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Ochsner and State Leaders Announce 10-Year Vision for a Healthy State

\$100M investment in first five years will address Louisiana's most critical health needs

NEW ORLEANS – Today, [Ochsner Health](#), Governor John Bel Edwards, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell, Jefferson Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng, Xavier University of Louisiana President Reynold Verret and other state and local leaders announced a long-term vision to improve the overall health of the state with a comprehensive strategy to enhance healthcare access, improve health equity and health outcomes. This 10-year commitment includes an initial investment of \$100 million during the next five years. Investments will support projects that eliminate barriers to healthcare; bring resources into underserved, urban and rural communities; collaborate with partners to research and better understand health disparities; utilize technology and innovation to improve outcomes and invest in Louisiana's next generation of healthcare providers and frontline staff.

"Today's announcement has been years in the making and our continued fight against COVID-19 underscores the pressing need for collaboration and continued investment in the health of our communities," said Warner L. Thomas, President and CEO, Ochsner Health. "Louisiana's unfortunate distinction of being ranked one of the least healthy states is not just a number – it reflects the lives and livelihood of our friends, neighbors, colleagues and family. We won't accept the challenges we face today as our future state and are committed to improving our health and implementing our vision over the next decade. We understand that accomplishing this aspirational goal will happen by coming together and we implore other organizations, local leaders and community members to join us in this journey to create a healthier state."

"The Ochsner Health Board supports this bold vision for a healthier Louisiana and we are excited to work together with state and community leaders to improve and save lives across our region," said Andrew Wisdom, Chair, Ochsner Health Board of Directors. "This commitment delivers on the mission of our organization and will create a better, healthier state for today and generations to come."

The Current State of Louisiana's Health

Louisiana has consistently ranked at or near the bottom of the country for nearly a decade, placing 49th in 2020 by [America's Health Rankings](#). Clinical, behavioral, environmental and social factors are analyzed to determine a state's health rankings.

Key challenges facing the state include a high percentage of children in poverty, people who smoke, prevalence of obesity, low birth weights and higher rates of cardiovascular death and cancer deaths. Louisiana's population also has some of the country's highest rates of chronic conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure and COPD. This year, New Orleans emerged as one of the country's first and hardest hit COVID-19 hotspots. Regions across the state have continued to face high positivity rates and additional hospitalizations related to COVID-19.

The Strategy to Address Health Needs

Ochsner leaders, physicians and researchers have spent years analyzing health factors and disparities to identify the greatest needs across the region. Based on this data, a strategy was developed and will be implemented over the next 10 years to improve health and reach the vision of ranking 40 by 2030. The first five years will include \$100 million in investments to programs including:

Community Health Centers

Over the next three years, 15 community health centers will open in underserved areas across the state. Each clinic will tailor services to its patients, expanding access to primary and preventive care, as well as behavioral health. This commitment goes beyond the physical clinical buildings and through collaboration with federal and state leaders, we will further enhance care through digital medicine tools and telehealth programs.

This summer, the Brees Dream Foundation announced a \$5 million gift to support these clinics. This significant investment supports Ochsner's long-term efforts to reduce barriers to healthcare by making services affordable, convenient and accessible to all, targeting specific areas with access issues and higher emergency department utilization.

Ochsner's Community Health Center locations include:

- Orleans and Jefferson Parishes (6)
- Northshore
- Baton Rouge (2)
- Shreveport (2)
- Monroe
- Lafayette (2)
- Lake Charles

Ochsner Xavier Center for Health Equity

Ochsner recognizes that health inequity, whether due to race, ethnicity, gender or low socioeconomic status, contributes to poor health and is a complex issue that requires careful investigation and novel solutions. To better understand the challenges related to these factors, Ochsner is partnering with Xavier University to develop the Ochsner Xavier Center for Health Equity.

"Our health outcomes are driven by social factors, Social Determinants of Health. It is so important that we come together to face these issues head on," said Xavier University President Dr. Reynold Verret. "This center has the potential to profoundly improve the wellbeing of our communities here in Louisiana."

The Center will focus on five key strategies to address health inequity in Louisiana:

1. Outcomes and health service research;
2. Education which includes workforce development to create a diverse and inclusive pipeline of healthcare providers and training so that all healthcare providers understand the importance of diversity, inclusion and health equity;
3. Population health initiatives that focus on healthcare access and ambulatory care quality metrics, and connecting patients with community resources they need outside of healthcare;
4. Community engagement, with the Center hosting events such as health fairs, community clinics and workforce development opportunities.
5. Advocacy to work with our government leaders to improve public policy around health.

"Unfortunately, health disparities and inequities are real and pose significant concerns for our people and our state. I'm grateful to Ochsner and Xavier University for coming together to develop a comprehensive strategy to address these pressing issues and the Brees Dream Foundation for

supporting this important work,” said Gov. John Bel Edwards. “Louisiana has consistently been one of the least healthy states in our nation, and we know that COVID-19 is especially dangerous for those who suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure and other chronic illnesses. This is why I created the Louisiana COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force to delve into the cause and possible solutions. It’s more important than ever to help ALL of our people get – and stay – healthy.”

Ochsner Scholars Program

With the country and state facing a critical shortage of trained healthcare providers, Ochsner is continuing to invest in additional education and workforce development programs to train the next generation of physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists and all allied health professionals.

Starting in 2021, Ochsner is creating the Ochsner Scholars Program, which will cover medical school tuition for medical students who choose to practice psychiatry or primary care in Louisiana with Ochsner. The program will help meet a critical physician shortage in Louisiana. The Scholars program will also focus on nursing and allied health providers to grow and enhance workforce development programs for Ochsner employees.

- **For Physicians:** Ochsner is committing \$15 million over the next five years to cover medical school tuition for medical students who choose to practice psychiatry or primary care and commit to work at Ochsner for at least five years. Kicking off in 2021, it’s expected to ramp up to support 30 students annually receiving their medical education at LSU Health Shreveport or the University of Queensland Ochsner Clinical School. At least half of the scholars in the program will be from underrepresented groups or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Ochsner is committed to training physicians that are representative of the communities we serve. Ochsner will work with its academic partners to create a pipeline of students for this program.
- **For Nursing and Allied Health:** Building upon Ochsner’s current workforce development programs in the communities we serve, Ochsner is committing \$15 million over the next 10 years in workforce development programs in partnership with Louisiana’s Community and Technical Colleges (LCTCS) to grow the pipeline of nursing and allied health professionals in Louisiana. The investment supports tuition and workforce programs, like MA to LPN, surgical tech, lab tech and LPN to RN training programs and will positively impact more than 3,000 students, including Ochsner employees within the first 5 years.

The Ochsner Scholars Program builds upon Ochsner’s recent announcements with [Loyola University](#) to create a new four-year, full-time undergraduate nursing program and [Xavier University](#) to launch a new Physician Assistant (PA) program. As well as the Alton Ochsner Medical School Scholarship which supports a Xavier graduate to attend LSU Health Shreveport who is committed to practicing in Louisiana.

Ochsner will continue to share updates about its commitment to health including workforce development programs in the coming months. To learn more about Ochsner Health, please visit [ochsner.org](https://www.ochsner.org).

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About Ochsner Health

*Ochsner Health is a system that delivers health to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and the Gulf South with a mission to **Serve, Heal, Lead, Educate and Innovate**. Ochsner Health is a not-for-profit committed to giving back to the communities it serves through preventative screenings, health and wellness resources and partnerships with innovative organizations that share our vision. Ochsner Health healed more than 876,000 people from across the*

globe in 2019, providing the latest medical breakthroughs and therapies, including digital medicine for chronic conditions and telehealth specialty services. Ochsner Health is a national leader, named the top hospital in Louisiana and a top children's hospital by U.S. News & World Report. As Louisiana's leading healthcare educator, Ochsner Health and its partners educate thousands of healthcare professionals annually. Ochsner Health is innovating healthcare by investing in new technologies and research to make world-class care more accessible, affordable, convenient and effective. Ochsner's team of more than 26,000 employees and 4,500 providers are working to reinvent the future of health and wellness in the region. To learn more about Ochsner Health, please visit www.ochsner.org. To transform your health, please visit www.ochsner.org/healthyyou.