

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Wins Workforce Champion Award

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Public-Private Partnership to Ease the Nursing Shortage Receives Recognition

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Dec. 7 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF) has received the 2006 Workforce Champion Award from Workforce Florida, Inc. and the Agency for Workforce Innovation for excellence in workforce development. The company was recognized for its innovative public-private partnership called Generation RN(SM), a program designed to address Florida's critical workforce shortage of nurses.

In partnership with the Department of Education and the Florida Legislature, BCBSF has supported innovative programs that accelerate the number of nurses entering the workforce. The company's leadership has leveraged the state's efforts to encourage and support colleges and universities that develop new ways to increase educational capacity such as resource sharing, distance learning, fast-track career training and advanced degree training.

Through philanthropic investments matched by the state, BCBSF has helped establish endowments that will fund the education of more than 200 nurses each year in perpetuity. Moreover, all related endowments create a greater capacity to train and develop nurses for the citizens of Florida. The initiative also includes support for programs that increase educational capacity, train more nurse faculty, mentor novice nurses and continue the education and advancement of nurses in the workforce to promote retention.

"We are thrilled to recognize Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida for its leadership in bringing business, education, workforce and government partners together to address a critical health care shortage in our state," said Katherine Wilson, chairman of Workforce Florida, Inc. "The Generation RN initiative is a successful model for expanding career opportunities for Floridians and meeting 21st century workforce needs."

Studies show that by the year 2020 Florida will need an estimated 61,000 more nurses than are available. To address this critical workforce need and public health issue, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, Inc., initiated a strategic public/private partnership called Generation RN. The focus of the initiative is to build an expanded, stable, and diverse nurse workforce in cooperation with public and private sector stakeholders. Stakeholders include: state legislators, Florida Department of Education administrators, nursing school deans and directors, nursing and hospital professional association leaders, hospital executives and others. David Armstrong, chancellor of the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education, nominated BCBSF for the award.

"Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida is committed to the health and well being of all Floridians," said BCBSF Chairman and CEO Robert I. Lufrano, M.D. "We are pleased to partner with the state and other interested stakeholders to address a critical workforce need that has a direct impact on public health. We appreciate the recognition for all efforts, not only our efforts, that will increase the future capacity of the system, and look forward to more opportunities to continue our partnership to ease the nursing shortage."

Workforce Florida, Inc. (WFI) is the state's chief workforce policy organization and principal architect in the efforts to meet the current and future workforce needs and challenges of Florida's businesses and citizens. WFI is a state partner, along with the Agency for Workforce Innovation, in the Employ Florida affiliate network of 24 business-led regional workforce boards and nearly 100 one-stop centers that provide employment solutions throughout Florida.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida is a leader in Florida's health industry. BCBSF and its subsidiaries serve more than 8.6 million people. Since 1944, the company has been dedicated to meeting the diverse needs of all those it serves by offering an array of choices. BCBSF is a not-for-profit, policyholder-owned, tax-paying mutual company. Headquartered in Jacksonville, Fla., BCBSF is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies. For more information concerning BCBSF, please see its Web site at www.bcbsfl.com.