

**Mercer University School of Medicine and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
Join Forces to Advance Pediatric Healthcare in Rural Georgia**

Children's Establishes a Long-Term, Sustainable Fund of \$200 Million to Support Georgia's Kids

ATLANTA (February 22, 2023) – Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM) and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (Children's) today announced they will be working together to launch a major initiative focused on improving pediatric healthcare in rural Georgia. The announcement, which was made by Gov. Brian Kemp at the Georgia State Capitol with legislators and healthcare leaders in attendance, includes a series of pilot programs focused on improving access to pediatric care close to home. The affiliation will be funded by a dedicated and long-term sustainable fund of \$200 million that the Children's Board of Trustees allocated in 2022.

One of the top priorities that Mercer has already identified is an urgent need for more pediatricians throughout Georgia. To help increase access to pediatricians in rural counties, Children's is funding 10 full-tuition scholarships in 2023 through a program at Mercer University School of Medicine for medical students specializing in pediatrics who commit to serving in rural Georgia for at least four years after residency.

In addition, the funding will allow the School of Medicine to leverage its demonstrated understanding of the healthcare needs of rural communities to conduct and evaluate the pilot programs. Children's will provide the specialized pediatric clinical knowledge needed to launch and sustain those programs.

"On behalf of all Georgians, especially those who live in rural parts of our state, I want to thank Mercer University School of Medicine and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta for partnering to tackle this critical need," said Governor Brian Kemp. "Since day one on the job, my administration has worked to bring more healthcare options and better health outcomes to all parts of our state, and this partnership will help us make an important step toward that goal. I'm grateful for their efforts and look forward to the impact this program will have."

"This important affiliation between Mercer University School of Medicine and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta will improve access to pediatric medicine in rural Georgia," said MUSM Dean Jean R. Sumner, M.D., FACP. "I believe this is a transformational opportunity for the State of Georgia and rural children. It also aligns perfectly with MUSM's mission to meet the primary care and health needs of rural medically underserved areas of Georgia, to which we are committed. We could not be more honored and grateful to be working with Children's, a critically important and outstanding system, to enhance the lives of Georgia's kids."

Proposed Rural Healthcare pilots and projects include:

- **Helping Rural Hospitals be “Kid Ready”** – To help rural hospitals better prepare and treat pediatric patients in emergency departments, this initiative will assist rural hospitals enrolled in the pilot program to be considered “Kid Ready.”
- **Supporting Rural Pediatricians** – Training and resources will be provided to physicians focused on challenges regularly faced in rural practices. MUSM has identified a need for specialty consult services via telehealth for rural patients and a network of pediatricians focused on rural pediatric health.
- **Expanding Behavioral and Mental Health Support** – MUSM and Children’s will work with schools, pediatricians and hospitals to develop a comprehensive approach to pediatric mental health in two communities with virtual mental health services and a focus on suicide awareness and prevention.

“Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta has been dedicated to providing the best possible care to sick and injured children and to helping kids stay healthy through our prevention and advocacy programs across Georgia,” said Donna Hyland, Chief Executive Officer, Children’s. “The past few years have impacted kids and healthcare providers across the state. Children’s is very excited to work with Mercer University School of Medicine and the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center (GRHIC) because they are a trusted community partner and best suited to guide us in addressing the current and future needs of Georgia’s rural pediatric population. We believe that together we can make an impact for kids in Georgia’s rural communities now and for generations to come.”

This year, Children’s will be **expanding support for Atlanta Ronald McDonald House Charities**. Children’s has pledged a significant financial contribution to Atlanta Ronald McDonald House Charities to allow them to further their mission to transform pediatric healthcare access and experiences for families with ill, injured or recovering children through a network of Houses, Family Rooms, Care Mobiles, and community resources and providing a home away from home for those who must travel to Atlanta for healthcare.

About Mercer University School of Medicine (Macon, Savannah and Columbus)

Mercer University’s School of Medicine was established in 1982 to educate physicians and health professionals to meet the primary care and health care needs of rural and medically underserved areas of Georgia. Today, more than 60 percent of graduates currently practice in the state of Georgia, and of those, more than 80 percent are practicing in rural or medically underserved areas of Georgia. Mercer medical students benefit from a problem-based medical education program that provides early patient care experiences. Such an academic environment fosters the early development of clinical problem-solving and instills in each student an awareness of the place of the basic medical sciences in medical practice. The School opened additional four-year M.D. campuses in Savannah in 2008 and in Columbus in 2021. Following their second year, students participate in core clinical clerkships at the School’s

primary teaching hospitals: Atrium Health Navicent The Medical Center and Piedmont Macon Medical Center in Macon; Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah; and Piedmont Columbus Regional Hospital and St. Francis-Emory Healthcare in Columbus. The School also offers master's degrees in preclinical sciences and biomedical sciences and a Ph.D. in rural health sciences in Macon and a master's degree in family therapy in Macon and Atlanta.

About Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

As the only freestanding pediatric healthcare system in Georgia, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is the trusted leader in caring for kids. The not-for-profit organization's mission is to make kids better today and healthier tomorrow through more than 60 pediatric specialties and programs, top healthcare professionals, and leading research and technology. Children's is one of the largest pediatric clinical care providers in the country, managing more than one million patient visits annually at three hospitals, Marcus Autism Center, the Center for Advanced Pediatrics, urgent care centers and neighborhood locations. Consistently ranked among the top children's hospitals by U.S. News & World Report, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta has impacted the lives of kids in Georgia, across the United States and around the world for more than 100 years thanks to generous support from the community. In 2021, Children's served 23,000 individual children from rural counties totaling 65,000 patient visits. Patients from rural counties sought care for emergencies, surgeries, cardiology, neurology, orthopedics, hematology/oncology, transplant and a variety of other treatments.

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