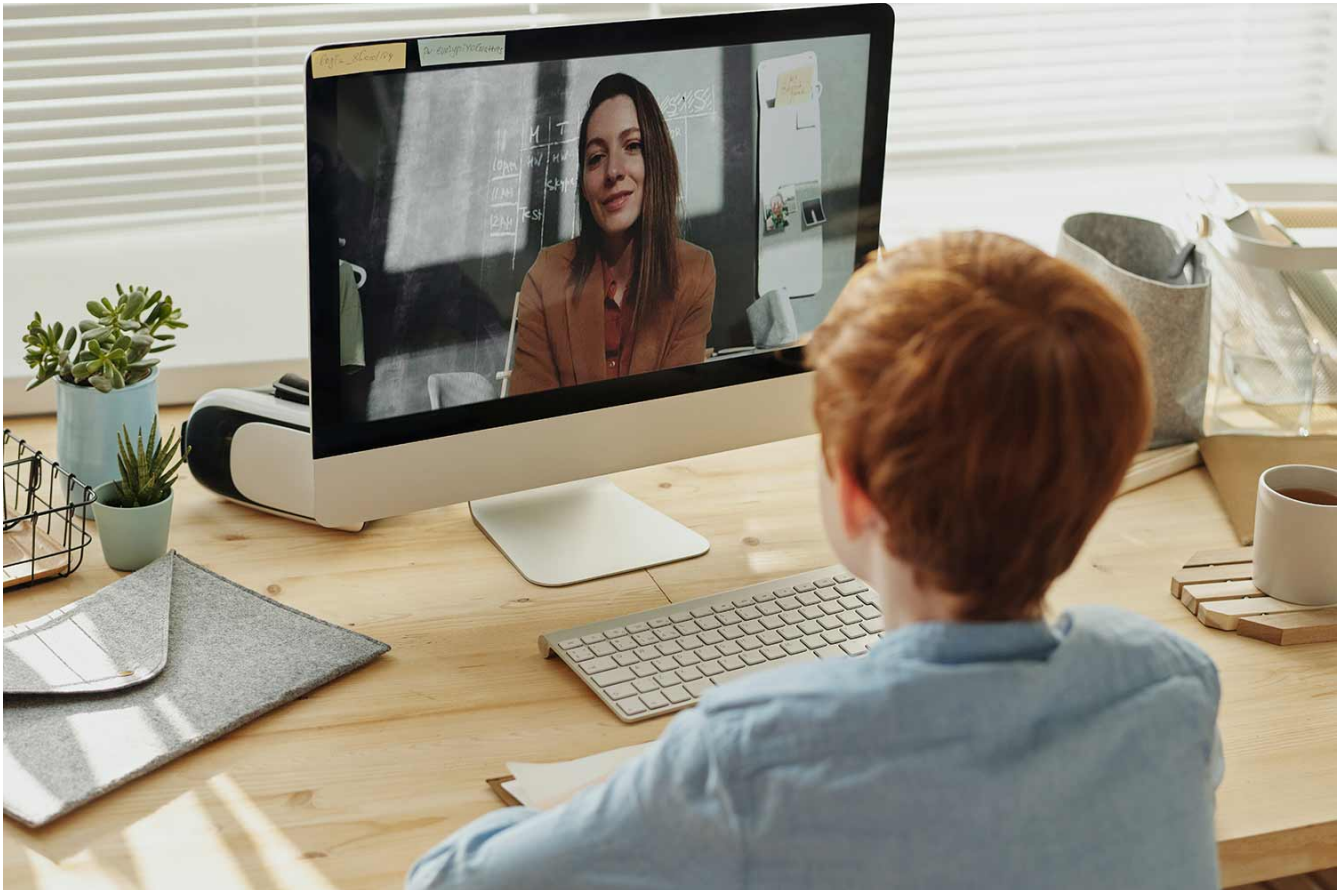


UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Amanda Rubalcava

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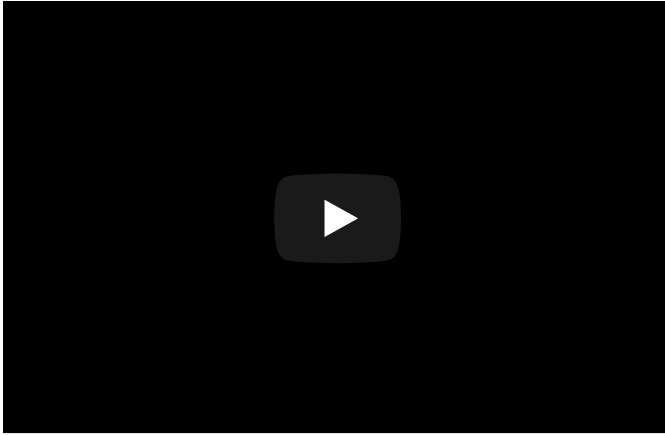


Psychiatrist video calls with patient Photo by Julia M. Cameron.

UnitedHealth Group Awards \$4M to UC San Diego to Expand State's Mental Health Workforce

“When an adolescent walks into an office and sees a psychiatrist whom they identify with and who may understand their background and community, this experience can create a healing environment in and of itself,” said Dr. Desiree Shapiro, associate clinical professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “Physicians who represent and respond to the communities that they serve have the power to improve health, the patient experience and our systems—it is essential to create pathways for students who understand and celebrate the racial, ethnic and cultural identities of the patients they support.”

With the support of a [\\$4 million grant from UnitedHealth Group](#), the University of California San Diego has launched a four-year program to expand and diversify the pipeline of child and adolescent psychiatrists in California. Over the last few months, UC San Diego School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry has begun leading several new initiatives designed to support aspiring child and adolescent psychiatry students, addressing one of California's most pressing health care needs.



There is a critical demand for more skilled psychiatrists equipped to serve our state's youth. In California, there is a severe shortage, with only 13 child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000 children, according to the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#). It is also estimated that up to one in five children living in the United States experiences a mental disorder in a given year, according to the [National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report](#). With the COVID-19 pandemic taking a toll on the mental health of young people, UC San Diego's collaboration with

UnitedHealth Group is well-timed and relevant.

"Grants, such as that from UnitedHealth Group, help us achieve a shared goal of preparing tomorrow's health care leaders to serve our increasingly diverse and interconnected communities said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. "Support like this allows UC San Diego's health community of faculty, staff and students to remain at the forefront of combating mental illness through discovery, educating future generations of scientists and clinicians and delivering best treatments. And that is in all of our best interests."

This collaboration with one of the nation's leading health care companies is designed to introduce UC San Diego School of Medicine students to the career of child and adolescent psychiatry, offering novel learning opportunities, individualized mentorship, medical student scholarships and financial educational support for participating residents. Together, these initiatives will build a stronger community of trainees pursuing careers in this field, and ultimately help create an inclusive, skilled workforce representing the changing social, racial and economic demography of California's children, youth and families.

When it comes to serving the mental health needs of the children and families that make up the state, there is no such thing as a one size fits all approach. By ensuring an inclusive mental health workforce, UC San Diego can actively take steps toward reducing health disparities, expanding access to care and achieving health equity.

“Providing the right care at the right time is every bit as important for mental health as it is physical health,” added Dr. Amar Desai, CEO of Optum Care California, a UnitedHealth Group company. “By expanding and diversifying the mental health workforce, UnitedHealth Group intends to do its part to help increase access to needed care and make the health system work better for everyone.”

Through the grant’s support, UC San Diego School of Medicine has already begun to familiarize medical students to the profession through a new innovative immersion program. This summer, Dr. Shapiro launched the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Inclusive Excellence Summer Program, where select first- and second-year medical students engaged in community health and mental health literacy projects among other learning opportunities. Through the program, students were able to bond over their enthusiasm in the field and develop an encouraging network to lean on as they navigate medical school and their rising careers.



Desiree Shapiro, associate clinical professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine and director of the Child and Adolescent Inclusive Excellence Summer Program.



Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Inclusive Excellence Summer Program participants and program director Dr. Shapiro gather for a virtual group photo.

“We want to provide the exposure as well as the support that is necessary to succeed in medicine,” said Dr. Shapiro, lead principal investigator on the grant. “The program’s learning opportunities showcase the incredible career choice of child and adolescent psychiatry and also emphasize collaborative learning from one another and our communities. The medical journey is arduous and creating an understanding peer network has the power to alleviate stress, promote medical student well-being and inspire future leaders to use their voices to positively impact their communities and mental health systems of care.”

UC San Diego School of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry aims to encourage medical students and psychiatry residents to choose child and adolescent psychiatry as a future career.

“The support offered through the program helped me navigate some of the challenges that commonly hold students back from pursuing a training in child and adolescent psychiatry, such as lack of financial support or mentorship,” said fourth-year medical student and program participant Cecilia Rangel-Garcia. “I am also thankful for the amazing amount of exposure to the field that I've received so early in my medical training. Generally, students in other universities do not get this exposure until the later years of their training, if at all.”

This early exposure to the profession could mean an instrumental turning point in a student's professional journey. It was not until Dr. Shapiro's final year of medical school that she was introduced to the field. At that time, there were various forms of stigma around pursuing psychiatry and she had been strongly considering pediatrics before discovering her passion for child and adolescent psychiatry. She gained exposure to the field one month before applying to residency, influencing her entire career path.

"Each day in the program, we were connected to different local and national child and adolescent psychiatrists, learning about the work they do and the diagnoses they focus on—ranging from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia to suicide in youth," said Garcia-Rangel. "The program also gave us a space to process the world around us, like the effects of the pandemic and social justice issues. We were all able to support each other in this ever-changing, challenging and growing world that we're living in right now."

This grant from UnitedHealth Group contributes to the Campaign for UC San Diego—a university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022. Together with philanthropic partners, UC San Diego will continue its nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries and planet-changing impact. Visit the [Campaign for UC San Diego website](#) to learn more.

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