

## Equitable, Affordable and Accessible Health Care for Virginia

As Virginia has navigated the worst health pandemic in a century, we have lost over 11,000 lives to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities across the Commonwealth and the country.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic has exposed that Virginia's health care infrastructure and safety nets were not prepared and exacerbated existing gaps in our healthcare system across the board. As Virginia begins to recover from the pandemic, Jenn will rebuild Virginia's health care system and safety nets to address these disparities and the everyday challenges of accessing quality and affordable health care, and she will prepare for any future potential health crises. Jenn's vision for health care ensures that no Virginians or communities are left behind.

Before COVID-19, too many families were one accident or illness away from economic devastation. As of 2019, over 648,000 Virginians under 65 years old did not have access to quality health care due to cost or geography.<sup>3</sup> Due to COVID-19, approximately 90,000 Virginians lost employer-provided health insurance between February and May of 2020 alone, increasing the number of uninsured Virginians to approximately 733,000.<sup>4</sup> As of May 2020, approximately 14% of Virginia's senior citizens were uninsured.<sup>5</sup> Jenn has first hand experience dealing with the stress of a health crisis, as a patient, spouse, mother, and daughter. Jenn's personal experience, and that of countless others, has helped guide her legislative leadership and policy making and fuels her career-long fight to expand access to health care and insurance in Virginia.

In the General Assembly, Jenn carried some of the most consequential health care legislation of the past two decades. Jenn has fought to expand access to high quality, affordable health care, including preventative, reproductive, and mental health care. As the first member of the House of Delegates to be pregnant while in office, Jenn had the perspective and personal life experience that helped her be a fierce advocate for protecting access to abortion and reproductive health care and increasing support and resources for postpartum parents.

### Over the past 15 years, Jenn:

- Passed legislation that [established](#) the [Virginia Health Benefit Exchange](#) under the Affordable Care Act to improve access to care, lower premiums, and improve efficiency of health care for approximately 230,000 Virginians
- Passed legislation that [expanded Medicaid coverage](#), including voting for the 2018 [budget](#) that made government health insurance available to 400,000 [low-income](#) Virginians—only made possible after years of advocating and collaborating with community advocates and other stakeholders across the Commonwealth

<sup>1</sup> [COVID-19 in Virginia](#), Virginia Department of Health.

<sup>2</sup> [COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>3</sup> [Uninsured Virginians Data](#), Virginia Health Care Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> [The COVID-19 Pandemic and Resulting Economic Crash Have Caused the Greatest Health Insurance Losses in American History](#), National Center for Coverage Innovation, at p. 7, 9.

<sup>5</sup> [Id.](#), at p. 13.

- Spearheaded the passage of the [Reproductive Health Protection Act](#), which made Virginia the [first](#) state in the South to proactively protect a person’s access to abortion care and reproductive health. This bill removed medically unnecessary restrictions for patients seeking access to safe and legal abortion, including: mandatory ultrasounds, 24-hour waiting periods, and targeted regulation of abortion provider (TRAP) laws
- Passed legislation that made Virginia the [first](#) state in the South to remove [the ban on abortion](#) coverage for health insurance plans offered through the Health Benefits Exchange
- Passed the 2020 [Pregnancy Protection Act](#), which protects pregnant people from employment discrimination on the basis of pregnancy
- Passed legislation directing the Board of Education to review and update the [Standards of Learning](#) for students to include mental health.
- Passed a [landmark justice reform bill](#) that will make the justice system more equitable for individuals with mental illness, autism, and developmental and intellectual disabilities by allowing evidence of their conditions to be presented during criminal defense hearings
- Passed legislation that extended coverage for [undocumented pregnant individuals](#)
- Passed a budget amendment that established a workgroup to study extending [health care coverage for undocumented children](#)
- Co-sponsored [legislation](#) that improved health insurance coverage for children with autism for behavioral health care, including [coverage](#) for the diagnosis and treatment of autism, regardless of a patient’s age
- Supported the legislation to require Virginia to create a certification registry and standard criteria for [doulas to obtain a Virginia certification](#) and the convening of a [workgroup to study fair rates for doulas to be reimbursed](#) for services covered by the Department of Medical Assistance Services
- Supported the [\\$22 million dollar investment boost](#) in health care access for new moms and babies to reduce racial disparity in the state’s maternal mortality rate
- Supported the establishment of the [Maternal Mortality Review Team](#) and sponsored the establishment of the [Infant and Fetal Mortality Review Team](#)
- Supported the 2017 creation, implementation, and funding of \$5.3 million for the System Transformation, Excellence, and Performance ([STEP-VA](#)) program designed to improve the quality of community behavioral services
- Supported \$1.6 million in funding to establish the [Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program](#) to increase and retain the number of behavioral health providers practicing in the Commonwealth
- Introduced the specialty tier coverage for prescription drugs in 2015 which would have limited copayment fees for specialty tier drugs to \$100 per month for up to a 30-day supply

As Virginia starts to rebuild from the COVID pandemic’s impacts, Jenn will rebuild an equitable, affordable and accessible Health Care system for all Virginians—from Virginia’s newborns to its seniors. Jenn will protect the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship from undue government interference and work to ensure that access to mental health and reproductive health resources are part of a comprehensive health care system.

## **As Governor, Jenn will improve Virginia’s health care system by:**

- 1. Rebuilding from COVID-19:** Jenn will rebuild and reconstruct our health care and social safety nets. The pandemic exposed many of the existing weaknesses and inequities in Virginia’s health care system. As Governor, Jenn will strengthen Virginia’s PPE supply chains, invest in health care professionals and home care workers, establish paid family and medical leave, and stabilize and increase

quality and affordable care to underserved areas and populations. She will also create an Emergency Preparedness Task Force and direct them to analyze COVID-19 emergency preparedness and make recommendations for the future.

- **Closing the Equity Gaps & Clearing the Path to Accessing Quality Care:** Jenn will close access and equity gaps across health care systems in Virginia and increase health care access to areas of the Commonwealth with limited health care providers by expanding Telehealth options and scope of practice expansion.
  - a. **Increasing Equity by Addressing the Social Determinants of Health:** The social determinants of health are depicted by where a person lives, works, learns and plays— these life factors impact the overall health— including access to healthy food, stable employment, and quality education. These factors can impact mortality, morbidity, life expectancy, health care expenditure and health care status.<sup>6</sup> Jenn has been working to address these factors in the legislature and as Governor will:
    - Continue building on her work with the [Food Access Investment Grant \(VFAIF\)](#) and invest another \$2 million into the fund to ensure that the Commonwealth’s local food systems are equitable for all Virginians.
    - Introduce and invest \$2 million in the Produce Prescription Program (PPP), which started advocating for in the [2021 Session](#). The program will allow nonprofit organizations or State/ local agencies to partner with healthcare providers to: provide fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income individuals suffering from or at risk of developing diet-related health conditions and evaluate the impact of these types of projects on dietary health, food security, and health care use and costs.
    - Make the statewide implementation of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Informed Communities mandatory for behavioral and medical health providers, which will increase the number of communities and providers who are “ACES informed.”
  - b. **Decreasing the Maternal Mortality Rate:** Jenn will comprehensively address maternal care deserts and the systemic racism that perpetuates disproportionate maternal mortality rates among Black women. She will invest \$30 million to address this issue by:
    - Ensuring coverage for mental health and chronic conditions continuing coverage for those on Medicaid for up to year of postpartum care;
    - Continuing to invest in home visiting programs for babies and new parents;
    - Funding the Medicaid doula reimbursement program;
    - Increasing funding for Long-Acting Reversible Contraception;
    - Mandating State Paid Family Medical Leave Program;
    - Creating and funding bias and cultural competency training for health care providers and increasing diversity in the health provider workforce;
    - Increasing educational outreach to pregnant individuals on access to care and services;
    - And directing the Virginia Neonatal Perinatal Collaborative (VNPC) to coordinate its efforts with the maternal mortality review team and the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association (VHHA) through the Maternal Health Collaborative to study how to further decrease maternal mortality rates.
  - c. **Expanding Coverage for All Children in Virginia:** Jenn’s plan will provide coverage to 88,000 more Virginia children, who currently lack health insurance — including 13,000 undocumented children. Virginia currently has one of the more restrictive criteria for child health insurance eligibility in the country, where the recipients’ family must be at 205% of the Federal Poverty Level to qualify for Medicaid. Jenn will close coverage gaps by raising Virginia’s child eligibility rate to 305% of the Federal Poverty Level. She will also expand access to state Medicaid eligibility for undocumented children up to the age of 18, increasing coverage for approximately

31% of uninsured children in the Commonwealth.<sup>7</sup> Jenn will ensure that all children in Virginia have health coverage, regardless of immigration status. Jenn will also increase the funding in her budget to increase the Virginia Mental Health Access Program (VMAP) to train pediatricians in mental health care so children and their families have easier and more integrated access to mental health support.

- d. **Expanding Telehealth & Scope:** During the pandemic, medical professionals have provided life-changing and lifesaving care to patients through innovative Telehealth methods. As a result, Virginians, particularly rural communities, received an increase in access to quality care. Virginia now knows the value of Telehealth and the outlet it provides to ensure patients receive affordable quality health care. Jenn will allocate funds to increase Telehealth infrastructure and fund broadband expansion to reach more Virginians in rural and economically challenged areas. She will also eliminate red tape measures that prohibit health care professionals from providing quality care to underserved areas of the Commonwealth.
  - e. **Employing a Culturally Competent Health Workforce:** Virginia has made progress in achieving a more equitable and accessible health care system, but generations of mistrust between the health care system and low-income, Black, and Brown communities has created operational and cultural concerns that can keep people from receiving proper treatment and care. Jenn will invest in cultural competency training efforts to build trust between medical professionals and the communities they serve.
  - f. **Increasing LGBTQ+ Health Rights:** Jenn will champion LGBTQ+ health care rights by affirming the identity of individuals who are transgender. She will address the LGBTQ+ youth suicide crisis by requiring licensure boards to incorporate cultural competency training in health care worker licensure processes and investing in new Virginia Safe Communities grants – local grants totaling up to \$15,000 purposed to provide funding for communities to combat the LGBTQ+ youth suicide epidemic.
- **Protecting and Expanding Reproductive Health:** Jenn will increase accessibility and affordability of reproductive health care by implementing the Reproductive Health Equity Act so that EVERYONE has access to the full spectrum of affordable, quality reproductive health care; and work with the General Assembly to pass a constitutional amendment to enshrine the principles of *Roe v. Wade* into Virginia's Constitution.
  - **Implementing the Virginia Health Benefit Exchange:** Jenn will implement the Virginia Health Benefit Exchange and the Health Reinsurance program to improve coverage access, lower premiums, help offset premium costs for those who are not eligible to receive federal subsidies, and improve efficiency of health care for Virginians.
  - **Increasing Accountability & Transparency in Health Plans:** Jenn will pass legislation to increase oversight power of the Bureau of Insurance (BOI) and rein in high health premiums and prevent high prescription drug prices. This will create greater transparency and accountability in health coverage by empowering the Bureau of Insurance (BOI) to provide greater affordability and quality consumer protections in health insurance plans. Jenn will also integrate the current complaint filing system for network adequacy from the Department of Health (VDH) to the Bureau of Insurance. Currently, if a patient cannot see a specific medical provider due to lack of network adequacy in the insurance plan they can file a claim with VDH to have this reviewed.
  - **Championing Prescription Drug Affordability:** Jenn will create a Virginia Prescription Affordability Board (VPAB) under the Bureau of Insurance which will serve as a safeguard against the high costs of prescription drugs for Virginians at the pharmacy counter. The VPAB will increase power of the Bureau of Insurance and rein in and prevent high prescription drug prices. The Board will additionally study pharmaceutical practices and provide recommendations to the General Assembly to propose legislation that protects consumers against high-cost drugs and complicated and expensive procedures. No Virginian should have to choose between economic livelihood and their health. Jenn will also set prescription copay caps for essential medications and insulin treatments and hold pharmaceutical companies accountable by requiring greater transparency. Jenn will also institute a competitive bidding process for state employee health benefit plans – fostering competition among Virginia's

insurance and pharmaceutical companies to provide drugs at the lowest cost to Virginia consumers.

- **Improving Virginia Managed Care:** Jenn will create the Patient Quality Access Medicaid Task Force and direct it to work with the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) and MCOs to make recommendations for standardization, consistency, accountability and transparency that prioritize patient choice, protect and provide resources for Small, Minority, and Women-Owned (SWaM) providers and increasing access to quality care.
- **Increasing Medicaid Reimbursement Rates:** Jenn will increase funding and streamline the process for Medicaid reimbursement rates, to support continued enhancement and redesign of services while ensuring reimbursement rates match the cost of services. Current rates keep many physicians from treating Medicaid patients without losing money. The Medicaid process is complicated and forces some providers and physicians to absorb the complete cost of the service because of the challenges that come with navigating the reimbursement process. By increasing funding and streamlining the Medicaid process, more Virginians will have access to care as Medicaid acceptance rates increase.
- **Reforming Behavioral Health Care:** Jenn will reform Virginia's behavioral health care system by promoting equity and addressing social determinants of health; strengthening the behavioral health workforce; focusing on early intervention, prevention, and wellness across the lifespan; implementing a trauma-informed crisis system; and improving accountability, quality, and oversight within the behavioral health system.

## 1. Rebuilding from COVID-19:

In the last year, Virginia has lost more than 11,000 lives to COVID-19. The tragic loss of life in our Commonwealth has exposed existing gaps in our healthcare system – and pulled the Commonwealth and its health care and social safety nets into a crisis for which it was not prepared. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequities including lack of health care coverage, access to quality care, and lack of paid sick and family medical leave. As Virginia recovers from the pandemic, Jenn will ensure lessons learned in the last year are collected, analyzed, improved and applied to future emergency preparedness infrastructure and procedures in Virginia. She will invest in the Commonwealth's health care infrastructure by rebuilding and keeping our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supply up-to-date. Jenn will also invest in Virginia's health care workers and caretakers in our hospitals and homes so our health care workforce is supported, trained, prepared, and fairly compensated for any future healthcare crises. Jenn will close existing equity gaps and access to quality care across Virginia and work to ensure Virginia has a mandatory statewide paid sick and family medical leave program.

### ***Paid Sick and Family Medical Leave***

Jenn has been fighting for paid family medical leave and paid sick days in Virginia, and small strides were made during the 2021 Legislative Session to provide home health workers paid sick days— but Virginia has a long way to go. During the health pandemic it has never been more clear that Virginia needs paid family medical leave and sick leave. As governor, Jenn will mandate a paid family and medical leave program, and paid sick leave and establish a state administered and operated plan that helps Virginians get their leave request approved while also helping Small businesses with the administrative burdens of implementing a paid family and medical leave program and paid sick leave program.

### ***Investing in Health Care Professionals and Home Care Workers***

The home health care worker field is growing exponentially across the Commonwealth as more Virginians live longer. Currently, over 30,000 Virginians care for those with disabilities and those 65 and older. As the pandemic continued, home health care workers selflessly served as a lifesaving force in the pandemic response. Jenn will ensure that home health care workers are valued under the law and prepared for the post-COVID care world. In the legislature, Jenn cosponsored and passed a bill to [provide annual paid sick leave](#) to health home care workers, providing a safety net to a workforce

that is overwhelmingly populated by women of color.<sup>8</sup> Jenn also served as the chief patron of the [Virginia Domestic Workers Bill of Rights](#) which added protections for home health care workers. Jenn's investment in home health care workers will also positively impact the thousands of aging individuals and people with disabilities who depend on their care. As Governor, Jenn will continue to protect and defend our essential home health care workers by providing them with the continuing education, PPE, and resources to best serve Virginia's homebound patients.

### ***Bringing Quality Care into Underserved Areas***

About 50% of Virginia communities – particularly in inner cities and rural localities do not have adequate health care providers to meet the care needs of all of its residents.<sup>9</sup> Jenn will incentivize health care providers to increase their presence in underserved communities by establishing Virginia Quality Health Care grants that specifically assist independent medical professionals to expand their presence in underserved communities. Jenn will also develop pipeline programs with Virginia's top medical institutions to inject new and diverse talent into communities. By increasing health care presence in underserved areas, residents will have greater opportunities to access more affordable and quality healthcare professionals.

### ***Creating Emergency Preparedness Task Force***

As Governor Jenn will be to create the Emergency Preparedness Task Force. She will direct the Emergency Preparedness Task Force to analyze current COVID-19 emergency preparedness and make recommendations to help the Commonwealth rebuild a world class emergency preparedness and response plan for future health crises. The task force will work collaboratively with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Virginia Department of Health, hospitals, providers, and community representatives to ensure that Virginia has a plan for sufficient staffing, adequate PPE supplies, effective coordination between emergency response entities, other updated preparedness measures – as well as epidemiological and disease threat precautions, and best practices for emergency preparedness development and execution.

## **2. Closing the Equity Gaps & Clearing the Path to Access to Quality Care:**

### **Equity and Social Determinants of Health**

Context in health care is crucial for quality care. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), where a person lives, learns, works, and plays contributes to a wide range of health and quality of health risks and outcomes. The CDC has created five areas to determine healthy people: health care access and quality, education access and quality, social and community context, economic stability, neighborhood and built environment.<sup>10</sup> By acknowledging and using these social determinants throughout Virginia's health and behavioral health care systems, Virginia can formulate more effective solutions to improve the quality of care for all.

### ***As Governor Jenn will address the Social Determinants of Health by:***

- Continue building on her work with the [Food Access Investment Grant \(VFAIF\)](#) and invest another \$2 million into the fund to ensure that the Commonwealth's local food systems are equitable for all Virginians.

<sup>8</sup> [Protecting Home Health Care Workers: A Challenge to Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Planning](#), Sherry Baron, Kathleen McPhaul, Sally Phillips, Robyn Gershon, Jane Lipscomb.

<sup>9</sup> [Underserved Areas](#), Virginia Health Care Foundation.

<sup>10</sup> [Social Determinants of Health, Know What Affects Health](#), Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Introduce and invest \$2 million in the Produce Prescription Program (PPP), which started advocating for in the [2021 Session](#). The program will allow nonprofit organizations or State/local agencies to partner with healthcare providers to: provide fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income individuals suffering from or at risk of developing diet-related health conditions and evaluate the impact of these types of projects on dietary health, food security, and health care use and costs.
- Make the statewide implementation of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Informed Communities mandatory for behavioral and medical health providers, which will increase the number of communities and providers who are “ACES informed.”<sup>11</sup>
- Direct agencies to track and share data regarding racial and other social factors that impact health and behavioral health services and outcomes. Jenn will then use this data to inform her budget making process and any necessary legislation to continue addressing racial and health disparities and behavioral health outcomes.

### ***Reducing the Black Maternal Mortality Rate***

In 2015, Jenn gave birth to her second child via emergency C-section nine weeks early. Due to her daughter’s early arrival, the first six weeks of her life were spent in the NICU. They both almost died. As Governor, Jenn will work to guarantee that no mother or child is without the quality care they need.

In Virginia, the maternal mortality rate for Black women is over two times as high as white women, regardless of income. There are significant differences by race in regards to the cause of death. 66% of Black women died of natural causes stemming from cardiac disorders (18%), exacerbation of chronic diseases (11.2%), and pulmonary embolisms (7.9%).<sup>12</sup> For white women, the leading causes of death included accidental overdoses (18.7%), motor vehicle accidents, infections, and suicide.<sup>13</sup> This data confirms that disparities in maternal mortality and health outcomes are rooted in systemic racism embedded in the health care industry.

In the legislature, Jenn has championed efforts to decrease the Black maternal mortality crisis, increase maternal care, and fight systemic challenges faced by Black and Brown mothers. In 2020, Jenn sponsored the [Pregnancy Protection Act](#) which protects pregnant people from employment discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. She supported the creation of the [Maternal Mortality Review Team](#) and sponsored the establishment of the [Infant and Fetal Mortality Review Team](#). She also supported the legislation to require Virginia to create a certification registry and standard criteria for [doulas to obtain a Virginia certification](#). Jenn supported the creation of a [workgroup to study fair rates for doulas to be reimbursed](#) for services covered by the Department of Medical Assistance Services, helped pass the [\\$22 million dollar investment boost](#) in health care access for new moms and babies to reduce racial disparity in the state’s maternal mortality rate, and extended coverage for [undocumented pregnant individuals](#).

Jenn will comprehensively address the systemic racism that perpetuates disproportionate maternal mortality rates among Black women and acknowledge that many chronic conditions are not adequately addressed prior to, during, and beyond pregnancy. It is important to acknowledge the effect that racism and cultural bias has on the undue physical and mental stress to a person’s body and mind, and that nine months of prenatal care cannot eliminate underlying social determinants of health inequities. The lack of coordinated care leaves many pregnant people without appropriate screenings, referrals, and creates a system where individuals are left to navigate the complicated health care system on their own.

<sup>11</sup> [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>12</sup> [Virginia Maternal Mortality Data](#), Virginia Department of Health.

<sup>13</sup> [Virginia Maternal Mortality Data](#), Virginia Department of Health.

***Jenn will comprehensively address maternal care deserts and the systemic racism that perpetuates disproportionate maternal mortality rates among Black women. She will invest \$30 million to address this issue by:***

- Ensuring coverage for mental health and chronic conditions continuing coverage for those on Medicaid for up to year of postpartum care;
- Continue to invest in home visiting programs for babies and new parents;
- Fund the Medicaid doula reimbursement program;
- Increase funding for Long-Acting Reversible Contraception;
- Mandating State Paid Family Medical Leave Program;
- Create and fund bias and cultural competency training for health care providers and increasing diversity in the health provider workforce;
- Increase educational outreach to pregnant individuals on access to care and services;
- And direct the Virginia Neonatal Perinatal Collaborative (VNPC) to coordinate its efforts with the maternal mortality review team and the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association (VHHA) through the Maternal Health Collaborative to study how to further decrease maternal mortality rate

### ***Closing Coverage Gaps for all Children in Virginia***

No child in Virginia should go without quality and affordable health care. As of this year, approximately 88,000 children in Virginia live without adequate health care coverage while only 46,000 are eligible for Medicaid/FAMIS benefits.<sup>14</sup> Jenn will ensure that there are no gaps in coverage for Virginia's children – regardless of their family's socio-economic background or immigration status. As of 2016, undocumented immigrants comprised 3% of the total state population.<sup>15</sup> Currently, 13,000 of those children who lack any form of health insurance, are undocumented – among them, 9,000 live under 200% of the federal poverty line and do not qualify for Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) health insurance because of their immigration status.<sup>16</sup> Currently 50% of Virginia's children that are undocumented are without health care coverage.<sup>17</sup>

Virginia's current eligibility rate for a child in a household of four is 205% under the federal poverty line – the third lowest eligibility in the nation.<sup>18</sup> Under federal guidelines, states can set Medicaid eligibility requirements. As Governor, Jenn will use executive action to raise Virginia's child eligibility to include children in families who fall 305% under the Federal Poverty Level, expanding access to state Medicaid eligibility for undocumented children up to the age of 18, which will increase coverage for approximately 31% of uninsured children in the Commonwealth.<sup>19</sup>

As a legislator, Jenn passed a budget amendment that established a workgroup through the Department of Medical Assistance Services to compile data and solutions to expand health care [coverage for undocumented children](#). As Governor, Jenn will use the data from the workgroup to expand state sponsored health care so no child is left without health coverage.

Additionally, once the Medicaid eligibility ban for undocumented children is lifted, Jenn will introduce legislation to reform Virginia's public charge policies so that undocumented parents will not forgo medical care for their children for fear of federal coverage declines or green card application complications. Jenn will also increase the funding in her budget to increase the Virginia Mental Health Access Program (VMAP) to train pediatricians in mental health care so children and their families have

<sup>14</sup> [Uninsured Virginians Data](#), Virginia Health Care Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> [Immigrants in Virginia](#), American Immigration Council.

<sup>16</sup> [Health Care Coverage Options for Undocumented Children](#), 2021 Virginia Budget.

<sup>17</sup> [Health care is a right for every child](#), Megan Prior and Arshia Qaadir, Virginia Mercury.

<sup>18</sup> [Income Guidelines](#), Virginia Health Care Foundation.

<sup>19</sup> [It's Time to Cover All Kids](#), The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, May 2021

easier and more integrated access to mental health support.

### ***Expanding Telehealth and Scope of Practice to Rural Virginians***

Where a person lives should not impact the access they have to quality and affordable health care – especially in an increasingly digital world. Particularly in rural areas across the Commonwealth, individuals are unable to seek and obtain crucial health care services that provide preventative and emergency physical and behavioral health care. During this era of COVID, Virginians in all corners of the Commonwealth quickly learned and benefited from the innovative Telehealth options offered by health care providers to improve physical and behavioral health needs from Virginia’s most populated cities to the most remote communities. According to the CDC, Telehealth visits increased by 50% during the first quarter of 2020, compared with the same timeframe in 2019.<sup>20</sup> Individuals in more remote communities were finally able to gain better access to specialists that otherwise would be difficult to reach. Virginia’s rural and low-income communities have faced extra challenges in accessing quality care.

As Governor, Jenn will continue to expand these innovative efforts to reach rural communities in Virginia by budgeting for telehealth expansion and incentivizing health care providers to provide greater access to telecare through broadband expansion. Jenn will invest a minimum of \$50 million annually into the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) expanding broadband expansion to rural communities across the Commonwealth and making it easier for Virginians to receive care online.

Jenn will also defend recent legislative progress to expand the scope of practice so that qualified health care professionals are not impeded from assisting patients because of institutional red tape – particularly in areas of the Commonwealth that already have shortages of health care personnel. In the 2021 session, Jenn co-sponsored and [passed a law to establish parameters for midwife licensure](#), responsibly defining and expanding the ability to practice for midwives and nurse practitioners across the Commonwealth and particularly those who serve in communities with fewer health care professionals.

### ***Culturally Competent Health Care Workforce***

Virginia has made progress in achieving a more equitable and accessible health care system, but generations of mistrust between the health care system and low-income, Black, and Brown communities has created operational and cultural concerns that can keep people from receiving proper treatment and care. Black and Brown communities across the income spectrum continue to experience the ills of systemic racism and maltreatment by the health care system, which in many cases has resulted in a treatment below the standard of care. To begin to build that much needed framework of trust, Jenn is committed to developing a health care workforce that centers cultural competency.

As Governor, Jenn will invest in widespread cultural competency training for health care workers and incentivize health care systems to train and hire more health care professionals from underrepresented racial and geographic backgrounds who will serve on the frontlines of building trust between health care systems and marginalized communities. Jenn co-sponsored the [“Get Skilled, Get a Job, Give Back” \(G3\) Fund](#) that provides funding for low- and middle-income students who are enrolled in educational programs at associate-degree-granting public institutions and pursuing careers in high-demand fields like health care. Through the G3 Fund, Jenn will ensure the educational and certification programs including cultural competency training. As Governor, Jenn will continue to fund the G3 program and partner health care job programs with students at Virginia’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to further prime the pipeline for a diverse health care workforce.

### ***LGBTQ+ Health Rights***

The LGBTQ+ community faces unique health care challenges in Virginia and across the nation. Even after significant progress for LGBTQ+ health care rights in the last two sessions of the General Assembly, LGBTQ+, and particularly transgender and non-binary Virginians, continue to face a lack of cultural

competency from health care professionals and in some cases hostility. Under Jenn’s administration, she will ensure that who you love or how you identify will not affect your quality of healthcare coverage and care in Virginia.

Jenn has supported legislative efforts to expand health care protections for LGBTQ+ Virginians. In the General Assembly, [Jenn passed](#) legislation that [modernized HIV laws](#), eliminating criminal standards that negatively and disproportionately affected members of the LGBTQ+ community for decades.

As Governor, Jenn will fight to solidify efforts to cover gender dysmorphia in Medicaid guidelines to affirm transgender rights in last year’s budget. Jenn will defend the rights of and affirm the identity of trans individuals ensuring that anti-discriminatory laws that protect transgender people are enforced. To combat the high rates of LGBTQ+ youth suicide, Jenn will invest in new Virginia Safe Communities grants – local grants totaling up to \$15,000 purposed to provide funding for communities to fight the suicide and gun violence epidemics. Jenn will also require licensure boards to incorporate cultural competency training in their licensure process among health care workers.

### 3. Protecting and Expanding Reproductive Health:

#### *Protecting Abortion Access and Reproductive Care*

Abortion is health care, and Virginia has made major and historic progress to expand access to abortion care. That progress would not have been possible without Jenn building a brick wall against Republican attempts to pass abortion and birth control restrictions. In Virginia, more than 170 anti-abortion bills, budget amendments and regulations have been introduced in the General Assembly since 2010.<sup>21</sup>

In 2010, [Jenn stood on the House floor, pregnant with her first child](#), fighting against Republican bills designed to inhibit reproductive rights. In 2012, [while holding her personal copy of “What to Expect When You’re Expecting” on the House floor](#), she fought against medically unnecessary restrictions for a patient seeking access to safe and legal abortion, including mandatory ultrasounds, 24-hour waiting periods, and targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP) laws that require abortion providers to be regulated like hospitals.

Jenn voted against a [“personhood” bill](#) that would have “defined life as beginning at conception, which is a pre-cursor for trying to outlaw abortion. Jenn fought against another restrictive bill that [required](#) people to have an ultrasound before an abortion, and voted against a [bill](#) that would [“strip”](#) the Board of Health of its ability to fund abortions for Medicaid recipients when a physician certifies that the fetus had a gross and totally incapacitating physical deformity. She stood up on the House floor and [argued](#), “when you are denying Medicaid funding for abortion, for some women you are denying their ability to get one.”

Jenn passed [the Reproductive Health Protection Act](#), which made Virginia the [first](#) state in the South to proactively protect a person’s access to abortion care and reproductive health. This bill removed medically unnecessary restrictions for patients seeking access to safe and legal abortion, including: mandatory ultrasounds, 24-hour waiting periods, and targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP) laws. Jenn made Virginia the [first](#) state in the South to [remove the ban on abortion](#) coverage for health insurance plans offered through the Health Benefits Exchange.

21 [Anti-Choice Attacks in Virginia](#), NARAL Virginia.

With the U.S. Supreme Court packed with anti-choice ideologues, Virginia has to be ready to continue fighting back and serve as a safe haven in the South for reproductive health care.

### ***Passing a Constitutional Amendment to Enshrine the Principles of Roe v. Wade***

As Governor, Jenn will work with the General Assembly to pass a constitutional amendment to protect reproductive health. Virginia must remain a safe haven for reproductive health, no matter what happens in the Supreme Court. Jenn will make safeguarding reproductive health a top priority of her governorship, including enshrining those rights into a constitutional amendment. And, she will work with reproductive rights allies to lead on legislative and other actions to protect and expand access to reproductive health.

### ***Protecting Reproductive Health Care and Expand Access to Care – Ensuring that Every Virginian can Afford and Access Care***

Jenn will also work with the General Assembly to pass the Reproductive Health Equity Act (RHEA), which will ensure that EVERYONE can access and afford birth control, pre- and post-natal care, breast cancer screening and counseling and other life-changing preventative services for women. RHEA expands access to reproductive health care as basic health care and includes coverage for well visits, abortion care, contraception, childbirth and postpartum care and contraception. It specifically expands care no matter where a person's income is, their gender, their insurance or their immigration status.<sup>22</sup>

## **4. Virginia Health Benefit Exchange & Reinsurance Program:**

### ***Implementing the Virginia Health Benefit Exchange and Reinsurance Program to Improve Coverage Access, Lower Premiums and Improve Efficiency of Health Care for Virginians***

Jenn [created](#) the [Virginia Health Benefit Exchange](#) under the Affordable Care Act to improve access, lower premiums, and improve efficiency of health care for approximately 230,000 Virginians. In 2024, the Virginia Health Exchange will open and the next administration will play a crucial role in its implementation. Jenn also supported the legislation to create the [Reinsurance Program](#), which will reduce health insurance premiums, especially for those who do not receive federal subsidies and to offset premiums that average \$650 a month. As Governor, Jenn will oversee the implementation of the reinsurance program, a state-based subsidy program to increase affordability of health plans to individuals and to increase enrollment in the Virginia Health Benefit Exchange.

Jenn will oversee the implementation of the Health Exchange and ensure that the exchange is consumer-focused to make purchasing insurance coverage easier and more affordable. She will require a true “no wrong door” policy that creates a seamless transfer from Medicaid coverage to health exchange coverage, so if a consumer's eligibility changes they do not have to go to a different place to get their coverage, but can be assisted through the the Virginia Health Benefit Exchange regardless of eligibility for Medicaid or an exchange plan. She will also prioritize funding health navigators, one-on-one support, community outreach, and language access.

Jenn will grow and increase the numbers of Medicaid navigators across the Commonwealth. She will ensure that these navigators are more involved in regions of Virginia which have traditionally had difficulty navigating the eligibility process and completing enrollment applications on their own. Enrollment alone is not enough. Jenn will also assist those who need additional support and education in selecting and enrolling in a health care plan to ensure Virginians maintain continuous coverage. She will also incentivize hiring of multilingual navigators to ensure those who speak Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Tagalog, Arabic, and other languages have access to resources to navigate the

Medicaid process.

Jenn will work with the Biden-Harris Administration and advocate for permanent subsidies for Virginians.

## 5. Accountability & Transparency in Health Plans:

### *Expanding Transparency and Accountability in Health Coverage*

Over the past decade, Virginians saw an 86.5% increase in out-of-pocket costs for employer-provided health care, which included increased deductibles and premiums.<sup>23</sup>

The Bureau of Insurance is a state regulatory agency whose mission is “[to ensure that citizens of the Commonwealth are provided with access to adequate and reliable insurance protection, and that insurance companies selling policies are financially sound to support payment of claims.](#)” Their role is in part to ensure that insurance agencies are operating “according to statutory and regulatory requirements.” Despite the important role the Bureau serves, it is not empowered to regulate insurance agencies and businesses in a manner that holds insurers accountable. There are no clear parameters to ensure that the Bureau is providing affordable and quality health plans to their consumers nor is there a robust rate review process that specifically looks at affordability and quality.

As Governor, Jenn will introduce legislation that will empower the Bureau of Insurance to regulate health insurers through a consumer protection lens by requiring greater transparency and accountability for affordability and quality in the available health plans. She will also introduce an affordability and quality review measure to require that plans provided in Virginia meet certain affordability and quality measures.

Network adequacy helps ensure consumers have requisite access to health care providers that are in-network under their health insurance plans. Health insurance carriers have the ability to adjust the qualifications and quality of their providers that are in their network.

Jenn will also improve Virginia’s Network Adequacy program by integrating it into the Bureau of Insurance, creating a newly reformed accountability for consumer protections and affordability. She will ensure there is a clearer process for consumers to report network adequacy issues and equip, staff and fund the Bureau of Insurance to incorporate network adequacy needs are addressed more efficiently and effectively.

## 6. Championing Prescription Drug Affordability:

### *Reining in Prescription Drug Costs*

Today in Virginia, individuals are struggling to pay for prescriptions that can make the difference between improved life and death. Annually, Americans pay more than \$1,200 a year on prescription drug costs while pharmaceutical companies profit.<sup>24</sup> According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, nearly 89 percent of adults 65 and older report taking prescription medication.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, most Americans are one medical emergency away from a financial crisis. Jenn will make sure that Virginians are not saddled with the high costs of prescription medications and ensure that pharmaceutical companies are held accountable to sell vital prescription drugs at fair prices.

<sup>23</sup> [Virginians spend more on their health insurance than people in almost every other state](#), Dave Ress, *Virginian-Pilot*.

<sup>24</sup> [Drug Prices](#), Robert Langreth, *Bloomberg News*.

<sup>25</sup> [Data Note: Prescription Drugs and Older Adults](#), Kaiser Family Foundation.

Jenn has worked to pass substantive prescription drug regulations in the past. As a Delegate in 2015, Jenn proposed legislation that would have [imposed price limits on special tiers](#) and capped patient out-of-pocket costs applicable to the drugs not to exceed \$100 per month for a 30-day supply. As Governor, Jenn will continue the work she started by instituting prescription drug copay caps - including insulin treatments - and holding pharmaceutical companies accountable to produce more generic versions of lifesaving medications. No Virginian should be forced to choose between keeping their health and putting food on the table.

As Governor, Jenn will implement solutions that lower prescription drug costs for Virginians. Within the first year of the McClellan administration, Jenn will establish the Virginia Prescription Affordability Board (VPAB) under the Board of Insurance. The VPAB will serve as a crucial safeguard against high prescription drug prices for Virginia consumers. The establishment of VPAB will make Virginia a national leader and pioneer in ensuring that consumers are protected from an overly complicated and expensive system. The Board will consist of medical professionals, community members impacted by drug costs, economists, actuaries, and experts tasked to study pharmaceutical trends in Virginia and provide recommendations to the Virginia General Assembly to pass legislation that creates price protections for consumers. Jenn will request a report from the VPAB within the first year of her administration.

Jenn will also introduce a competitive bidding process for state employee health benefit plans that require insurance carriers to bid at the lowest price possible – keeping plan and prescription drug costs low to Virginia state employees. Similar efforts to regulate prescription drug and plan costs have successfully been implemented in Maryland.

Jenn will also work with the Biden-Harris administration to regulate and reduce prices for noncompetitive, unfairly priced drugs and incentivize the increased production of essential generic medications. Jenn will work to make Virginia a leader in keeping pharmaceutical and insurance companies accountable.

## **7. Improving Virginia Managed Care:**

Virginia's Medicaid Managed Care Program is a partnership with Virginia's private insurance to provide coverage to Virginia's medicaid recipients. A Medicaid Care Organization (MCO) is a health plan with a group of doctors and other providers working together to provide services to medicaid recipients, and this coverage encompasses both medical and behavioral health services. In the past few years the Commonwealth has enabled MCOs to adjust and update the providers in their networks. To help address these issues, Jenn will create the Patient Quality Access Medicaid Task Force and direct it to work with the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) and MCOs to make recommendations for standardization, consistency, accountability and transparency that prioritize patient choice, protect and provide resources for Small, Minority, and Women-Owned (SWaM) providers and increasing access to quality care.

## **8. Increasing Medicaid Reimbursement Rates:**

Current funding to ensure adequate Medicaid reimbursement rates are severely underfunded. Medicaid can prevent physicians and other medical professionals and providers from serving everyone within their communities due to inadequate reimbursement rates for critical health care services and access to health care providers. Current reimbursement rates are not high enough for many health care providers

to accept Medicaid. The Medicaid process itself does not make it easy on physicians, doctors, or other providers either. It is so complicated that some of those who can afford to accept Medicaid end up absorbing the complete cost of the service because they are unable to navigate the reimbursement process.<sup>26</sup>

Jenn will solve these issues by increasing funding to support adequate rates that support high quality services and streamlining the administrative processes that providers must adhere to as part of the Medicaid MCO process. She will support continued enhancement and redesign of services while ensuring reimbursement rates match the cost of services. This will facilitate wider acceptance of Medicaid throughout the Commonwealth, which will result in better access to health care for more Virginians and a healthier, more productive Virginia.

## **9. Reforming Behavioral Health Care:**

Mental health is crucial for maintaining overall health. The specific impact of COVID-19 on mental health has yet to be seen as early studies are still in developmental phases. However, existing studies on traumatic events ranging from natural disasters to economic downturns show that increased mental health challenges are expected outcomes, including increased rates of mental health concerns and increased substance use.

Systemic racism, stigma, provider bias, and inequality of care have created barriers and challenges for Virginians of color. Promoting equity in all aspects of behavioral health is a core strategy for ensuring that the mental health care system is accessible and supportive in meeting the needs of all Virginians with mental health challenges. With an estimated 308,000 adult Virginians experiencing a serious mental health disorder at any time annually, ensuring equitable access and addressing long-standing deficiencies remains a top priority.<sup>27</sup> Mental health is an integral part of an individual's overall well-being and greatly influences a person's ability to participate fully and meaningfully in their community, work, school, and other opportunities.

The hallmarks of Jenn's mental health platform as Governor will build on and strengthen the behavioral health system, ensuring a more robust, accessible, and equitable mental health care system for all Virginians.

### ***Acknowledging Equity and Social Determinants of Health***

As Governor, Jenn will implement comprehensive behavioral reform that promotes equity and addresses social determinants of health such as food security, a safe and clean living environment, and social support networks. In Jenn's budget, equity will be a driving force behind state mental health funding. She will direct agencies to adopt a needs based funding formula to ensure the specific behavioral health needs of communities and localities are being met.

She will prioritize her budget to increase and continue building on permanent supportive housing and other forms of independent, integrated housing settings to promote housing permanency for people with disabilities, mental illness/co-occurring substance use disorders, and chronic health needs. Jenn will ensure accessible and fully funded community resources will decrease the need for high cost systems like emergency departments. People with mental illnesses, like all persons with disabilities, can live productive lives when treatment, personal care, and housing affordability and access.

She will make the statewide implementation of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) informed communities mandatory and increase the number of communities and providers who are "ACES

<sup>26</sup> [Health Insurance in the Individual Market](#), Joint Commission on Health Care.

<sup>27</sup> [FACT SHEET: Mental Illness in Virginia's Adult Population](#), National Alliance on Mental Illnesses.

informed” and part of this evidence-based prevention strategy that is beginning to span pockets of the Commonwealth.

She will direct agencies to track and share data regarding racial and other health disparities in behavioral health services and outcomes. She will then use this data to inform her budget making process and any necessary legislation to continue addressing racial and health disparities in behavioral health outcomes.

### ***Strengthening the Behavioral Health Care Workforce***

As Governor, Jenn will implement initiatives to support and sustain an exceptional behavioral health workforce, with a focus on increasing diversity in the workforce, specifically focusing on:

- Licensed clinicians of color
- Bilingual licensed clinicians
- BIPOC Certified Substance Abuse Counselors (CSACS)
- Certified Peer Recovery Specialists

She will enact and fund loan repayment initiatives, specifically for mental health and substance use providers, People of Color practicing in these fields, or people practicing in underserved areas of Virginia, and fund adequate Medicaid reimbursement rates (DMAS) for mental health providers.

### ***Focusing on Early Intervention, Prevention, and Wellness across the Lifespan***

Jenn will continue Medicaid behavioral health enhancement, a collaborative effort between the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Medical Assistance Services, and multiple state agency, local, and private and public provider partners to support an evidence-based, trauma-informed, and cost-effective continuum of care across the lifespan of a person.

She will work with state agencies and local communities to promote and fund trauma-informed care initiatives including statewide expansion of ACES-informed communities; explore continuing the state-level Trauma Informed Care Network Initiative.

Jenn will address the ongoing opioid epidemic by making Virginia’s standing naloxone order, under the Virginia Department of Health, more flexible to allow it to be initiated by trained citizens -- compared to the current system that only allows certain trained medical/paraprofessionals and first responders. She will also offer community grants to help identify opportunities to target resources to continue evidence-based substance abuse prevention efforts in Virginia through community coalition building, harm reduction efforts, and other data-driven initiatives.

### ***Trauma-Informed Crisis System and Comprehensive Continuum of Care***

As the Commonwealth emerges from the COVID-19 epidemic, many Virginians regularly experience hardships that require timely crisis care. During the next four years, it will be important to identify opportunities to target and strengthen mental wellness and suicide prevention efforts, including to citizens particularly vulnerable post-COVID but also to targeted populations including health care providers, veterans, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ youth.

As Governor, Jenn will support compassionate, trauma-informed crisis care across the lifespan by revamping Virginia’s crisis infrastructure to aid individuals in distress. In 2020, the federal government passed legislation establishing 988 as the nationwide three-digit number for people in crisis; states must comply and integrate this number into call centers by July 2022. As Governor, Jenn will stand up Virginia’s crisis call centers alongside the new federal 988 implementation directing the Division of Public Utility Regulation of the State Corporation Commission to smoothly implement the transition to

the 988 crisis line in 2022.

Currently, Virginia's crisis hotlines have a 51% in-state answer rate.<sup>28</sup> Jenn will provide the necessary resources to ensure that Virginia's crisis hotline infrastructure is properly staffed on the regional level and increase call metrics for Virginia's crisis hotlines to meet the 80/20 (80% of calls answered in twenty seconds) call-center industry standard within the first year of Jenn's administration. By her third year, the call center will meet the national standards for other emergency hotlines like 911 and fire calls to ensure that 95% of calls made to the crisis hotlines are answered within 15 seconds by in-state operators. This staggered funding increase for personnel at the regional level over the next three years will increase the amount of quality and life-saving care provided to Virginians in crisis.

Jenn will also work to reduce and address in-person behavioral health incidents across the Commonwealth that have the potential to turn lethal if not properly deescalated. In 2018, Marcus-David Peters, a 24-year old Black man was shot and killed by law enforcement as he experienced a behavioral health episode in Jenn's Senate district. Marcus-David Peters should still be alive today and died as a result of the systemic problems of policing and as a result of law enforcement officials having to resolve behavioral health incidents.

Jenn introduced the [Marcus Alert bill](#), which his family supported and requested. Though that version did not pass, the legislation that did pass [established a "Marcus Alert" system](#) which aims to provide a mental health response to mental health crises and reduce negative outcomes involving use of force in law enforcement interactions when an individual is experiencing a mental health, substance use, developmental disability, or related crisis.

The system requires Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and the Department of Criminal Justice Services, in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, to develop protocols to divert behavioral health calls from 911 to the behavioral health system, including dispatching mental health only mobile crisis and community care teams, or to respond with a specialized law enforcement response that must adhere to minimum standards and best practices for law enforcement response. As Governor, Jenn will expand the scope of the legislation by implementing Marcus Alert systems statewide through mobile crisis coverage to serve more communities across the Commonwealth and prevent tragic incidents. Jenn will also work to update some of the parameters in the recently passed legislation to reflect the desires of Marcus-David Peters' family and her originally [introduced bill](#).

Jenn will also finalize the implementation of the System Transformation Excellence and Performance (STEP VA) program, which is Virginia's initiative to improve access and consistency within the public mental health system by supporting and ensuring effective implementation of the remaining three steps: case management, care coordination, and psychiatric rehabilitation. Jenn will continue to fund STEP VA and foster interagency and stakeholder collaboration between the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, and community services boards.

Jenn will require an audit and review of the current oversight, management and accountability of health information technology between the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, community services boards, and between the Department of Medical Assistance Services. Using the findings of this audit she will fund ongoing modernization efforts within DBHDS including data and IT systems, performance contracting, and quality management systems to ensure the overarching system functions more efficiently.

## Conclusion

Improving access, coverage, and quality of health care is essential to improving health outcomes for Virginians. Health care impacts everyone, and the inequity in the system has devastating socio-emotional, physical, and economic effects on Virginia communities. As Virginia continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, rebuilding Virginia's health care and social safety nets will be essential, but they must be rebuilt in a way that increases access, affordability and quality care for everyone. Under Jenn's administration, she will break down barriers to access, build up quality, and address the on-going inequities many of our communities have faced for generations.