



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

**County:** Henrico County, Virginia

**Program Title:** A Community Supports the Mental Health and Wellness of Youth and Families

**Program Category:** Health and Human Services

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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**Title:** Chief of Communications, Henrico County Public Schools

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## **1. Summary**

Henrico County, Virginia's "Henrico CARES" program works to ensure that Henrico's children, youth and families can easily access and navigate a full array of coordinated and integrated mental health care services at various levels of intensity. The program spans multiple county agencies, the school division and private and community treatment providers and connects residents with services as their needs shift over time. This comprehensive, multipronged action plan is being implemented strategically over five years. It directly addresses the three key cornerstones of youth mental health access, coordination and navigation, and works to reduce youth violence while prioritizing youth mental health care in ways that advance and promote mental health equity. The program's successful outcomes include:

- Increased numbers of highly qualified licensed mental health providers (licensed professional counselors and licensed professional social workers) serving the community.
- Reduction of barriers to school-based mental health services for HCPS students experiencing mild and moderate distress or who are at-risk for a given mental health challenges.
- Reduction of barriers to in-person or virtual mental health care treatment by licensed clinicians for students with identified mental health needs.
- Increased coordination among Henrico and central Virginia stakeholders serving children.
- Simplified navigation of the mental health system for all.
- More HCPS students receiving in-patient and residential treatment and continuing to receive services upon discharge.

## **2. The Problem or Need for the Program**

Unmet youth mental health needs are associated with lower school attendance, higher dropout rates, and rates of suspension and expulsion three times those of their peers. Furthermore, these mental health challenges often coincide with other health and behavioral risks that carry over into adult years. Like many localities across the nation, concerns exist in Henrico County about recent youth mental health data trends. The Henrico Youth Violence Prevention Committee, an interagency committee led by the county manager, chief of police and Henrico County Public Schools' superintendent, recognized these concerns and understood the association among youth mental health, substance use and violence. The county manager requested the formation of an interdisciplinary work group to develop a shared vision, mission and recommendations on how to help Henrico meet the growing mental health needs of its young people. As a result, Henrico CARES, an action plan to be phased in over five years, was developed. It includes goals, strategies, action steps, budgetary items and key metrics of success. The plan met with overwhelming support from the Henrico County's Board of Supervisors, the Henrico School Board and the school division's superintendent, and Henrico CARES was announced on July 1, 2024. The first phase was launched in August 2024.

### **3. Description of the Program**

Henrico CARES has one vision: to ensure that 100% of Henrico County's children and youth have access to high quality, timely mental health care and related services to meet their needs over time. This five-year multifaceted approach is a partnership between Henrico County and Henrico County Public Schools, with support from local private and public medical and mental health care providers. It is aimed at serving HCPS students and families and includes core elements driving the evolution of youth mental-health-care services and support in Henrico County.

More specifically, the Henrico CARES has three goals:

- Build a comprehensive school mental health system, ensuring that every HCPS student has access to a full continuum of mental-health-care services and support when and where they need them.
- Enhance the coordination of services and sharing of information among schools, families, medical and mental health care providers and community agencies.
- Simplify the navigation of an often complex and intimidating mental health care system for students and their families, as well as for schools and providers.

To do this, program organizers have taken a multipronged approach with various initiatives working together to address the full array of Henrico County's youth mental health needs. These include partnerships among HCPS, the Henrico County Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department and local community and private providers. Working together, the approach seeks to bring clinical mental health care and related services into schools, ensuring that support is just a hallway away. Some strategies include:

- An initiative aimed at growing school-based mental health staff by five new positions every year for five years, to increase access for all students to experienced school-based mental health providers, regardless of school.
- Hand-picking the best evidence-based programs to address mental health, substance use and youth violence and offering all middle and high school students no-cost teletherapy services at home or school.
- Developing seamless, supportive protocols and unified referral paths among HCPS, the Henrico County Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department, and community and private medical and mental health care providers. This streamlines access to and coordination of necessary services for students and families alike.

- Rolling out no-cost programs that build mental health literacy, such as the Youth Mental Health First Aid, and a virtual mental health care coordination service, such as Care Solace. This ensures that HCPS students, families and staff have access to live, multilingual care concierge service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The programs greatly simplify the often complicated and frustrating navigation of the mental health care system.
- Expanding specialized support from Henrico County Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department clinicians increases access for HCPS families to parent-child interaction therapy, strengthening the bonds and positive interactions between our youngest learners experiencing behavioral challenges and their parents or caregivers.
- Working to phase in opportunities for universal screening enables early identification and intervention support for students and their families.
- Offering brief, no-cost, outpatient treatment services to HCPS students immediately upon their discharge from inpatient or residential treatment supports a critical transition during an incredibly vulnerable time and may help to reduce readmission.
- Helping more school counselors and school social workers earn their licenses as licensed professional counselors or licensed clinical social workers cultivates the clinical expertise of school-based staff, while building the pipeline of highly qualified school and community mental health providers serving children and youth in Henrico County. HCPS is doing this by supporting them as they seek to qualify for annual, no-cost clinical supervision.

In sum, Henrico CARES is making a profound impact on the Henrico community and is an example of what can be accomplished when innovation meets dedication.

#### **4. Responding to Economic Downturn**

The current economic climate calls for careful consideration and prioritization when allocating funds. To that point, unmet mental health needs in youth have been shown to have significant economic ramifications. For example, 50% of youth in the nation's child welfare system and approximately 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder (Burns et al., 2004; Skowrya & Coccozza, 2006; Meservey & Skowrya, 2015; Teplin et al., 2013; Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). Additionally, positive mental health is essential to a productive economy, which is reliant on educated and productive workers. Unmet mental health needs can lead to loss of earnings and severe economic consequences for those affected and for their larger communities. Unmet mental health needs may increase reliance on disability insurance, with mental disorders recently accounting for 29% of Social Security disability insurance beneficiaries — a share larger than beneficiaries who cannot work due to injuries, cancer or diseases of the circulatory and nervous system, combined (Drake et al., 2009). Of equal importance, inadequate treatment of mental illness has been linked to homelessness and incarceration, adding millions of dollars of direct and indirect costs to states and localities (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009; Schnittker et al., 2012; American Action Forum, 2020). Against this background, prioritizing and investing in the mental health of Henrico's young people not only fosters long-term economic benefits but directly contributes to the county's overall vitality and sustainability.

#### **5. The Cost of the Program**

Henrico CARES is a comprehensive and scalable investment in the community and in Henrico County Public Schools. The plan is being implemented in phases from fiscal 2025 to fiscal 2029,

in partnership with Henrico County, and will be fully funded after five years. The investments are significant and varied.

- A pivotal component of Henrico CARES is the expansion of full-time, colocated clinical mental-health-care services provided by the Henrico County Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department directly to students on-site at some Henrico County Public Schools campuses. This demonstrates a commitment to integrated mental health care, with allocations increasing from \$536,594 in fiscal 2025 to \$1,245,396 annually in fiscal 2027 and later.
- A key allocation crucial to ensuring that mental health services are accessible to students within their school environment is increasing the number of HCPS school-based mental health staff. Funding for these positions will grow from \$504,165 in fiscal 2025 to \$2,767,751 by fiscal 2029.
- New funding to expand the Henrico County Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department's parent-child interaction therapy services for HCPS students will be renewed at \$130,879 annually, underscoring a sustained commitment to early intervention strategies.
- To expand the pipeline of high quality candidates pursuing mental health care fields in both the schools and the community, \$46,000 is being allocated each year for 12 qualified HCPS school counselors and school social workers who are pursuing their licenses as licensed professional counselors and licensed clinical social workers. These staff members will get critical clinical supervision hours toward licensure by Henrico County Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department clinical supervisors at no cost to them.

- The Henrico CARES budget includes innovative approaches such as contracting mental health teletherapy services for all students at home in grades 6-12, with funding set to increase from \$320,000 in fiscal 2025 to \$420,000 in fiscal 2028 and subsequent years.
- Importantly, an annual funding allocation of \$212,000 will make navigating the mental health care system easier for all HCPS students, families and staff through a contract with a K-12 multilingual mental health care coordination service.
- An annual allocation of \$24,000 from fiscal 2026 onward will ensure that HCPS students recently discharged from in-patient and residential treatment have access to brief treatment services by a licensed mental health care provider at no cost.
- An allocation of \$5,478 in fiscal 2027 will fund planning for a small universal screening pilot project, which will begin in fiscal 2028, and will see an increase in funding to \$12,529. A planned expansion of the pilot project in fiscal 2029 will be accompanied by an increase in funding to \$59,863.
- HCPS and the Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department was awarded a \$27,000 grant for Henrico CARES through the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. The funds were used to offset the cost of evidence-based mental health services, a curriculum focused on substance use and youth violence prevention, and early and intensive intervention programming to be used over the next five years.

The overall investment for transforming the mental health and wellness landscape in Henrico County starts at approximately \$1.8 million in FY25 and rises gradually to \$5 million in fiscal 2029. Over a five-year period, this brings Henrico County's total investment to approximately \$17 million, aimed at ensuring that 100% of county children and youth have access to high quality, timely mental health care and related services to meet their evolving needs.



Potential offsets for these costs include additional grant funding, Title-I allocations where applicable and Medicaid reimbursements for eligible school-based services.

## 6. The Results/Success of the Program

In just the first five months of fiscal 2025, the impacts of the Henrico CARES program have been profound:

- By adopting Care Solace, a contracted care-coordination service that quickly connects students, families and staff members with the right mental health care at no cost to them, **272 individuals** connected with Henrico County Public Schools participated in a successful initial appointment with a mental-health-care provider, with an average wait time of approximately two weeks. This is a **45% successful appointment rate** from referral, significantly higher than the national average of 18%. Approximately 37% of those being served identified as children (3-11 years), 31% as adolescents (12-17 years) and 31% as adults (18-67 years). The top five topics individuals report seeking support for include anxiety, depression, trauma, ADHD and disruptive behavior. **Additionally, 494 more searches for providers** were conducted on the company's Care Match website, which lets visitors search anonymously and connect on their own with curated and vetted local mental health care providers.
- Similarly, the adoption of teletherapy services through a contract with Hazel Health provides safe and confidential teletherapy sessions to students at home at no cost to them. **Thirty students** in grades 9-12 participated in weekly virtual therapy sessions with a licensed mental health provider in the first five months of fiscal 2025. **An additional 44 students** were already scheduled for their first appointment. The top five topics students report seeking support for include anxiety; sadness; feeling sad, anxious and withdrawn; family concerns; and/or grief and loss.

- **Mental health teams are now on-site at two HCPS school campuses**, an increase of 50% from the previous year. These Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department teams include licensed mental health providers, a case manager, a family support partner and a clinical supervisor.
- **More than 16,112 HCPS students** in grades 6-10 have received LifeSkills Training, an evidence-based curriculum shown to prevent youth substance use, violence and other health-risk behaviors.
- Across 11 HCPS high schools and programs, **60 students** identified as needing more intensive levels of substance-use intervention are receiving or have received “Teen Intervene,” a one-on-one ongoing evidence-based intervention being delivered by five tiered intervention school counselors, whose positions were funded through Henrico CARES.
- Additionally, **2,647 students** in grades 9-10 completed “CATCH My Breath,” an evidence-based youth vaping-prevention program, also delivered by Henrico CARES-funded tiered intervention school counselors.
- Henrico CARES results include the solidification of **11 “Active Minds” chapters** across HCPS high schools and programs. These student-led mental health clubs currently have **386 active student members** and an additional 58 students holding leadership positions within their chapter.
- Relatedly, **18 qualifying HCPS school-based mental health providers** (school counselors and school social workers) are receiving clinical supervision toward Virginia Board of Health licensure as licensed mental health professionals at no cost to them through a partnership between schools, the Henrico Area Mental Health and Developmental Services Department and a local private mental health agency.

- Henrico CARES provided joint training sessions during the summer of 2024 that involved staff members from Henrico County and HCPS, as well as community leaders. These resulted in **23 new nationally certified youth mental health first aid instructors, 11 new adverse childhood experience interface trainers and 14 new nationally certified teen mental health first aid instructors**, which significantly increased the ability to build mental-health literacy across Henrico County.

These results speak volumes about the transformative impact Henrico CARES has already had on Henrico's young people and their families, and the program's promise for the future.

## **7. Worthiness of Award**

The Henrico CARES program exemplifies a collaborative, transformational model that sets a new standard for addressing youth mental health. As communities nationwide struggle with how to meet the increasing mental health needs of their children, young people and families, Henrico CARES is a testament to the collective resolve of a diverse group of dedicated individuals from county agencies; the school division; private and community mental health care; psychiatric, pediatric and primary health care providers; higher education; faith and community organizations; and families with experience navigating the youth mental health care system.

While it is common to address one or two of these elements, the program stands alone in creating deep partnerships to unite evidence-based mental health strategies, recommendations and best practices. The program's features represent extensive review and analysis of data and research into a single, comprehensive, innovative action plan. By focusing on what matters most, Henrico CARES establishes a mental-health care blueprint for any community, whether urban, suburban or rural. The program is a considered, replicable model for counties seeking to initiate or enhance their efforts by aligning innovations, current and future resources, and efforts to strengthen the three cornerstones of youth mental health access, coordination and navigation.

## **9. Supplemental Materials**

[Henrico CARES One-Pager](#)

[Henrico CARES Plan Announcement- March 8, 2024](#) (video)

[Henrico CARES Signals 'Call to Action' to Strengthen Youth Mental Health Services](#) (news release)

[HCPS Department of Student Support and Wellness](#) (website- Henrico CARES)

[HCPS Substance-Use Prevention and Intervention Programming](#) (Henrico CARES)