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For Immediate Release

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## **New Florence Behavioral Health Initiative Represents First-of-its-kind Collaboration**

**FLORENCE, S.C.** – Governor McMaster, South Carolina House Speaker Murrell Smith, Florence Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin and a collaboration of health care organizations and university leaders today announced a historic, collaborative investment in South Carolina’s behavioral health system in Florence. The governor, speaker and mayor were joined by leaders from the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS), South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH), McLeod Health, the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC Health), Francis Marion University (FMU) and HopeHealth to announce the historic investment, which includes a unique combination of state and local funds. The investment includes up to \$100 million in state funds appropriated to SCDHHS by the South Carolina General Assembly and \$5 million in funding committed by the City of Florence. The city’s investment is believed to be the first direct investment of municipal funds in a behavioral health facility by a South Carolina municipality.

The innovative new facility will serve as a regional behavioral health hub and include a combination of triage, crisis stabilization, telehealth, outpatient and inpatient services that will expand much needed behavioral health resources in the Pee Dee region. Once built, the hub will occupy the site of an MUSC-owned property currently known as the Cedar Tower campus on E. Cedar Street in Florence. The project was coordinated through an advisory committee convened by SCDHHS Director Robby Kerr.

"This first-of-its-kind facility is an enormous step forward in addressing the current and future needs of South Carolina's behavioral health system," said Governor Henry McMaster. "Through the collaboration of our state's universities, hospital systems and state agencies, we connect the pipeline between our education system, workforce and public health needs, leading to improved behavioral health outcomes in our state."

"This type of collaborative effort is the only way to transform the delivery of behavioral health services into a continuum of care that improves efficiency and access to these vital services," Kerr said. "We appreciate the partnership exhibited through this effort, including the financial support provided by the South Carolina General Assembly, and hope to develop a model of care from this innovative new facility that can be used in the other regions of the state."

The state’s investment in the project is through funds appropriated by the South Carolina General Assembly after years of work to foster collaboration and secure funding by South Carolina Senator Hugh K. Leatherman. The new facility, whose construction will begin in 2024, will be named after Senator Leatherman. As a first-of-its-kind hub, the collaborative pilot is poised to offer a new model for communities throughout the state to address the growing need for behavioral health services.

“Through historic investment and collaboration, the people of the Pee Dee region will soon have a first-of-its-kind, innovative facility to address the growing need for behavioral health services,” said Speaker Murrell Smith. “This new facility will not only serve the people of the region, but also serve as an example to the rest of our state and beyond as an exceptional model of care. I’m appreciative of all the parties who came together to make this transformational aspiration a reality, especially the late Senator Leatherman, whose vision for this far preceded any of our plans.”

“This historical collaboration will have a monumental impact on the mental health services which will be more readily available for the Pee Dee area and beyond,” said Mayor Ervin. “This collaboration will help to create a more comprehensive healthcare hub of the Pee Dee.”

“We are excited to partner with these public-private colleagues to make these services available as quickly as possible and have been supportive of finding innovative ways to serve some of our most vulnerable citizens in this way for some time,” said David J. Cole, M.D., FACS, MUSC president. “Access to this kind of care is of paramount concern when we consider the economic and societal impact of mental illness, substance abuse and other behavioral health concerns.”

“The need and investment are urgent for escalating behavioral health treatment needs and safety,” said McLeod Health CEO Donna Isgett. “It will also help reduce over-utilization of the state’s emergency rooms for psychiatric patients who need another level of care, as well as focus on bridging the gaps in mental health services for patients of all ages in the Pee Dee.”

“Senator Hugh Leatherman had long envisioned a facility of this type in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina where our health providers and educational institutions would come together collaboratively,” said FMU President Fred Carter. “At FMU, we’re preparing psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners and doctors of psychology to provide practitioners needed in this crucial field.”

The new facility will include:

- A rapid access center to provide walk-in triage and assessment and offer transition to care;
- Telepsychiatry services to strengthen access to psychiatric services throughout the region;
- Sixteen adult and four adolescent beds for crisis services to rapidly stabilize patients;
- Outpatient adult and pediatric behavioral health clinics; and
- A 63-bed inpatient psychiatric unit to treat patients needing more acute care, including the transfer of the 23 psychiatric hospital beds at the McLeod Behavioral Health Center in Darlington to the new facility.

“As one of the state's largest community health centers, we have invested significant resources into the integration of a multi-disciplinary behavioral health program, including psychiatrists, psychologists and behavioral health counselors,” said HopeHealth CEO Carl Humphries. “This investment proved to be a critical necessity during the pandemic, when issues like isolation and fear of the unknown lead to larger mental health concerns for our patients.”

“Insufficient behavioral health resources are not a problem limited to the Pee Dee region,” said SCDMH Acting Director Robert M. Bank, M.D. “This partnership between local healthcare systems and state agencies will create a true continuum of behavioral health services so that citizens of the Pee Dee in need receive the right treatment at the right time in their local community. This type of collaboration

not only seeks to improve services but could also serve as a model that could be duplicated elsewhere in the state.”

A rendering of the new facility is available for [download here](#). Pictures of the event are available upon request.

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### **About SCDHHS**

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services provides health care benefits to nearly 1.3 million South Carolinians. The agency’s mission is to be boldly innovative in improving the health and quality of life for South Carolinians.

### **About McLeod Health**

Founded in 1906, McLeod Health is a locally owned and managed, not for profit organization supported by the strength of approximately 900 members on its medical staff and more than 2,900 licensed nurses (Registered Nurses; Advanced Practice Nurses – including Certified Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Practitioners and Certified Nurse Midwives; as well as Licensed Practical Nurses). McLeod Health is also composed of approximately 15,000 employees and more than 90 physician practices throughout its 18-county service area. With seven hospitals, McLeod Health operates three Health and Fitness Centers, a Sports Medicine and Outpatient Rehabilitation Center, Hospice and Home Health Services. The hospitals within McLeod Health include: McLeod Regional Medical Center, McLeod Health Dillon, McLeod Health Loris, McLeod Health Seacoast, McLeod Health Cheraw, McLeod Health Clarendon and McLeod Behavioral Health. Also on the coast, the McLeod Health Carolina Forest complex operates an Emergency Department with diagnostic services, a medical Office building with physicians and specialists, Outpatient Testing, Occupational Health Services and Rehabilitation Services in the first two of seven medical park office buildings as an extension of McLeod Loris Seacoast Hospital.

### **About MUSC**

Founded in 1824 in Charleston, MUSC is the state’s only comprehensive academic health system, with a unique mission to preserve and optimize human life in South Carolina through education, research, and patient care. Each year, MUSC educates more than 3,200 students in six colleges – Dental Medicine, Graduate Studies, Health Professions, Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy – and trains more than 900 residents and fellows in its health

system. MUSC brought in more than \$297.8 million in research funds in the fiscal year 2022, leading the state overall in research funding. For information on academic programs, visit [musc.edu](https://www.musc.edu).

As the health care system of the Medical University of South Carolina, MUSC Health is dedicated to delivering the highest-quality and safest patient care while educating and training generations of outstanding health care providers and leaders to serve the people of South Carolina and beyond. Patient care is provided at 16 hospitals (owned and affiliated) with approximately 2,500 beds and four additional hospital locations in development; more than 350 telehealth sites, with connectivity to patients' homes; and nearly 750 care locations situated in all regions of South Carolina. In 2022, for the eighth consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report named MUSC Health the No. 1 hospital in South Carolina. To learn more about clinical patient services, visit [muschealth.org](https://www.muschealth.org).

MUSC and its affiliates have collective annual budgets totaling \$5.1 billion. The nearly 26,000 MUSC team members include a world-class faculty, physicians, specialty providers, scientists, students, affiliates and care team members who deliver and support groundbreaking education, research and patient care.

### **About HopeHealth**

HopeHealth was founded in 1991 as a grassroots HIV/AIDS support organization and was designated as a Federally Qualified Health Center, also known as a Community Health Center (CHC), in 2007. HopeHealth provides primary and specialty medical services at 19 locations across South Carolina. With more than 100 highly qualified providers, HopeHealth sees nearly 60,000 patients annually.

HopeHealth provides a broad range of comprehensive, integrated services. These include primary care, pediatric care, endocrinology, rheumatology, chronic disease management, chiropractic care, pain management, pediatric care, behavioral health services, nutrition counseling, dental services, women's health, and more.

### **About SCDMH and its Pee Dee Mental Health Center**

SCDMH's mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses. As South Carolina's public mental health system, the Department provides community mental health care through a network of 16 mental health centers and associated clinics serving all 46 counties. Mental health centers provide a complete array of necessary mental health services for adults, children, adolescents, and families. Following a thorough assessment, treatment plans are tailored to meet the needs of each individual patient. Services may include individual, group, and family therapy with a trained therapist, psychiatric medical assessments with a Psychiatrist or Nurse Practitioner, supportive nursing services, crisis intervention, and care coordination. The Department provides clinical services to approximately 100,000 patients each year, about 30,000 of whom are children. SCDMH services also include a 24-hour, statewide mobile crisis response program, school mental health services, and a nationally recognized telepsychiatry consultation program serving 27 South Carolina hospital emergency departments. SCDMH additionally operates three state hospitals.

The Department's Pee Dee Mental Health Center provides a full range of evidence-based, patient-centered mental health services to adults, children, and families in Florence, Darlington, and Marion counties. Its caring staff of psychiatrists, nurses, and therapists treated more than 4,000 patients in fiscal year 2022, including more than 1,500 children.

### **About Francis Marion University**

Francis Marion University is a four-year public liberal arts institution established by the state of South Carolina in 1970 and is located near the City of Florence. FMU offers bachelor's degrees in a wide range of liberal arts disciplines, as well as in the health sciences, education, engineering and business. The University also offers

professional degrees at the baccalaureate, master's, and specialist levels as well as professional doctorate degrees.

### **About the City of Florence**

Chartered in 1890, the City of Florence is located at the economic and cultural heart of seven counties that comprise what is commonly referred to as the Pee Dee region. Originally encompassing a mere one-mile radius from its city center it now occupies a land area of approximately twenty-seven square miles and has a population of approximately 40,000. The once railroad town has emerged into a beacon of growth for the Pee Dee and Southeast region while offering a friendly and hospitable hometown feel.

The City of Florence is the largest city in Florence County and serves as the county seat. Florence's location makes it especially desirable for business development and expansion. As a significant transportation connector, with Interstate 95 and Interstate 20 intersecting at the city limits, Florence is among the top commercial, industrial, medical, and service centers in the state. In addition to the two major interstate highways, Florence can be accessed from a regional airport, numerous trucking terminals, and both Amtrak and CSX Transportation railway services. Florence's successful transformation has established a market for private investment, aided in the creation of jobs, generated opportunities for future development, and provided residents and guests desired amenities and entertainment options.

Florence County is home to many domestic and international businesses and ranks as one of the strongest internationally diverse economies in the state. The investments in the Florence area of companies such as GE, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Honda, Nan Ya Plastics, Johnson Controls, QVC, Otis Elevator, McCall Farms, Niagara Bottling, Ruiz Foods, and most recently by AESC have contributed significantly to the overall capital investments and job creation in the area. The healthcare industry in Florence continues to be one of the best in the nation, and the growth in area healthcare continues. Florence boasts two major hospital systems – McLeod Regional Medical System and MUSC Health, as well as federally qualified health center, HopeHealth, Florence leads the region as a center for health care excellence with numerous healthcare specialists, medical, eye care, and dental practices also located in the city.

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