



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
September 8, 2021

## **Rural Forward NC joins MDC to enhance capacity and support for rural leaders and communities across the South**

*Partnership allows for greater impact in rural communities and future collaboration with FHLI for locally led rural development throughout the southern United States*

DURHAM, NC— MDC, a nonprofit based in Durham, N.C., focused on improving economic mobility and advancing equity in the South, is delighted to announce that Rural Forward NC has joined the MDC team, providing additional expertise and capacity to support rural leaders, organizations, and communities.

Working collaboratively with the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, Rural Forward NC provides program-wide guidance, identifies opportunities for community collaboration, and develops technical assistance and support programs in 10 rural NC counties through the Trust's Healthy Places NC initiative.

One in five North Carolinians, almost 2.2 million people, live in rural counties. Compared to towns and cities, those living in these rural areas face unique barriers to accessing critically needed health care and social support services. At the same time, North Carolina's rural communities are full of natural, social, economic, cultural, and human capital that can be used as the building blocks to prosperity. The new rural economy is more interconnected, built upon our global economy, and more tied into regional opportunity.

Rural Forward NC was created in 2014 to provide technical assistance and support to 10 rural counties in partnership with the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. The Healthy Places NC work continues today, and Rural Forward NC has grown to support additional funders and organizations working in rural areas. Founded initially as a program of the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation (FHLI), Rural Forward NC supports the nonprofit, clinical, and human service leaders within Healthy Places NC counties. The program supports communities through capacity building, strategic planning, coaching, facilitation, and resource development tools to make rural counties healthier and more thriving.

"We've long admired Rural Forward NC's work to support, develop and advance rural leadership," said John Simpkins, president of MDC. "This next phase in Rural Forward's evolution is largely the product of a successful incubation at FHLI, which allowed the program the space and time to develop its vision, mission, core constituency, and program strategies. With this new addition to the MDC team, we look forward to increasing our reach in rural communities. In addition, we are excited about further building our relationship with FHLI."

"With the support of FHLI, Rural Forward has developed a model that is trusted among many community leaders across North Carolina," said Kelly Calabria, CEO and president of FHLI. "Our goal, as Rural Forward transitions to MDC, is to ensure the program can continue to evolve and serve more communities, including those outside of North Carolina. We are confident that MDC's involvement will help Rural Forward seize that opportunity. This is just the beginning of ways FHLI and MDC will find to partner as we serve those in rural areas."

The MDC and Rural Forward NC partnership will help amplify MDC's impact on rural development – allowing for MDC's national research and analysis to be further grounded in local practice and for Rural Forward's model to

expand to other states. This combined expertise will inform regional and national rural development strategies and initiatives, particularly within the southern United States.

“We are incredibly grateful for the partnership and support from FHLI and its staff over the years. They helped us evolve to our next iteration in partnership with MDC,” said Calvin Allen, director of Rural Forward NC. “Rural Forward is poised to continue our relationship with FHLI with exciting new dynamics as part of the MDC team.”

“As this new era unfolds for Rural Forward NC, we are excited about the possibilities for continued collaboration between MDC and FHLI,” said Dr. Laura Gerald, president, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. “We support the work of both organizations to advance the development and success of rural communities in North Carolina and beyond.”

The impact of Rural Forward NC’s work across the state includes stronger local leadership and skills; stronger strategic plans; greater focus for community collaborations and partnerships; more inclusive efforts in community initiatives; stronger evaluation measures; and greater access to local, regional, statewide, and national resources.

For more visit: [www.mdcinc.org](http://www.mdcinc.org)

###

**About MDC:** MDC equips Southern leaders, institutions, and communities with the necessary tools and strategies to advance equity—particularly racial and gender equity—and economic mobility.

For over 50 years, institutions, communities, foundations, and others across the South have turned to MDC for deep knowledge and proven tools to design, demonstrate, and sustain what works to boost members of underinvested communities to higher rungs on the economic ladder.

**About FHLI:**

The Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation (FHLI) is a nonprofit organization that envisions healthy communities across North Carolina where everyone can flourish. FHLI develops and supports innovative partnerships that build a healthier North Carolina through collaboration and respect. With a long history in the state — and a deep understanding of its health care needs — FHLI scales solutions that benefit the entire state. FHLI staff are thought leaders and experts who bring communities together for a better, healthier North Carolina. Learn more at [www.foundationhli.org](http://www.foundationhli.org).

Media contact:

Clarissa Goodlett  
Director of Communications, MDC  
[cgoodlett@mdcinc.org](mailto:cgoodlett@mdcinc.org)