



For Immediate Release
June 1, 2026

Partnership HealthPlan of California
(707) 989-0034
press@partnershiphp.org
Contact: Dustin Lyda

Partnership Announces Winners of 2026 Member Scholarships

FAIRFIELD – Partnership HealthPlan of California is proud to announce the winners of the 2026 Member Scholarship Program, which supports Medi-Cal recipients pursuing careers in health care, social service, and public service. One Partnership member received a \$10,000 scholarship, and four members each received \$5,000 scholarships, for a total of \$30,000 awarded.

“When our members pursue careers in health care, they bring invaluable lived experience to the people and communities they serve,” said Sonja Bjork, CEO. “This scholarship program helps open doors for future professionals who understand firsthand the importance of accessible, compassionate care.”

The \$10,000 scholarship was awarded to Christopher Jackson of Humboldt County. After spending 26 years incarcerated, he is now pursuing a degree in social work and plans to become a licensed social worker serving individuals involved in the justice system as well as Tribal communities. With support from Partnership during his reentry, Christopher found the stability he needed to move forward. “Partnership has been a partner in my reentry, healing, and personal development. Access to health care and therapy has given me the stability and confidence to pursue higher education and commit fully to serving others,” Jackson said in his application essay.

Four Partnership members were each awarded \$5,000 scholarships:

Erica Downey of Tehama County, a single mother of a son with complex medical needs, is committed to improving pediatric care. She plans to earn her nursing degree so she can work as a pediatric case manager to help other parents with coordinating care. “I want to be more than just a nurse — I want to be a source of comfort, guidance, and reassurance for families who feel overwhelmed and uncertain,” Downey said in her application essay.

Ariel Norman of Sonoma County, a single mother and former foster youth, works to help at-risk youth, especially those experiencing homelessness, to find stability. Her long-term goal is to become a licensed social worker so she can support youth not only with resources and housing, but deep inner healing too. “Because of Partnership, I have been able to stay enrolled in school, continue working in social services, and show up consistently for my children and the young people I serve,” Norman wrote.

Kailie Shoemaker of Lassen County is pursuing her master’s in social work at Cal Poly Humboldt to eventually become a licensed clinical social worker. Motivated by her own experiences as a mother, Kailie’s goal is to serve her rural community as a social worker. “I know what it looks like when the nearest provider is an hour away, when stigma keeps people from asking for help, when the paperwork alone is enough to make someone give up. I want to be the person who helps bridge that gap,” Shoemaker wrote.

Vanessa Hurtado Torres of Napa County is charting a unique path in pharmacy focused on working with Spanish-speaking populations. Growing up with a Spanish-speaking mother, Vanessa witnessed firsthand the systemic barriers that marginalized communities face. Beyond direct patient care, she aspires to be actively involved in community outreach and public health efforts. “I want to help eliminate the fear and confusion that often accompany healthcare experiences for individuals with limited English proficiency,” Hurtado Torres said.

The Partnership Member Scholarship Program was established in 2025 to recognize and support Partnership members who demonstrate exceptional commitment to careers that uplift their communities. “By investing in our members’ education, we are investing in the future of health in Northern California,” Bjork said.

Winners were selected based on Partnership member status, essay responses, and career goals.

About Partnership HealthPlan of California: Partnership is a community-based, safety-net health care organization that contracts with the state to administer Medi-Cal benefits. Partnership provides quality care to about 850,000 Medi-Cal members. Starting in Solano County in 1994, Partnership now serves 24 Northern California counties – Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Mendocino, Modoc, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Yolo, and Yuba. Learn more about Partnership at PartnershipHP.org.