

## Articles on Ballad Health and United Way (2 pages)

The seven United Ways are piloting the following initiatives with Ballad Health's support:

- Tutoring and educational programming designed to raise children's reading level scores in school systems;
- Training on trauma-informed care for teachers and caregivers;
- United WE READ, which engages, empowers and equips all children and families using tools and strategies to build a literacy rich culture;
- Reading volunteers brought digitally into the classroom through a computer program called Vello; and
- A region-wide chronic absence initiative offering mini-grants and a regionally focused online attendance toolkit across 17 school districts in Southwest Virginia.

United Way: "Chronic absenteeism, which is missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason, can predict a child's ability to master reading by the end of third grade. These early absences can add up quickly, and can decrease the time a child has to develop critical literacy skills students need to succeed in school."

In a study on the impact of absences on third grade reading scores, researchers found that only 17% of children who were chronically absent in kindergarten and grade 1 were proficient readers by the end of grade 3, compared to 64% of regularly attending students. An alarming number of children—about 67% nationwide and more than 80% of those from low-income families—are not proficient readers by the end of third grade.

The initiatives will be supported by a \$300,000 investment — \$100,000 from the United Way agencies, \$100,000 from the Ballad Health Foundation, and \$100,000 from contributions made by Ballad Health team members during the health system's 2018 team member campaign. In addition, Ballad Health has created incentives for team members to volunteer as B.E.A.R. Buddies mentors by offering to donate \$200 per volunteer to a charity of the team member's choosing if at least 500 team members sign up to volunteer. Team members can choose for their contribution to go to Niswonger Children's Hospital, the Team Member Emergency Fund, or the United Way. Donations directed toward the United Way will be directed back into community reading initiatives, creating additional support for the program.

By: [Jessica Fuller](#), News Channel 11 Staff

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Ballad Health is taking a step toward improving community health.

Ballad announced at Bristol Regional Medical Center Tuesday morning that 150 community organizations from Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia are collaborating to form a coalition that will focus on community health in our region.

Those organizations and stakeholder groups from the region are now part of what's called an [Accountable Care Community](#) (ACC) council, with the backbone of the organization fronted by Ballad, United Way of Southwest Virginia and Healthy Kingsport.

Paula Masters, vice president of health programs at Ballad, said that the ball started rolling on developing an ACC for the region in July.

"We are bringing the expertise and the energy and the know-how of this entire region together with a shared goal and vision," she said. "This is something that hasn't been done quite like this before in our region. There is so much coming together and it's coming together so quickly, but that just speaks to the shared vision and passion everyone has and truly tacking this together and having the goal of improved health in our entire region."

[According to the North Carolina Medical Journal](#), ACCs were implemented from the idea that improving community health is a community-wide effort. [Research shows](#) that clinical delivery systems are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to overall health in the community.

The ACC in our region is one of 31 such initiatives across the nation, and so far is made up of 24 leaders in from our region that will oversee 21 counties.

The ACC council will be formulating plans to tackle issues in our community related to tobacco use, obesity, substance abuse and childhood resiliency, which Masters said relates to building protective resources for those who experience "adverse childhood experiences."

"We want everyone to start rowing in the same direction because there are so many organizations and so many groups in this region that are doing very impactful work, but if we don't bring it together and align those efforts, it's only going to be smaller impacts," she said. "Bringing everyone together in this way brings us all down that same path. We get to leverage the assets that are already here."

Representatives from county education systems, corporations like Eastman and KVAT Food City alongside nonprofit and faith-based organizations to create the 24-member council, but Masters said the council will be inclusive to any organizations who wish to join moving forward.

[The ACC is part of Ballad Health's plan to improve community health](#) per the Certificate of Public Advantage agreement that allowed the health system to merge a year ago. Masters said the council is working on implementing strategies to achieve public health goals, and that the first of these phases will roll out spring of 2020.