



**RWJBarnabas Health Employees Offered Access to Higher Education:
Associate Degree at No Cost Through NJ Community College Opportunity Grant Program**

Credential-Building Program is a partnership between RWJBarnabas Health's HR Workforce Development Division and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges

West Orange, NJ, September 14, 2020 – Through a unique partnership, [RWJBarnabas Health](#), with the [New Jersey Council of County Colleges](#), is proud to announce its participation in a \$5 million **Community College Opportunity Grant Program**. Beginning this fall semester, the program offers RWJBarnabas Health employees who meet certain criteria the chance to attain an Associate Degree in any field at no cost to them.

The Community College Opportunity Grant Program is the first of its kind in the state of New Jersey and is mutually beneficial for all parties involved. Not only will the program allow RWJBarnabas Health to build a pipeline of highly-trained workers, but it supports the state's objective to significantly increase the percentage of residents with post-secondary credentials and thus improve quality of life through increased career opportunities. By enrolling additional students in Associate Degree programs, the Community College Opportunity Grant Program also generates revenue for New Jersey's community colleges and supports higher education within the state. The funding for this program is supplied by the New Jersey state budget for 2020. Governor Phil Murphy's proposed state budget for 2021 has \$10 million appropriated for the Community College Opportunity Grant Program, the legislature has bills under consideration to ultimately establish the tuition free grant program permanently in the law, and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges plans to partner with other employers to offer this tuition free grant to employees throughout the state.

Some of the criteria for RWJBarnabas Health employees to participate in the Community College Opportunity Grant Program include an adjusted gross household income of \$65,000 or less and no previous degree attained. Employees may work with the system on a full time, part time, or per diem basis and must enroll for a minimum of six credits per semester. The Council has created a dedicated webpage for RWJBarnabas Health employees and has assigned personal navigators from each college in order to provide guidance through the enrollment process. Likewise, RWJBarnabas Health has created an employee landing page for access to the same information along with the internal resources available to them through the system's Strategic Workforce Development division.

"The Community College Opportunity Grant Program is a meaningful and substantial benefit to employees of our system," said Lourdes Valdes, Director of Workforce Development and Grants at RWJBarnabas Health. "The impact will be significant in terms of supporting career advancement for frontline workers within the system and fostering equity and opportunity across the state."

"As the largest employer in the state of New Jersey, working with RWJBarnabas Health as a partner to pilot the Community College Opportunity Grant Program made perfect sense," added Catherine Starghill, Director, Strategy, Outreach and Communications at the New Jersey Council of County Colleges. "We value our partnership and look forward to working with Lourdes and her team to refine and expand this program to its maximum impact."

To date, 400 RWJBarnabas Health employees have applied to participate in the Community College Opportunity Grant Program for the fall 2020 semester.



ABOUT RWJBARNABAS HEALTH

RWJBarnabas Health is the largest, most comprehensive academic health care system in New Jersey, with a service area covering nine counties with five million people. The system includes eleven acute care hospitals; three acute care children's hospitals and a leading pediatric rehabilitation hospital with a network of outpatient centers, a freestanding 100-bed behavioral health center, two trauma centers, a satellite emergency department, ambulatory care centers, geriatric centers, the state's largest behavioral health network, comprehensive home care and hospice programs, fitness and wellness centers, retail pharmacy services, a medical group, multi-site imaging centers and two accountable care organizations. RWJBarnabas Health is New Jersey's largest private employer – with more than 33,000 employees, 9,000 physicians and 1,000 residents and interns – and routinely captures national awards for outstanding quality and safety. RWJBarnabas Health recently announced a partnership with Rutgers University to create New Jersey's largest academic health care system. This collaboration will align RWJBarnabas Health with Rutgers' education, research and clinical activities, including those at the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey - the state's only NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center.

ABOUT NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF COUNTY COLLEGES

New Jersey's 18 agile and innovative community colleges are prepared to lead in the response to and recovery from this public health and economic crisis and to secure a brighter future for all New Jerseyans. The New Jersey Council of County Colleges provides statewide leadership for the advancement of New Jersey community colleges, perform coordinating responsibilities as required by law, and coordinate statewide efforts to build a skilled workforce and improve student success. We encourage you to visit our website at www.njccc.org.

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