

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## OPTIMA HEALTH BRINGS READING PROGRAM TO NORTHERN VIRGINIA

*Local Events Take Place December 10-11 in Woodbridge and Manassas*

**VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (December 6, 2018)**—Virginia-based Optima Health is bringing its reading program to Northern Virginia. The Optima Health reading program offers a variety of literacy services for low-income children and adults, recognizing the positive effect that reading has on lifelong health and wellbeing. Literacy plays a large role in improving the social determinants of health, which include financial stability, food security, education, housing, transportation, and access to quality healthcare.

The Optima Health reading program includes sponsorship of student tutoring and scholarships, payment for Graduate Education Development (GED), screening for developmental delays and connecting members with resources, participation in back-to-school events, and placing children's books in the home of every member household, as well as puppet performances that emphasize the joy of reading and provide a book for every child in attendance to take home.

Megan Philpotts Padden, Vice President of Government Programs at Optima Health, said, "Addressing the holistic well-being of our Medicaid members by targeting social determinants of health moves us closer to the heart of health care. We're Virginians caring for Virginians. So, we understand how the Optima Health reading program meets a real need to instill the love of reading and improve health outcomes in low-income families through literacy. Our puppet performances are perhaps the most visible aspect of the Optima Health reading program—but truly they're just one important part of our multifactorial effort to support all our members, at any age."

The puppet program, which features Rainbow Puppet Productions, a well-established children's theater company, has been developed just for Optima Health, a service of Sentara Healthcare.

Through these shows, Optima Health will reach more than 38,000 children in 100 different locations such as public schools, public libraries, and community events in lower-income areas throughout Virginia over the coming months.

Locally, upcoming puppet programs include:

- December 10, 9:30 a.m. Featherstone Elementary School performance, Woodbridge, Virginia. Enrolled students only.
- December 10, 2:00 p.m. Occoquan School performance, Woodbridge, Virginia. Enrolled students only.
- December 11, 9:30 a.m. and 2:15 p.m. Hayden Elementary School performances, Manassas, Virginia. Enrolled students only.
- December 11, 6:30 p.m. [Potomac Community Library](#), 2201 Opitz Boulevard, Woodbridge, Virginia, 22191. Free and open to the public.

Dr. Benedict Sales, a family practice physician at Sentara Family Medicine Physicians in Dumfries, Va., provided a physician's perspective, saying, "Reading with children is a great way to help them grow socially and emotionally, plus it can improve their vocabulary, increase self-confidence, and broaden their imagination. When adults read with children, the neurons in children's brains connect during the

interaction—in a way that just doesn't happen during passive activities like watching television. Numerous studies show a connection between brain development and time spent with books, even for infants.”

This Optima Health reading program joins other services that are part of Optima Health's larger commitment to infant and early childhood health called ZERO TO THREE®:

- **Text4Baby** provides health information via text message to pregnant women.
- **The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership** promotes social and emotional development.
- **Home Visiting – Ages & Stages Questionnaire®** screens the development of children from 1 year to 66 months.

Additionally, Optima Health recognizes that adverse childhood experiences have wide-reaching health and social consequences, and works to prevent them from occurring by addressing social determinants of health and monitoring child welfare when interacting with members. Optima Health encourages assessment of adverse childhood experiences in the primary care setting as a predictor of behavioral and physical health conditions, and equips parents with information on good parenting practices.

### **About Optima Health**

Optima Health, based in Virginia, provides health insurance coverage to more than 510,000 members. With more than 30 years of experience, Optima Health offers a suite of commercial products including consumer-directed, employee-owned and employer-sponsored plans, individual health plans, employee assistance programs and plans serving Medicare and Medicaid enrollees. Its provider network features 26,000 providers including specialists, primary care physicians and hospitals across Virginia. Optima Health also offers programs to support members with chronic illnesses, customized wellness programs and integrated clinical and behavioral health services, as well as pharmacy management—all to help members improve their health every day. The company's goals are to provide better health, be easy to use and offer services that are a great value. Optima Health is a service of Sentara Healthcare. To learn more about Optima Health, visit [www.optimahealth.com](http://www.optimahealth.com).