

UNE receives \$30 million to support quality health care and workforce needs in Maine



*The Harold Alfond Foundation has gifted the University of New England \$30 million to boost the state's workforce and economy and support quality health care.*

The University of New England has received a gift of \$30 million from the Harold Alfond Foundation as part of a major investment in eight Maine institutions for the purpose of growing the state's workforce and economy and supporting quality health care. The foundation announced the recipients on Oct. 6.

This gift to UNE will support the construction of a new facility for the relocation of the University's [College of Osteopathic Medicine](#) from the Biddeford Campus to the Portland Campus, the establishment of a new Institute for Interprofessional Education and Practice, and the acceleration of high-growth undergraduate and graduate programs on the Biddeford Campus to meet student demand and workforce needs, such as aquaculture, entrepreneurship, criminal justice, sports media communication, and others.

"The Harold Alfond Foundation has been a longtime supporter of the University of New England, and we are pleased to be able to invest again in this great university," said Greg Powell, chairman of the foundation. "We believe that two fundamental components of a bright future for Maine are a high-quality education and a healthy population, and UNE is a significant contributor toward both of these goals. With this grant, UNE is poised to take its contributions to the state to new heights and will be instrumental in Maine's future success.

Currently, UNE's College of Osteopathic Medicine (UNE COM) is one of the only graduate health profession programs located on the University's Biddeford Campus, while an array of other health programs, including those in dentistry, pharmacy, physician assistant, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, social work, dental hygiene, and nurse anesthesia are situated on the Portland Campus.

By unifying its health professions programs on one campus, UNE hopes to fully integrate those programs and enhance its already robust adoption of interprofessional education practices, which call for teams of health care providers across multiple disciplines to work collaboratively on patient-centered care. This team-based model of health care, in contrast with the more siloed traditional model of practice, has been shown to produce better patient outcomes, to reduce medical errors, and to decrease provider burnout.

“With a truly integrated health care campus, like none other in our region, our health professions students will capitalize on opportunities for cross-professional learning, enhance their team-based competencies, and will benefit from amazing new learning spaces that will complement UNE’s existing assets,” said UNE President James Herbert, Ph.D. “UNE will be able to realize its full potential as a national leader in interprofessional education.”

UNE educates more health care professionals than any other institution in the state of Maine, and has, since 1995, awarded more than 15,500 degrees in the health sciences. Many of the University’s graduates stay and work in Maine, where they tackle the health care needs of the state’s rural and aging populations.

At a news conference on the UNE’s Portland Campus on Tuesday, Oct. 13, Powell said UNE’s past successes have paved the way for the University’s future.

“With success comes new needs and new opportunities,” Powell said. “UNE is not resting on its record of achievement, nor is it retreating in the face of a worldwide health crisis. Instead, it is stepping up big-time. UNE’s plan will build on the outstanding success it has achieved in the past.”

The 110,000-square-foot facility in Portland will include:

- Space to significantly increase the College of Osteopathic Medicine’s class size
- A digital health teaching center to focus on telehealth and digital health technologies, such as wearable devices, artificial intelligence, robotics, and health data discovery and application – all critical in meeting the needs of rural residents living in isolated areas away from population centers
- An interprofessional patient simulation center that can accommodate large cohorts of student teams engaging in case studies and collaborative learning
- Design features that incorporate best practices in medical education and team-based learning, including flexible classrooms, superb technical capabilities, and spaces designed to encourage collaboration and interaction.

“UNE has grown into a powerhouse, attracting students from all over the country to its many programs and world-class research. Moving the medical school to Portland is just another step in strengthening Portland’s position as a biotech innovation hub,” Portland Mayor Kate Snyder said at the conference.

Herbert said the creation of the Institute for Interprofessional Education and Practice will strengthen the University's collaboration with health care partners throughout the state by providing greater opportunities for students to engage in team-based rotations at UNE's clinically affiliated sites.

Moreover, the creation of the institute will fully integrate all of UNE's professional health care education programs with its health-related Centers for Excellence, including those in Aging and Health, Digital Health, Public Health, and Collaborative Education, amplifying and providing a new cohesiveness around their work.

Chuck Hayes, president and CEO of MaineGeneral Health — a longtime partner in UNE's health education initiatives — said that interprofessional collaboration is critical in meeting today's medical needs.

"Medicine today is too complex for one individual or one discipline to have all the answers. It requires a full team of medical professionals to fully care for an individual," Hayes said. "The shared curriculum among health professionals that the University of New England has created allows students to understand the expertise of other members of the health care team, and, as importantly, how to effectively work together as a team for the benefit of patients and their families.

"The expansion of the medical school and having additional physicians who are placed in the workforce is so critical to the future of Maine's health care system," Hayes continued. "We are very fortunate to have a high-quality medical school like UNE in the state of Maine, and we are so grateful for the support of the Harold Alfond Foundation in addressing the most critical needs for the future of health care in this state."

UNE's Biddeford Campus will benefit from the relocation of the medical school as well, as the move will allow the University to expand its programming in several market-aligned fields of study, enabling the growth of current academic programs and the development of new programs through use of labs and classrooms vacated by the medical program.

"By allowing us to grow undergraduate and graduate programs on our Biddeford Campus that are linked to workforce needs, this grant also enables us to expand our positive influence on Maine's economy and help shepherd in a new wave of economic prosperity for our state," he added.

At Tuesday's conference, Biddeford Mayor Alan Casavant said such expanded programs will contribute to the city's continued growth and redevelopment.

"The plans we are announcing today bring UNE to the next level. Biddeford continues to grow, and it is home to so much new innovation, and UNE has part of that innovation," he said. "By expanding programs in key areas and working with our businesses, I see further development

and further growth into what we call a 'Biddessance' in Biddeford — the renaissance of the communities along the Saco River.”

In video remarks, members of Maine’s Congressional delegation lauded the Foundation’s grant. Sen. Angus King said, “having dentistry, pharmacy, and UNE’s wonderful medical school on one comprehensive campus will be an incredibly powerful medical engine for the state of Maine,” while Sen. Susan Collins said the gift, “recognizes the role the university plays in health care education and delivery in Maine.”

Rep. Chellie Pingree said UNE’s commitment to interprofessional, team-based care will become increasingly important and called the relocation of UNE COM the right move in expanding that foundation by uniting students across disciplines.

“UNE already does so much to keep Maine healthy,” Pingree said. “With this generous grant, UNE will be able to affirm and expand its statewide commitment to quality, affordable, and accessible health care services.”

With an estimated total cost of approximately \$70 million, the project will require UNE to raise additional funds through private and public sources.

The University hopes to break ground on the new building in the spring of 2022 and looks to the fall of 2023 as a targeted completion date.

“We have lots of work ahead of us,” said Herbert, “but I am confident that, thanks to this amazing grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation, we are prepared to take on this task of elevating to a whole new level UNE’s standing as a leading innovator in interprofessional education of health care scientists and professionals and as a key contributor to Maine’s economic prosperity more generally.”