



CalOptima Health

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CALOPTIMA HEALTH CREATES FIRST STIPEND PROGRAM FOR MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS AT CAL STATE FULLERTON

Funding of \$5 million will support more than 100 students across the next five years

ORANGE, Calif. (May 16, 2023) — To bolster the public health care workforce, the CalOptima Health Board of Directors approved a \$5 million investment over five years to support Master of Social Work (MSW) students at California State University Fullerton (CSUF) beginning in the fall of 2023. As part of the CalOptima Health Stipend Program, students will receive a \$20,000 stipend for each year of the two-year program. Upon graduation, they will commit to two years of full-time paid service in public health care settings or CalOptima Health contracted agencies in Orange County.

“Cal State Fullerton is the only public institution in Orange County to offer an MSW program,” said Framroze Virjee, President, CSUF. “CalOptima Health’s generous stipend will serve as a major incentive for students to pursue an advanced degree in social work, a field that is experiencing a critical shortage of trained professionals. CSUF is grateful for the funding and will release criteria to apply for the stipend before the Fall 2023 semester begins.”

The stipends will enable students to receive enhanced didactic and experiential field training at a public health care site or community-based partner agency for two years during the program. They will also take courses focused on applying the recovery model in clinical practice.

“By providing tuition support for 115 new social workers, our insured members will benefit from an improved quality of life,” said Michael Hunn, Chief Executive Officer, CalOptima Health. “We need more social workers to serve our vulnerable Medi-Cal population, helping to guide them to food, shelter, safety and mental health services.”

Beyond addressing the existing and projected MSW shortages in Orange County’s workforce, the stipend program aims to recruit students from groups historically underrepresented in the social work field. Training individuals from diverse backgrounds will result in more culturally and linguistically responsive care for CalOptima Health members.

“With Orange County facing a mental health and opioid crisis, it’s more important now than ever before to inspire MSW students to pursue a career in the public healthcare system,” said Supervisor Doug Chaffee, who represents the Fourth District and is a CalOptima Health Board member. “We understand that pursuing an MSW can be financially challenging, and by providing this support, we can empower aspiring social workers to fully dedicate themselves to education and training and thereby grow our workforce.”

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“Orange County, like many other counties, has been grappling with a mental health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Supervisor Sarmiento, who represents the Second District and is a CalOptima Health Board member. “The financial assistance provided to students of the CalOptima Health MSW Stipend Program will serve as an incentive for students to join the Orange County workforce, increasing the number of social workers in our community and leading to improved support and services for our most at-risk population.”

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About CalOptima Health

A county-organized health system, CalOptima Health provides publicly funded 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 978,000 members with a network of nearly 9,600 primary care doctors and specialists and 45 acute and rehab hospitals.

About California State University Fullerton

The largest university in the CSU and the only campus in Orange County, Cal State Fullerton offers 110 degree programs and Division 1 athletics. Recognized as a national model for supporting student success, CSUF excels with innovative, high-impact educational practices, including faculty-student collaborative research, study abroad and competitive internships. Our vibrant and diverse campus is a primary driver of workforce and economic development in the region. CSUF is a top public university known for its success in supporting first-generation and underrepresented students, and preparing all students to become leaders in the global marketplace. Our It Takes a Titan campaign, a five-year \$250 million comprehensive fundraising initiative, prioritizes investments in academic innovation, student empowerment, campus transformation and community enrichment. Visit fullerton.edu.

About Supervisor Doug Chaffee

Orange County Supervisor [Doug Chaffee](#) represents the [Fourth District](#), which includes the Cities of Brea, Buena Park, Fullerton, La Habra, Placentia, Stanton, portions of Anaheim, and unincorporated communities.

About Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento

Orange County Supervisor [Vicente Sarmiento](#) represents the [Second District](#), which includes the City of Santa Ana, portions of Anaheim, Garden Grove, Tustin, Orange, and unincorporated communities.