



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nine Florida nonprofit programs, organizations and individuals receive Florida Blue Foundation Sapphire Award for community health improvement and share \$525,000 in support

PENSACOLA, Fla. – April 08, 2024 - The [Florida Blue Foundation](#), the philanthropic affiliate of [Florida Blue](#), is honoring nine recipients doing exemplary work in their local communities to improve health outcomes and increase access to health care services and support.

The Florida Blue Foundation announced the winners at its annual Sapphire Awards ceremony on April 3 in Orlando. The awardees will share \$525,000, allowing each to continue focusing on ideas and solutions aimed at improving health at the local level.

“Our Foundation recognizes the important role community-based initiatives play in strengthening neighborhoods and improving overall health and well-being,” said Susan Towler, executive director of the Florida Blue Foundation. “We applaud these nine recipients for their commitment to improving health outcomes and ensuring families have the resources, support, and care they need to live their healthiest lives.”

Each program, organization, and individual honored with a Sapphire Award was selected following a thorough external review process for leadership, innovative ideas, demonstrated outcomes, and excellence. In addition, they all have a track record of improving people’s health and quality of life.

Below are the organizations that were honored:

- [Lift Orlando](#) (Orlando) is a place-based nonprofit community development organization working with residents, business leaders, and community partners in the West Lakes community and ZIP code 32805. Its team works to empower residents to create long-term sustainability for their families, while also investing in resources, programs, services, and partnerships that address social determinants of health, and provide cradle-to-career education, and health and wellness services and support. The organization received a first-place award and \$100,000. Watch their video [here](#).
- The [Promise Fund of Florida](#) (West Palm Beach) aims to reduce health disparities by helping improve access to timely breast and cervical cancer resources and treatment for women in south Florida. The Promise Fund of Florida is committed to helping women overcome financial

and cultural barriers to care and reduce deaths from late-stage breast and cervical cancer. This organization received a second-place award and \$50,000. Watch their video [here](#).

- **[Lakeview Center](#) (Pensacola) is a behavioral health care provider serving adults and children with mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and intellectual disabilities. Programs and services include outpatient counseling, psychiatry, substance misuse support, trauma care, support for those with serious mental illness and job placement services. This organization received a third-place award and \$25,000. Watch their video [here](#).**

Below are the programs that were honored:

- [Food Rx](#) is a program led by [Feeding Tampa Bay](#) (Tampa) that provides food prescriptions to adults with diet-related health conditions in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, and Polk counties. The first food pharmacy in the state, Food Rx gives patients a prescription to visit a food pharmacy co-located at the site of their medical appointments. Feeding Tampa Bay received a first-place award for this program and \$100,000. Watch their video [here](#).
- The Inclusive & Healthy Futures program led by [YES Institute](#) (Miami) aims to reduce youth suicide and bullying in south Florida through communication and education. By including both youth and those who care for them in the programming, YES Institute is mitigating bullying, decreasing suicide and self-harm, and creating a positive impact on the lives of young people and their families. This program received a second-place award and \$50,000. Watch their video [here](#).
- The Endeavour Elementary School program, led by [Brevard Health Alliance](#) (Melbourne), provides mental health support, medical care, and dental and vision services to more than 700 at-risk students through an on-site clinic. The school-based site is the first of its kind in Brevard County. This program was honored with a third-place award and \$25,000. Watch their video [here](#).

Below are the individuals who were honored:

- [Carolyn M. Tucker, PhD](#), is the Florida Blue Endowed Chair in Health Disparities at the University of Florida (Gainesville). She has dedicated her career to developing, implementing, and demonstrating the long-term impact of programs to promote health equity, mental well-being, and food security in low-income communities in Jacksonville and Gainesville. Tucker was recognized for her research, leadership, and commitment to her work, her community, and to her field. Tucker received a first-place award and \$100,000, which will be directed to her work at the University of Florida. Watch her video [here](#).
- Candace Hodgkins, PhD, LMHC, is the president and CEO of [Gateway Community Services](#) (Jacksonville), an organization that provides addiction treatment for adults and adolescents in Northeast Florida. She is a contributing author on numerous published scientific articles and is active in research that informs the addiction community on evidence-based interventions to

assist people in their recovery. Hodgkins was honored with a second-place award and \$50,000, which will be directed to Gateway Community Services. Watch her video [here](#).

- Barbara Fradkin, BSW, CCM, is a Social Worker, Certified Care Manager, and the Co-chair of the [Brevard Parkinson's Alliance](#) (Melbourne), a nonprofit organization that supports individuals, caregivers and families who are impacted by Parkinson's Disease. Barbara's goal is to reach as many people as possible with Parkinson's and help them throughout their journey. Since joining the Alliance in 2017, resources for funding and support groups have doubled, and awareness of resources has increased. Fradkin was honored with a third-place award and \$25,000, which will be directed to the Brevard Parkinson's Alliance. Watch her video [here](#).

The Florida Blue Foundation introduced the Sapphire Awards in 2005 to recognize excellence and innovation in community health leadership and programs across Florida. Since then, the Foundation has given out 148 Sapphire Awards, totaling \$7.5 million.

Florida Blue Foundation presented the 2024 Sapphire Awards during its annual two-day Community Health Symposium. This year's event focused on local solutions designed to address critical health issues affecting Floridians and attracted 700 people from the health care, government, higher education, and nonprofit sectors.

The event featured national and statewide speakers, panel discussions, and networking opportunities focused on improving health at the community level.

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About Florida Blue Foundation

Florida Blue Foundation enables healthy communities by making grants, building coalitions, and embracing solutions that create a meaningful impact in our communities. More than 8 million Floridians have received services as a result of our community investments since its founding in 2001. Florida Blue Foundation is committed to improve health equity by impacting food security, advancing mental well-being, growing healthy communities, and addressing health disparities. Florida Blue Foundation is a trade name of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Foundation, Inc., an Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, please visit www.FloridaBlueFoundation.com.

About Florida Blue

Florida Blue, the leading health insurer in Florida, has been providing health solutions to residents of Florida for nearly 80 years. Driven by its mission of helping people and communities achieve better health, the company serves more than five million members and all 67 Florida counties. Headquartered in Jacksonville, Fla., with nearly 8,900 employees, it is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association.

For additional information visit www.FloridaBlue.com. For the latest news and content, visit the [Florida Blue Newsroom](#), and follow Florida Blue on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and Instagram @Florida.Blue; and X (formerly Twitter) @FLBlue.

Photo L – R (Susan Towler, Florida Blue, Allison Hill, Lakeview Center, Charlie Joesph, Florida Blue)

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