve the lives of our community members.”



## The Realities Our Families Face

We asked community members to reflect on the paths their lives have taken over the past 18 months. Of those who answered:

More than **25%**

say their family's **physical health has worsened.**

More than **51%**

say their family's **emotional health has worsened.**

More than **43%**

say their family's **finances have worsened.**

As our Community Health Needs Assessments show, equitable access to behavioral health services is one of the most significant issues we and our partners are being called to address in our communities.

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## WHERE WE'RE FOCUSING

Our CHNA findings, coupled with what we learn from our patients, plan members, and community partners every day, will guide our mission and advance our work over the next three years to address three overarching and interconnected focus areas:

- **Behavioral and Mental Health:** Improving the mental and emotional well-being of every member of our communities by increasing access to services and striving to improve models of care and support.
- **Chronic Disease:** Reducing the impact of chronic disease on overall health outcomes through access to care and screenings, as well as greater availability of educational resources and community assets that support healthy behaviors and activities.
- **Social Drivers of Health:** Aligning ourselves, other healthcare providers, and community-based organizations to increase awareness and access to resources to help address social and economic issues affecting health outcomes.

Sentara Community Care (detailed on page 9) is an example of an initiative in which we're tackling all three

focus areas at once through a new model of care that brings primary care, behavioral health and safety net navigation services directly into historically underserved neighborhoods.

Similarly, through our health plans' onboarding and care coordination processes, we're working to ensure more members of our communities are efficiently and seamlessly plugged into their care networks and connected with community services providers.

And, through our community partnerships, we're working to build the capacity of community-based organizations to touch more lives and extend resources further into our communities.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and there is no one single entity that can tackle these issues alone," says Dr. Asher. "That's why we're committed to advancing regional Community Health Improvement Plans developed in partnership with other providers and community leaders. These plans represent the next step in our ability to truly deliver on our mission: We Improve Health Every Day."

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– Dr. Jordan Asher, M.D., M.S.  
Executive Vice President &  
Chief Physician Executive  
Sentara Health

# Bringing Care Where It's Needed Most

**Sentara Community Care leverages outreach and data-driven research to direct vital services to historically underserved communities throughout Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina.**

Felicia Shearin sat in a typical doctor's office in the early winter of 2023 and said, "I just never trusted doctors, but when I saw this young Black woman come in, and I saw that she looked like me, it just gave me a sense of comfort."

The "young Black woman" Shearin referred to in this instance was Chanell Dorris, a nurse practitioner at the Sentara Community Care Center in Southside Norfolk's Berkley Historic District. And nothing about the doctor's office or the visit was "typical" for the 46-year-old Hampton Roads, Va., native.

A month earlier, after moving back to the area from South Carolina, Shearin had no primary care options. She was staying in Norfolk and couldn't get in to see her

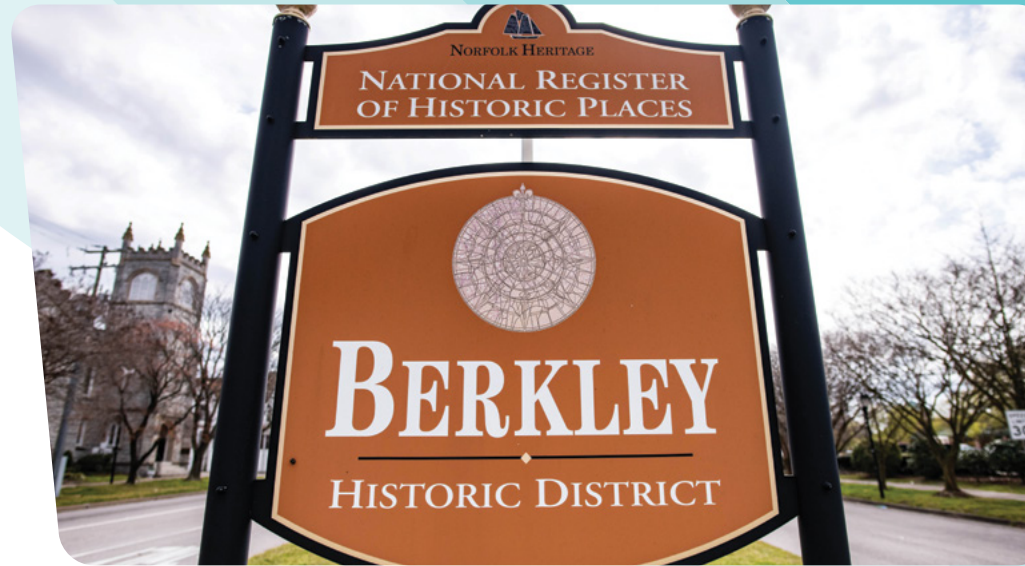
previous doctor. Then, when her blood pressure spiked, she headed to the Emergency Department. Once stabilized and discharged, she resumed her search for a primary care physician. However, since driving to unfamiliar places often triggers her anxiety (which exacerbates the blood pressure condition she's trying to manage), she needed her physician to be nearby.

What she found in the Sentara Community Care Center, however, was much more than a convenient location.

"A lot of times, you go to the doctor's office, and they're in and out," she says. "She really took the time to find out what was going on with me."



◀ When Hampton Roads resident Felicia Shearin discovered the Sentara Community Care Center in Norfolk's Berkley Historic District, she found a holistic team of care services and care navigation providers who quickly earned her trust.



▶ In addition to brick and mortar locations like the one in Norfolk's Berkley Historic District, the Sentara Community Care model also deploys mobile care vehicles to strategically chosen neighborhood-level locations.

In addition to addressing her blood pressure, Shearin says, Dorris explored some of the fatigue, anxiety and other symptoms she had been experiencing. The staff also helped Shearin enroll in a new insurance plan and reminded her that the community health worker and licensed clinical social worker on-site were ready to help her manage her anxiety (when she was ready to take that step).

Now, with a care plan to help manage her blood pressure, cholesterol, and low vitamin D levels, Shearin says her energy levels are rising, her headaches are fewer and farther between, and her dizziness has subsided. And though she now lives in Chesapeake, she plans to keep making the drive to Berkley.

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## DRIVEN BY DATA & COMMUNITY INSIGHT

### HOW WE BUILT OUR CARE MODEL FROM THE GROUND UP

#### Building Trust

For physicians like Dr. Michael Charles, Executive Medical Director for Sentara Community Care, community members like Shearin were exactly who Sentara had in mind when launching the initiative in 2022.

“This is someone who was forced to go to an emergency department because she didn’t have another option she could trust — someone who the medical profession had frankly let down,” Dr. Charles says. “To be able to sit down and use every tool at our disposal to really get someone like Felicia on a journey to better health — that’s why we get into medicine in the first place.”

But building an effective plan and model to reach residents like Shearin wasn’t an overnight process.

“You can trace the origins of this particular initiative back to our grassroots COVID-19 vaccination outreach, especially with faith leaders in our communities,” says Heather Strock, Executive Director of Operations for Sentara Community Care. “Those partnerships were instrumental in helping us understand the who, what,

when, where, why and how we truly needed to make Sentara Community Care happen.”

Dr. Geoffrey Van Guns, Senior Pastor at Second Calvary Baptist Church in Norfolk, was one of those faith leaders who worked closely with Sentara nurses and the Rev. Gregory Johnston of Urban Discovery Ministries on door-to-door vaccination outreach. He has since stayed connected to help inform the design of Sentara Community Care and has hosted the Sentara Mobile Care vehicle at his church.

“Our work with Sentara went far beyond vaccinations,” Dr. Guns says. “When you talk to people the way we did, it showed Sentara’s flexibility to adapt and its openness to working in a community in ways that I don’t think a lot of organizations have been willing to do.”

With more than 3.1 million people living in Sentara’s combined service area in Virginia, increasing access to care on a larger scale hinged on answering two essential questions: Where are we most needed? And what model of care will make the most significant difference?

## Pinpointing the “Where”

To answer those questions, Sentara embraced a data-forward approach to align community input with Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) findings and the extensive data available to us through our Optima Health and Virginia Premier health plans. Our aim? To build heat maps that could visualize as much information as we could find regarding chronic disease prevalence, gaps in access to services and social drivers of health needs.

### Our process in action:

1. Start with the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS), which includes 90 measures across six domains of care, including the effectiveness of care, access/availability of care, the experience of care, and utilization of services.
2. Then, determine where our health plan members in a particular region or community are experiencing high concentrations of HEDIS gap scores.
3. Combine those insights with overall uninsured population data and CHNA findings related to overall population health indicators.
4. Overlay regions and populations federally designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration as medically underserved.
5. Input Sentara Emergency Department utilization statistics down to the zip code level.
6. Factor in where the highest concentrations of food scarcity exist.



Since launching in the summer of 2022, Sentara Mobile Care has been a fixture at community events, offering direct patient care, information and other support services.

7. Add in subsidized housing locations.
8. Chart the locations of every Sentara practice and every Federally Qualified Health Center.
9. Drop pins in strategically located zip codes where:
  - HEDIS gaps are the most prevalent.
  - ED utilization is high.
  - Access to food, housing, transportation and other services is limited.
  - Proximity to primary care services is low.

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## Turning “Where to Go” into “What to Provide” & “How to Provide It”

“Our heat maps were powerful tools that helped crystallize and visualize the gaps and disparities that our community members felt,” Strock says. “It also confirmed for us that a one-size-fits-all approach just wouldn’t work.”

Therefore, Strock adds, to ensure Sentara was meeting the community where and when it needed us — and that we were delivering on the services residents and our data analysis identified — we developed a flexible, multifaceted service model that provides:



## SUCCESS FROM THE START

### INITIAL SENTARA COMMUNITY CARE LOCATIONS ARE ALREADY MAKING AN IMPACT

From inspiring individual stories like Felicia Shearin's to collective impact in communities served, Sentara Community Care marked some major milestones and found plenty of successes in 2022 to celebrate as we continue to expand in 2023.

- Sentara opened the first three Sentara Community Care programs in Hampton Roads. Two Sentara Community Care centers now offer services in Norfolk, Va. — one inside the Union Mission unhoused residential facility and a second in the medically underserved Berkley neighborhood — while the third program serves the entire Hampton Roads region via the Sentara Mobile Care vehicle.
- Since opening the Sentara Community Care Center at Union Mission, EMS calls/transport of Union Mission residents to Sentara Emergency Departments have been reduced by 80 percent.
- Sentara Mobile Care of Hampton Roads delivered health and wellness services directly to more than 25 communities between September and December 2022. In 2023, Sentara anticipates delivering direct care to more than 50 communities across the Commonwealth via Sentara Community Care and six Sentara Mobile Care vehicles.
- In mid-October, Sentara aligned an existing Community Care Center and two mobile care vehicles in Northern Virginia with the Sentara Community Care model and expanded services to continue serving uninsured individuals and families, as well as to reach Medicaid and Medicare members.
- Sentara Community Care — in collaboration with Sentara's Health Equity team — assisted more than 1,500 individuals at more than 250 community events in 2022, providing health education and screenings, COVID and flu vaccinations, preventative services, and support to address social drivers of health.
- More than 650 individuals received direct care by a Sentara Community Care clinician. Patients have seen improvements in chronic disease management and increases in preventative services and screenings.
- The Sentara Community Care team assisted 75 patients in insurance enrollment and reenrollment support.

# Empowering the Next Generation

**Sentara's \$4 million student investment helps create more graduates with less debt, strengthening the healthcare workforce throughout Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina.**

Healthcare is an ever-evolving field requiring a dedicated team of professionals to provide quality patient care and serve our communities. However, the barriers to pursuing a healthcare career have kept too many away from the fields and communities where they're needed most. Just as Sentara understands the barriers to accessing care that exist in our communities, Sentara also recognizes that the barriers to accessing education must also be addressed if we're to inspire and support the next generation of healthcare professionals.

For these reasons, Sentara launched two multi-faceted student-support programs — Sentara Scholars and Project CHOICE. Together these programs aim to inspire more students to enter healthcare and healthcare-related fields of study and provide stronger supports along their educational journeys.

Last year, Sentara invested more than \$3 million in its Sentara Scholars initiative. This higher education

student assistance program supports students interested in healthcare or healthcare-related fields of study throughout Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina. The program helps students across many fields and disciplines regardless of education level — certificates, two-year, undergraduate, and graduate. The program aims to provide greater opportunities for students who want to work in healthcare by removing financial barriers.





Most funds will be used for direct student tuition assistance, paying up to 50 percent of selected students' tuition this year. But tuition is not the only financial barrier students face. All too often, educational journeys are disrupted or even stopped because of other expenses, such as textbooks, vehicle repair and moving costs. A portion of the Sentara Scholars investment will be reserved for emergency funding, helping students when a sudden and unforeseen expense threatens their educational goals.

"Today's barriers should not constrain the aspirations of the next generation," says Alex Askew, Sentara Health Community Relations Coordinator and Sentara Scholars Chair. "Our Sentara Scholars investment will not only create greater opportunities for those who already decided on healthcare for their career path,

but it will open many others to opportunities they may not have known existed."

Nineteen academic institutions and nonprofits partnered with Sentara to launch Sentara Scholars. Together, we will ensure that hundreds of students will receive the support they need to excel academically and gain the experience to become the next generation of healthcare professionals.

In addition to the Sentara Scholars investments, Sentara invested more than \$775,000 in Project CHOICE, representing Sentara's commitment to "Careers in Healthcare that provide Opportunities for Improvements in Community Economics and Equity."

Sentara's Project CHOICE is an innovative initiative designed to inspire middle, high school and college students to explore careers in healthcare that offer more

**"The scholarship I received is literally life-changing. It means I get to finish my education and continue doing what I love, helping others. I am dedicated to the care and well-being of all people."**

**- Kimberly S.**  
Sentara Scholar and Medical Billing and Coding student  
Centura College

sustainable wages — careers in which minorities are often underrepresented. By offering clinical and non-clinical immersive experiences, Sentara aims to expose young people to the diverse range of opportunities available in healthcare and to encourage them to consider a career in this rewarding and fulfilling field.

“Exposure is a critical component of the student experience, especially for those who grew up in communities without many healthcare professionals who looked like them,” says Dana Beckton, Sentara Health Chief Diversity Officer. “Too often, minorities are overrepresented in lower-wage, lower-skill jobs in healthcare. Project CHOICE removes barriers to achieving success in the careers that allow them not just to survive, but thrive.”

Through Project CHOICE, Sentara has provided clinical and non-clinical immersive experiences to about 500 students across 10 organizations and academic institutions. These experiences are designed to attract students from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in the healthcare workforce and to destigmatize healthcare by illustrating it as a potential career path. Project CHOICE initiatives include:

- **Pre-Medical and Medical Student Engagement:** Through partnerships with dozens of undergraduate and medical school programs, Sentara provides grant funding and unique opportunities to support students pursuing a future career in medicine. These funds can be used for everything from MCAT preparation courses and tuition expenses, to conference fees and more. Additionally, these funds support mentorship programs and scholarships to help students achieve their goals.
- **Health Career Camps:** Sentara’s middle school summer camp experience offers students hands-on education and training to learn about careers in healthcare, including medicine, nursing, physical therapy, imaging services, and emergency services. The program has expanded over the years to include several Sentara locations, such as Sentara CarePlex Hospital in Hampton, Sentara Obici Hospital in Suffolk and Sentara RMH Medical Center in Harrisonburg.



- **Sentara Health Professionals High School Partnership:** This unique partnership between Green Run Collegiate and Sentara Princess Anne Hospital in Virginia Beach exposes students to healthcare professions throughout their high school career. Through field trips, summer programs, job shadowing and internship opportunities, students can gain valuable experience and insight into the healthcare industry.

Through programs like Sentara Scholars and Project CHOICE, Sentara is working to establish a robust and diverse healthcare career pipeline that empowers students to pursue their career aspirations with greater confidence and less financial burden.

For example, Reuben Laryea, Christopher Newport University junior and recipient of a Sentara pre-medical grant, says, “Without

these funds from Sentara and my ability to enroll in a prep course, I don’t know how I would have prepared for the MCAT to the great extent that I am now. I have access to incredible resources, such as live online tutorials, full-length practice exams, videos, tutors and a customized schedule to guide my path toward the exam. Since taking this course, I have scored within three points of my goal score on my practice tests — and the actual test is still five months away.”

◀ Project CHOICE offers students immersive, hands-on experiences to explore healthcare career paths. ▶



# Renewing Ridley

## Sentara's \$11 million investment helps accelerate transformation in the Southeast Community of Newport News.

As demolition commenced in Ridley Place in early 2022, it closed a significant chapter for one of the oldest public housing developments in the City of Newport News. At the same time, however, a new neighborhood story was already being written thanks to a collaborative, community-driven planning effort that began six years earlier.

This effort focuses on developing a community transformation plan that would allow the city to take part in the "Choice Neighborhoods Initiative" through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Stakeholders within the city, the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NNRHA), and the community agreed that Ridley's housing infrastructure was obsolete and needed to be

replaced. However, building consensus around how to do so required time and investment.

As Karen Wilds, Executive Director of the NNHRA, suggests, there was an understandable skepticism on the part of residents who wanted to know: Would they be able to afford to move back to the neighborhood? Would there be more opportunities to build better lives for themselves and their families when they returned?

Renderings of the Phase Two construction show centrally located community spaces where residents can access features like early childhood development services, as well as continuing education and workforce training programs. ▶





For Southeast Newport News community members like LaMonte Williams, pictured above, past Chair of the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhoods Initiative’s Citizens Advisory Committee, the housing initiative represents a collective “come up” for the historically rooted community.

Overcoming that skepticism wasn’t always easy, acknowledges Wilds — a sentiment echoed by LaMonte Williams, Chair of the project’s Citizens Advisory Committee in 2022 and current Neighborhood Team Lead. But as Williams stated at the Phase One ribbon cutting last October, that collaborative process helped ensure the project wasn’t “rubber-stamped” and that it was about the “come up” rather than the “kick out.”

That “come up” will take the form of both neighborhood features and wraparound services baked into the design and execution. An early childhood development center, for example, will help residents overcome one of the prime hurdles to entering and advancing in the workforce, all while increasing the social, emotional, and academic skillsets of children in the classroom. In addition, a partnership with Virginia Peninsula Community College will offer continuing education opportunities in high-demand, high-growth job sectors.

“Those will be right next door to each other,” Wilds says, “so you can participate in those education and career opportunities and know that your child has a place to go while you dedicate yourself to work, education, and job readiness.”

In addition to those services, Williams adds, significant industry investments like that made by S23 Holdings, LLC in the area will offer training and hundreds of manufacturing jobs within walking distance

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of Ridley. Couple that with the entrepreneurial opportunities that will come with the transformation, and Williams says he sees greater opportunities for upward mobility than ever before in what was once one of the most localized concentrations of poverty in the area.

“Those types of resources and the new housing opportunities at the heart of the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhoods Initiative are what really drew us to this partnership,” adds Dr. Aubrey Layne, Sentara Executive Vice President of Governance and External Affairs.



- ◀ The City of Newport News, Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and Pennrose, a leading multifamily, mixed-use, and mixed-income development company, are leading the development of the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhoods Initiative rendered here. Virginia-based Breeden Construction is managing the construction. Construction for Phase Two is expected to be complete in late 2024.

“It’s an important step in our ongoing journey to improve community health and wellness, create economic opportunity, and address social drivers of health.”

Announced in December 2022, Wilds says Sentara’s \$11 million investment is the lifeblood of projects like this, which was initially supported by a \$30 million grant through HUD’s Choice Neighborhoods Initiative.

“The HUD grant was a vital first step,” Wilds says, “But it’s frankly a small fraction of the financing needed to pull off a comprehensive project like this.”

With Phase One of the project complete, Sentara’s funding will help ensure a high-quality and expedient build-out for Phase Two. This Phase calls for a three-story apartment building with 41 units on the corner of Jefferson Avenue and 16th Street, which will include

space for retail and other small businesses. In addition, Phase Two will include 14 two- and three-story buildings with 114 townhomes, a walking and bicycle trail for community wellness, and the aforementioned support services.

Some of these units will be available at market rates, Wilds says. However, units will also be set aside for returning residents, as well as new individuals and families, to access using housing choice vouchers and other subsidized housing options, making it a truly mixed-income, mixed-use development when construction wraps up in late 2024.

## Addressing Housing in Halifax

In 2022, Sentara continued its partnership with Tri-County Community Action Agency (TCCAA) to support a multi-phased approach to enhancing the current Westside Trailer Park in South Boston, Va.

A joint effort between TCCAA, the Town of South Boston, Tri-River Habitat for Humanity, and the Southside Outreach Group, the project calls for upgraded water and sewer infrastructure, as well as green spaces. Phase One of the project will also include the construction of single family rental units to rehouse current residents and unhoused members of the community.

# Building a Stronger System

**Sentara's long-standing partnership with the Federation of Virginia Food Banks continues to rally the Commonwealth's hunger relief network around health equity.**

Driving change against a root health factor like hunger and nutrition security often requires a balancing act. After all, systemic changes to reduce long-term nutrition insecurity require significant investment. And those long-range investments depend upon keen decision-making when millions of meals are missing from tables right now.

Over the past several years, we've watched this balancing act play out in real-time. In 2019, for example, Sentara and the Federation of Virginia Food Banks (the Federation) set our shared sights on a vision to leverage and align the emergency food system and social safety net to achieve more

significant health outcomes. Then, less than a year later, the COVID-19 pandemic completely upended life as we knew it. Families facing uncertain futures reached out in greater numbers. And tangled supply chains left food banks and pantries searching for answers on how to source and safely distribute food to meet unprecedented demands.

So, we pivoted from long-term planning. With the Federation, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and other supporters, we helped develop the "We Care" initiative to meet the pandemic-driven spike in demand and delivered 224,500 food boxes to more than half a

million people throughout the state when they needed it most.

However, as pandemic-related subsidies took effect, and life ebbed and flowed back to "normal," we never lost sight of the long term — and neither did our hunger relief partners. In fact, the energy and drive to leverage food and healthcare partnerships had been invigorated by a pandemic that had brought health disparities and inequities into much starker relief than ever before. As a result, the willingness to build these partnerships on a statewide scale had never been greater.

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## EXPANDING RESOURCES IN NORTH CAROLINA

In addition to supporting the statewide hunger relief network throughout Virginia, Sentara has also been a long-time partner with the Food Bank of the Albemarle. In February of 2023, in fact, the food bank officially opened a teaching kitchen at its facility thanks in part to a Sentara grant. Through that kitchen, the food bank partners with North Carolina Cooperative Extension's EFNEP Educator Della Hicks, pictured here, to provide nutrition education and demonstrate how items from the food bank and local pantries can be prepared. This service is also extended throughout the food bank's coverage area, not contained solely to the food bank itself.



Through greater access to fresh foods and cooking instructions, hunger relief network partners throughout Virginia are in a better position to promote equitable health outcomes for more members of their communities through nutrition. >

“Sentara recognized the potential of a statewide approach early on, which really started us on this journey and laid the foundation for a three-year plan that centers health equity throughout the emergency food system in Virginia,” says Meaghan Butler, Health Equity Director at the Federation.

“Now, as we continue our partnership, we’re rallying and supporting our member food banks, pantry partners and neighbors around that shared vision.”

This vision includes developing “healthy pantries” throughout the state that can more readily connect individuals with programs and nutritious foods to manage chronic diseases and advance overall health. It also includes a more unified, data-driven approach to screenings, referrals, sourcing and distribution.

As a result, the hallmarks of a truly integrated and aligned statewide network continue to emerge.



“Sentara recognized the potential of a statewide approach early on, which really started us on this journey and laid the foundation for a three-year plan that centers health equity throughout the emergency food system in Virginia”

– Meaghan Butler  
Health Equity Director  
Federation of Virginia Food Banks

## HALLMARKS OF AN ALIGNED STATEWIDE HUNGER RELIEF NETWORK

### **Shared Healthy Pantry Model**

In 2022, the Federation convened a working group of food banks, pantry partners, Sentara and other healthcare organizations, community members and community services providers to develop a statewide healthy pantry model. This model outlines more than 20 practices that pantries can implement to spark better health outcomes, regardless of size or capacity. With this shared model in place, the Federation is now working with food banks and pantry partners to assess neighbor preferences and implementation capacity on the local level. From that assessment, the Federation anticipates supporting roughly 20 to 30 organizations with funding and other tactical support to develop healthy pantries in their communities in the coming year, some of which will potentially be co-located within Sentara Community Care Centers and Sentara Mobile Care.

### **Shared Data & Tools**

Sentara's partnership helped the Federation invest in significant data tools that will continue to be implemented throughout Virginia's food network in the coming year. The first, "Nourish," is a nutritional ranking tool that allows food banks to better source and distribute healthier foods that more actively contribute to positive health outcomes. The second platform is a shared data system that helps food banks and pantry partners to track real-time data and communicate and share resources more effectively. The third is the continued implementation of the Unite Us referral platform to connect individuals facing nutrition insecurity with the right resources in their communities.

### **Shared Focus On Outreach**

Public benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

remain one of our country's most effective tools to supplement food budgets for individuals and families. However, only 73 percent of eligible people in Virginia are enrolled in the program — and only 38 percent of eligible seniors are enrolled. To help increase those percentages, Sentara's investment has allowed the Federation to hire a statewide Nutrition Benefits Access Coordinator. This coordinator will work directly with Virginia's seven food banks to strengthen outreach and eliminate barriers to enrollment on the local level through resources, toolkits and grassroots outreach. Much of this work in 2022 was conducted in coordination with the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and will continue statewide throughout 2023. As a result of those initial efforts, from July through December of 2022, nearly 1,000 individuals in Virginia have been assisted with SNAP applications.

# Guiding a Community's Children

**As a trusted leader in its field for nearly a century, ChildSavers is one of Sentara's key partners in addressing the mental health and well-being of children, caregivers, and families in Central Virginia.**

In Richmond's East End, community fixtures dot the landscape — from the towering stained glass windows of the 135-year-old Mount Carmel Baptist Church greeting Chimborazo Park-goers, to the signature views of the city skyline throughout historic Church Hill.

For nearly 100 years, ChildSavers has counted itself among those fixtures; however, it isn't simply longevity that weaves an organization into a community's fabric. Rather, it's the ability of those organizations, as well as anchor institutions like Sentara and its health plans, to show up whenever — and wherever — needed.

Andrea Willis, M.S.W., Clinician I, is one of those community members, having grown up in the eastern area of Henrico County, which borders Richmond's East End. And while her journey has included time abroad, as well as in California and Maryland, the pull of family and community, and her gratitude for that community, brought her back.

"I'm just the result of all that those people gave to me," Willis says. "Every person should have a family and community that loves them — and loves on them...It's not just one person's responsibility to be present for a child. It's all of us together."

As a member of ChildSavers' Immediate Response team, clinicians like Willis are called to connect with children who have experienced a traumatic event — to reestablish a sense of safety and provide space to process. But Immediate Response is just one of the several critical services ChildSavers provides, not only in Richmond's East End, but throughout the Richmond region and Virginia's Tri-Cities.

For example, ChildSavers' school-based clinicians like Lissette Coreas, M.S.W., Supervisee in Social Work, Clinician I, also provide a significant presence in the environments where children spend the majority of their time outside the home.

“For a lot of these kids, coming to school is their safe space,” Coreas says.

Like Willis, Coreas also grew up in the Richmond region. As the child of Spanish-speaking parents and a fluent Spanish speaker herself, she’s able to build trust with students and parents alike. That ability is paramount in a school like Broad Rock Elementary in Richmond’s Southside, where roughly half the student population is Hispanic or Latino.

“Having somebody at school who you can have a trusting relationship with — and is providing that space for you to talk freely — is important to them,” Coreas says.

In addition to its immediate response and school-based services, ChildSavers also offers outpatient and psychiatric services and is widely recognized as the preeminent provider of play therapy in the region. Furthermore, ChildSavers provides training and professional development for early childcare providers in the area to cultivate equitable and healthy learning environments and help more parents and guardians stay in the workforce.

“ChildSavers has long been a trusted partner when it comes to connecting our plan members and their families with the services they need,” says Chantel Neece, Director of Member Outreach & Community Development for Virginia Premier. “They work daily to improve the lives of children through a range of techniques and programs that support and empower children wherever they are. We’re proud to be a part of that.”

◀ ChildSavers’ main offices in Richmond’s historic East End neighborhood of Church Hill provide a wealth of space for clinicians to engage with children and families.

[Continue](#) ▶





ChildSavers in Richmond is one of the state's preeminent providers of play-based therapies for children — therapies that allow them to process trauma and emotions while feeling safe, seen, and heard.

“Every person should have a family and community that loves them — and loves on them...It’s not just one person’s responsibility to be present for a child. It’s all of us together.”

– Andrea Willis  
M.S.W., Clinician I  
ChildSavers

Similarly, for local leaders like the Rev. Marvin Gilliam, Jr., that depth and breadth of services is what made ChildSavers one of his first community connections when he began serving as Pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church.

“Hearing about the work they were doing, with play therapy and helping with early childhood education, and all of these various programs — I was just like, man, this is cool,” Rev. Gilliam says.



As a member of ChildSavers’ Community Board, he and his congregation help foster relationships and hold events at Mount Carmel, such as a recent “Community Conversation,” where he and ChildSavers clinicians led a neighborhood dialog around coping with grief.

For him, providing that space is simply part of what being in the community is all about — something he sees organizations like ChildSavers and Sentara exemplifying daily.

“It’s about a power of presence,” he says. “It’s about letting people know that there is someone who will show up for you. It takes everybody — it takes faith communities, it takes organizations like ChildSavers, it takes healthcare professionals like Sentara — to be a part of that process of being spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, relationally healthy. And that’s the goal.”

## Meeting The Challenge

Sentara understands the importance of investing in partners who are working to address children’s mental health issues, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Another partner is ReadyKids, an organization that is committed to improving the mental health and well-being of children in Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Va.

ReadyKids aims to decrease child abuse and neglect report rates in the region, while also providing essential mental health support to families and children who need it the most. Sentara is proud to support partners like ReadyKids that are working tirelessly to improve the health and well-being of our communities.

# Spreading Awareness and Healing

**Sentara's support brings an inspirational play about mental health to communities throughout Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina.**

"You'll laugh; you'll cry..."

It may be a well-worn trope in the critic's circle, but when it comes to the one-person play, "Every Brilliant Thing," there may not be a more apt description.

Written by Duncan MacMillan and comedian Jonny Donahoe, the play was first produced in 2013 and has since been adapted for HBO and performed on stages throughout the world. But it isn't only the writing or performances that have sustained its power and longevity. It's the play's ability to deftly open space and dialog around mental health issues through equal parts comedy, improv, and audience interaction.

The title stems from the very mechanism that propels the action forward: a list of "brilliant things" penned following the first suicide attempt of the narrator's mother. From simple pleasures like ice cream and rollercoasters to memories that sustain us, like staying up past bedtime to watch TV, these "brilliant things" are those that make life worth living, that mark our childhoods, and that signal our passages into adulthood. For the narrator, these are also moments captured in the hope that they may ease their mother away from her depression.

But these moments aren't simply the narrator's to convey or feel. In fact, before the performance

begins, audience members receive a card. Each card lists one "brilliant thing." And as the narrator shouts out the list number, the audience member holding that card gets drawn into the play's action with help from the narrator's improvisation.

Such an intimate, interactive performance would have been impossible during the pandemic. But as the closing performance for the 2021-2022 season for the Virginia Stage Company (VSC) at Norfolk's Wells Theatre demonstrated, it was a meaningful way to embrace being together again, says VSC Producing Artistic Director Tom Quaintance. Even more so, he suggests, the play was





Photo courtesy of Virginia Stage Company

- ▶ A hallmark of the “Every Brilliant Thing” performance are the Post-it notes the performers use to carry the narrative and the way those notes then spark audience interaction.
- ◀ Pictured here is actor Laura Agudelo, one of several actors who center the one-person play depending on the night.

an opportunity to spur discussion around mental health at a time when we, as individuals and communities, perhaps needed it most.

Nedra Moncief-Craig, Director of Sentara Behavioral Health Services, agrees, which is why Sentara partnered with VSC to sponsor a road tour of the production for communities throughout Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina.

“Behavioral health is among the most pressing healthcare needs of our time,” says Moncief-Craig. “Supporting a meaningful play such as ‘Every Brilliant Thing’ aligns with our effort to destigmatize mental health and reassure patients that it is okay to ask for help.”

Through March of 2023, VSC had presented 10 performances to more than 1,000 attendees in

communities throughout Hampton Roads and Central Virginia, with more dates scheduled through the early summer. And if audience reaction is any indication, the performances are having the desired effect.

“This play is simultaneously funny and poignant, self-affirming and gut-wrenching,” Quaintance says. “It has the power to provoke a range of emotions — the strength of which can surprise some audience members.”

For that reason, front-of-house staff at venues are trained to spot potential audience members who may be having difficulty grappling with the tough subject matter. And each performance has behavioral health professionals on site to help people process any strong reactions they may have or to learn more about where to access mental and behavioral health services for themselves or a loved one.

# Embracing Service

**A Harrisonburg family unites to ensure more members of their community have access to the care they need.**

Marla Rios-Acevedo arrives at the Blue Ridge Free Clinic in Harrisonburg every Tuesday evening just in time to greet patients who, like her, have recently wrapped up their workday. Many of these patients are native Spanish speakers, and as a volunteer interpreter, Marla helps give voice to their needs and concerns — whether they need a medication refilled or help diagnosing and treating a complex medical issue.

“As soon as I start speaking Spanish, they say ‘Oh my gosh! Thank you so much for being here. Without you, we wouldn’t be able to communicate,’” Marla says.

Marla first became aware of the clinic shortly after it opened in 2021. Once she started volunteering and noticing how her presence made navigating care so much more comfortable for patients, she started telling others, most notably her mother and father, who offered to help with maintenance and housekeeping.

Once the clinic’s regular hours are over, her mother and father, Paula and Jose, arrive to provide custodial help at the facility, tidying up the patient rooms and offices, ensuring a clean and welcoming environment for the next day.

Continue ►





◀ By providing volunteer translation and interpretation services at the Blue Ridge Free Clinic in Harrisonburg, Marla Rios-Acevedo puts community members at ease and helps them access the care and services they need.

## Expanding Access in Northern Virginia

Sentara's partnership with CASA, Inc. in Northern Virginia continues to make strides in addressing barriers to care in the region's Hispanic and Latino populations.

By supporting CASA's Immigrant Access to Health and Social Services program, CASA representatives are able to cast a wider net and be a more visible presence and resource within Spanish-speaking communities.

In addition, CASA representatives provide care navigation and social services referral support at Sentara Mobile Care Locations.

“Whenever I go there, I feel like I’m doing something for people who need it,” notes Paula.

The fact that Marla, Paula and Jose all also work together at Sentara RMH Medical Center reinforces their close-knit family’s dedication to community health and access to care.

Jose began his journey at Sentara RMH in 2009 as a member of the hospital’s facilities team. After settling in and feeling at home, he encouraged Paula to join him. Soon after, she accepted a position in the hospital’s environmental services department. Their daughter eventually followed in their footsteps, coming aboard the RMH

team as a patient access representative in the Emergency Department (ED). She now helps to guide non-native English speakers through the process of care during what can otherwise be a harrowing and stressful experience.

Working in the ED, Marla says she would often interact with patients who had been cut off from primary care when the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Free Clinic closed its doors. That closure created a void in affordable access to primary care for at-risk communities, sending many to the ED for basic needs.



◀ Once a week, the Rios-Acevedo family finds time after their shifts to support patients and staff at the Blue Ridge Free Clinic. As father Jose notes, “It’s a blessing to be together here and do what we’re doing.”

“We would see a lot of medication refill requests and other things that normally would’ve been filled by a primary care doctor,” Marla says.

Recognizing this gap, Sentara has helped to fund the Blue Ridge Free Clinic’s services and operations through two consecutive grants in 2021 and 2022. With that funding, the clinic has helped over 3,000 people manage their long-term health concerns and access resources such as benefits, primary care physicians, transportation,

and specialists to address individual needs.

Moving back and forth between both facilities, Marla says the biggest difference she sees is the pace. While the ED can be overwhelming, the free clinic is a more relaxed, welcoming environment with a compassionate team who can speak patients’ language and help guide them to the right resources along their journey to sustained wellness.

**In addition to the regular volunteer work our team members contribute to their communities throughout the year, our annual “Sentara Day of Caring” placed 236 volunteer team members with 14 community organizations throughout our communities.**

## Bridging Gaps

To further address gaps in access to care in the Harrisonburg community, the Sentara RMH Foundation and Sentara RMH Medical Center have partnered with the Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County to bring back the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Free Clinic.

The community foundation gifted the building to Sentara RMH Foundation in 2022. Once complete, the space will house an array of services designed to meet the most pressing needs of the community, particularly access to care and behavioral health. These services will be provided through Eastern Mennonite University, James Madison University, Strength In Peers and other community-based organizations.

Plans for the building include operating a same-day clinic on the first floor, complete with a pharmacy and laboratory services, along with care management services. The second floor will be dedicated to substance use treatment services, with Sentara RMH providing office-based opioid medication-assisted treatment in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies. The top floor will provide HIV and AIDS services.



**Sherry Norquist,  
MSN, RN-ACM**  
Executive Director  
of Community  
Engagement & Impact  
Sentara Health

## THE POWER OF PRESENCE

When I reflect on the stories of individuals and families contained in this report and the incredible work of our Sentara team and community partners, I'm consistently reminded of something the Rev. Marvin Gilliam, Jr. of Richmond's Mount Carmel Baptist Church expressed so poignantly.

As he says on page 30, true community engagement and impact starts with the "power of presence."

For more than 130 years, Sentara's presence in our communities has never been defined solely by our hospitals and clinics. We have constantly searched for ways to strengthen our communities — and every individual who calls those communities home — by swimming farther "upstream" to address root causes of inequitable health outcomes and community conditions. By listening and striving to be a

trusted partner to community and faith-based organizations who share our mission, we can be an anchor upon which all can rely.

As you've seen demonstrated by the stories in this report, being an anchor means taking the time to collect and analyze the data we need to identify our most pressing community challenges. It means building on collaborative strengths with partners to deliver community-driven solutions that support and empower individuals when they need it, where they are. And, as the Rev. Gilliam says, it means demonstrating our commitment every day to "show up" — to listen, to learn, to act — no matter what.

**Sherry Norquist, MSN, RN-ACM**  
Executive Director of  
Community Engagement & Impact  
Sentara Health

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In memory of Gilmer Minor III, founding member of the Sentara Community Advancement Committee, whose legacy inspires lasting community impact.

