

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

El Futuro Announces Major Funding Boost for Mentos Fuertes Program from Alliance Health

Durham, NC – [25 June 2024] – El Futuro, a leader in providing bilingual and culturally-responsive mental health services, is thrilled to announce a significant investment commitment from Alliance Health to support and expand the Mentos Fuertes (Strong Minds) program in Orange County, North Carolina. This vital support, totaling more than \$464,000 annually for the next two years, will enhance and solidify the presence of community mental health workers (CHWs) in the region.

This transformative initiative draws inspiration from the successful *promotoras* movement within Latin American communities and global mental health strategies like friendship benches, setting a precedent for community-driven mental health care in North Carolina and beyond. The funding from Alliance Health not only supports the continuation of Mentos Fuertes but also marks a significant step towards a value-based care model, emphasizing preventative and community-focused health solutions.

"I am deeply grateful for the support and commitment of Alliance Health to Orange County and to El Futuro," shares Mary Jones, Client Care and Engagement Manager and Director of the Mentos Fuertes Program at El Futuro. "Our community mental health workers exemplify the profound impact and compassion required to change lives, showcasing what it means to be community-led."

The Mentos Fuertes program was born from the grassroots leadership of hundreds of Latino residents. Latino community leaders organized through Orange County Justice United and the NC Latino Congress to collaborate with El Futuro and Alliance Health to address the urgent need for accessible mental health services. At a public accountability assembly in Chapel Hill, Latino residents shared personal testimonies to emphasize that need for bilingual, culturally responsive services, and presented Alliance Health leadership with a program proposal developed in partnership with El Futuro. Nearly a year later, that proposal would become the Mentos Fuertes program. Thanks to initial funding from Alliance Health, which responded to community advocacy and partnership with a significant investment, El Futuro launched its first community health worker initiative. To date, the program has successfully engaged 48 participants, providing over 200 free therapeutic sessions to combat anxiety and depression among Latino adults in Orange County.

One participant and Hillsborough resident shared her journey, saying, "You use all your tools and all your knowledge to try to carry your emotions, and you say, 'I can, I can, I can.' But you can't if you need help." Her words echo the sentiments of many in our community who have found solace and strength through Mentos Fuertes.

Ivan Almonte and Marilu Solis, CHWs at El Futuro, detailed insights into the program's impact. "Strong Minds has been instrumental in helping participants recover and value their mental health, identifying positive tools and activities for a healthier future," Almonte noted. "This program is a journey toward emotional well-being, offering a safe, culturally relevant environment where participants can thrive," Solis added.

El Futuro, in collaboration with Alliance Health and supported by Orange County Justice United and the Orange County Government, is set to not only continue this impactful work but also to expand it, potentially influencing mental health policy and practices at the state and national levels.

Other participants have voiced transformative experiences, stating, "This program helped me reduce stress, depression, and anxiety, and I learned valuable self-care and thought management techniques that I use daily."

This initiative not only reflects Alliance Health's forward-thinking approach to healthcare but also highlights the successful coalition among El Futuro, local government entities, and community organizations, driving forward a model of care that places community and preventive practices at the forefront of mental health.

For more information about the Mentas Fuertes program and El Futuro's services, please visit www.elfuturo.org. And please visit www.alliancehealthplan.org for more information about Alliance Health.

ABOUT EL FUTURO

El Futuro is North Carolina's premier provider of bilingual and culturally responsive mental health services. Recognized as a trusted resource for 20 years, El Futuro offers therapy, psychiatry, substance use treatment, and case management in a nurturing environment designed to foster healing and hope. Annually, the organization serves over 2,500 Latino youth and adults at its outpatient clinics in Durham and Siler City, and extends its reach to over 53 counties through telehealth services. El Futuro's award-winning team comprises over 25 psychiatrists, therapists, social workers, and case managers, all supported by dedicated program and administrative staff. Together, they are committed to upholding El Futuro's mission to improve the mental health and well-being of the communities they serve.

About Alliance Health

Alliance Health is a public managed care organization serving Cumberland, Durham, Harnett, Johnston, Mecklenburg, Orange and Wake counties in North Carolina. Working with a network of more than 4,000 private providers, Alliance has responsibility for almost 470,000 Medicaid-eligible and uninsured individuals among a population of over 3.5M.

The Alliance Medicaid Behavioral Health and Intellectual/Developmental Disability Tailored Plan manages all the health care needs – physical, behavioral and pharmacy – for people with severe mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and long-term care needs including intellectual/developmental disability and traumatic brain injury.

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