

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 9, 2019

## OPTIMA HEALTH BRINGS READING PROGRAM TO ROANOKE

*Local Events in January and February in Roanoke and Blue Ridge*

**VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (January 9, 2019)**— Virginia-based Optima Health is bringing its reading program, including a popular puppet performance, to the Roanoke region. 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.

Traci Massie, Director 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:

- January 15, 9:00 a.m. Hurt Park Elementary School performance, Roanoke, Virginia. Enrolled students only.
- January 15, 1:00 p.m. Roanoke Academy for Math & Science Elementary School performance, Roanoke, Virginia. Enrolled students only.
- **January 16, 10:00 a.m. Taubman Museum, Roanoke, Virginia. Free and open to the public.**
- January 16, 1:00 p.m. Colonial Elementary School performance, Blue Ridge, Virginia. Enrolled students only.
- January 17, 8:30 a.m. Fairview Elementary School performance, Roanoke, Virginia. Enrolled students only.

Dr. Thomas Lundquist, Chief Medical Officer at Optima Health, provided a physician's perspective, saying, "Reading together is a great way to help your child grow socially and emotionally. Plus, reading can improve their vocabulary, grow their self-confidence and broaden their imagination."

This Optima Health reading program joins other services that Optima Health offers as part of their 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).