



# Augusta University Health System, Wellstar Health System announce letter of intent for statewide health care partnership

The new partnership would also expand the educational and research missions of Augusta University and enable a broader affiliation between Wellstar Health System and the university's Medical College of Georgia

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**AUGUSTA, Ga.** (Dec. 27, 2022) – Augusta University Health System (AUHS) has signed a letter of intent with Wellstar Health System to form an innovative new partnership that would expand Augusta University's educational and research missions and allow Wellstar Health System to create a broader affiliation with the university's Medical College of Georgia (MCG) as AUHS joins the Wellstar Health System.

The potential partnership is the culmination of a thoughtful and deliberate process begun in 2019 by AUHS, its governing board and Augusta University to strategically grow MCG while expanding and improving both patient care and Georgians' access to health care services across the state.

The proposed partnership would innovate clinical care, training and research while adopting a successful model of bringing together community-based health systems and academic medical centers such as MCG and its teaching hospitals. MCG and Augusta University are part of the University System of Georgia (USG), and MCG serves as the only public medical school in the state.

"AUHS, Augusta University and the Wellstar Health System have a shared mission to solve Georgia's health care challenges," USG Chancellor Sonny Perdue said. "By joining forces and working together, we can leverage Wellstar's clinical platform and leading-edge systems to support patients while providing more opportunities for students to learn, train and care for residents in local communities across Georgia."

Pending a definitive agreement and regulatory approval, the partnership would focus on three strategic initiatives:

- Expanding digital health offerings to create more convenient access to care and provide more individualized care regardless of location.
- Growing the pipeline of physicians and other health care providers serving Georgia by increasing the number of students who train and conduct research through MCG.
- Developing new treatments, innovative care offerings and scalable care models to optimize the health and well-being of every patient.

“By bringing Augusta University Health System together with Wellstar Health System and leveraging our respective strengths, we would improve the health of the community, address social determinants of health and expand access to quality care for all Georgians,” said Candice L. Saunders, FACHE, president and chief executive officer of Wellstar Health System.

While there are aspects of the proposed partnership yet to be determined, the partnership would likely result in significant investments to improve existing healthcare facilities and to expand access to care across the state, including a new hospital and medical office buildings in Columbia County.

“Providing health care has never been as dynamic and complex as it is today, and this partnership with the Georgia-based, not-for-profit Wellstar Health System would enable us to extend our mission of improving health through excellence in patient care, education and research for the benefit of Georgians,” said Brooks A. Keel, PhD, acting chief executive officer of Augusta University Health System and president of Augusta University.

Through an expanded affiliation with the university’s Medical College of Georgia, the partnership would address the need to train more physicians and address a growing statewide shortage. With 60 percent of MCG graduates entering a primary care residency, training more physicians in these disciplines would support increased access to frontline care provided by specialists such as family medicine physicians and general pediatricians, especially in underserved areas of the state.

A new teaching campus in Atlanta at Wellstar Kennestone Hospital could also be established under the proposed partnership. As a result, MCG, which already has the ninth-largest freshman medical school class in the nation, would grow to become one of the largest public medical schools in the country.

“With our entire nation facing a physician shortage and our state typically ranking about 40th in the number of physicians per capita, educating the next generation of physicians is more critical than ever,” said David Hess, MD, dean of the Medical College of Georgia and executive vice president of medical affairs and integration at Augusta University. “I’m excited about the partnership with Wellstar, since it will enable our students and residents to continue to learn from some of the most highly qualified physicians and other health care professionals in the state while allowing MCG to expand its contributions to improving public health in Georgia especially in more rural regions.”

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**About Augusta University Health System**

Augusta University Health System, in partnership with the Medical College of Georgia, is Georgia's only public academic health center and a place where world-class clinicians are bringing the medicine of tomorrow to patient care today. As the primary teaching affiliate of MCG, AUHS provides the most comprehensive routine-to-complex care at AU Medical Center, which houses the region's only Level 1 trauma center, Children's Hospital of Georgia, which houses the regions only Level IV NICU, the Georgia Cancer Center, as well as historic Roosevelt Warm Springs Rehabilitation and Specialty Hospitals, a virtual care network and more than 80 primary and specialty, and subspecialty care clinics across the state. Learn more at [augustahealth.org](http://augustahealth.org).

### **About Augusta University**

As one of Georgia's four public research institutions, Augusta University offers customizable, accessible education on campuses in Augusta and across the state. Augusta University aims not only to be different, but also to make a difference — to reimagine and recreate the future of art, technology, education and health care. Home to Georgia's only public academic medical center and designated by the state as a health sciences center of excellence, Augusta University is dedicated to creating a safer, healthier and more equitable Georgia. Learn more at [augusta.edu](http://augusta.edu).

### **About Wellstar Health System**

As one of the most advanced and integrated health systems in Georgia, Wellstar Health System doesn't take a one size fits all approach to healthcare. We provide deeply personal care that takes each person's unique life story into account. With 24,000 team members, nurses and doctors, Wellstar provides compassionate, high-quality care. Our team is made up of more Top Doctors than any other health care system in Georgia, across nearly every specialty. We are training the next generation of clinicians, offering graduate medical education that prepares clinicians to deliver the highest quality of health care to our community. Several Wellstar facilities have been recognized in the U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals rankings for providing world-class care in a variety of specialties, including cardiology, neurology, cancer care and pediatrics. In addition, Wellstar Paulding Hospital has been awarded the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the nation's highest level of recognition for performance excellence. Wellstar is the only health system to have a digital innovation hub — Catalyst by Wellstar. Catalyst by Wellstar is the -first-of-its-kind innovation company and venture firm created and operated within a health ecosystem to holistically address healthcare disruption by harnessing problems, building solutions, deploying capital and establishing strategic partnerships across industries. Wellstar operates the only comprehensive trauma care system in the state with Level II, Level III and Level IV trauma centers, pediatric emergency departments and a dedicated Burn Center. These centers help us serve the most critical patients with a range of emergency care options. Together, we're proud to have served one out of every six Georgians, including patients from 148 out of 159 Georgia counties. We provide nearly \$1 billion in uncompensated care in Georgia annually and have been recognized as one of the top 10 providers nationally on charity care. Through more than 450 community partnerships, including our Wellstar Center for Health Equity, the care we provide in our community extends far beyond the walls of our facilities. And our journey continues as we work to reach patients and families in new communities in new ways — to enhance the health and well-being of every person we serve.