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Baton Rouge Health District selected as EDA Build Back Better finalist - partner in Gulf Coast Health Sciences Corridor; Awarded half million-dollar planning award to compete in \$1 billion regional challenge

BATON ROUGE, LA - The Baton Rouge Health District, as a lead partner in the Gulf Coast Health Sciences Corridor, is one of 60 coalitions selected as a finalist for the EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge. This \$1 billion challenge, the marquee of EDA's American Rescue Plan programs, is a once-in-a-generation funding opportunity aimed at strengthening growth in communities nationwide by leveraging local assets and encouraging collaboration.

[EDA recently announced 60 finalists](#) out of a pool of over 500 applications. The Gulf Coast Health Sciences Corridor, a unique collaboration between hub cities Baton Rouge and New Orleans and led by the New Orleans BioInnovation Center in partnership with the Baton Rouge Health District, will receive a \$500,000 phase I award and will advance to Phase 2 and compete for up to \$100 million in American Rescue Plan funding to develop and scale the health sciences industry in Southeast Louisiana.

"The Baton Rouge Health District has demonstrated strong recent growth across all its dimensions as a physical healthcare destination, a coalition of health-related stakeholders, and as an anchor district organization," said Steven Ceulemans, Baton Rouge Health District Executive Director. "The continued federal support for our initiatives strengthens the value-proposition of our work and allows us to advance exciting and unique new initiatives for the betterment of our community and region."

The Baton Rouge Health District will serve as a lead partner in a regional Gulf Coast Health Sciences coalition of stakeholders from government, business, nonprofits, and academia. This coalition was awarded \$500,000 to develop a plan to transform the region into a national leader in health sciences with a focus on addressing obesity and chronic disease by: 1) creating economic opportunity through specialized workforce development with a focus on women, residents in rural areas and people of color,

and 2) strengthening the region's research development and commercialization pipeline through infrastructure and collaboration to leverage industry expertise and promote startup creation and investment.

"This Phase I award is a tremendous milestone in the expansion of key infrastructure developments in South Louisiana. These projects are intended to tackle some of our community's toughest problems through innovation and economic expansion, while driving growth in the BR/NO Super Region," stated Kris Khalil, Executive Director of the New Orleans BioInnovation Center. "Louisiana has a legacy of a strong healthcare sector combined with cutting-edge academic research. We look forward to the opportunity to accelerate our momentum through healthcare innovation."

The Gulf Coast Health Sciences Corridor is advancing a portfolio of projects aimed at new business growth, creating a robust job training pipeline, and retaining the small businesses and talent we need to transform our economic and health outcomes through the health sciences. These projects address facility and infrastructure needs, supercharge an equitable workforce pipeline, and achieve greater health and economic equity while growing our start-up ecosystem.

Key Baton Rouge initiatives will include:

- **A new Center for Innovation in Implementation Science**, to be planned and developed on the Pennington Biomedical Research Center campus. This Center will supercharge health innovation by accelerating adoption of scientific solutions by healthcare practitioners to commercialize and implement new research on how to effectively prevent, treat, and cure obesity, diabetes, cancer, and dementia more rapidly.

"Being a finalist for the Build Back Better Regional Challenge is an incredible achievement for the coalition, the Baton Rouge Health District, and an exciting opportunity for the region and the state. The potential award – up to \$100 million – could turbocharge efforts to turn the Baton Rouge/New Orleans corridor into a national leader in health sciences. By focusing on the disease of obesity and other chronic illnesses, the coalition can make an enormous difference in the health of Louisiana's people while creating economic opportunities for them," said John Kirwan, PhD, Executive Director, Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

- **A gateway infrastructure enhancement initiative** to transform the primary interstate entry points to the Baton Rouge Health District into signature gateways by enhancing the sense of arrival into a distinctive healthcare district and a major urban center. Planning, design, and engineering studies will be completed to upgrade the streetscape character to suitably match and support the quality of the existing healthcare facilities.

"The Health District is thrilled to receive this planning grant from the EDA. This grant can be transformational in our community while we work on infrastructure and healthcare innovation both locally and across the region," said John Spain, Chair of the Baton Rouge Health District Board and Executive Vice President of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

About the Baton Rouge Health District

The Baton Rouge Health District is a coalition of patient-focused, innovative healthcare organizations committed to the vision of a world-class, high performing health destination at the heart of a healthy and vibrant community. As a non-profit organization, the Health District promotes collaboration among healthcare providers, government officials, payors, higher education institutions and others to implement a master plan that will enhance healthcare and economic development in Baton Rouge. Founding members of the Baton Rouge Health District include Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Baton Rouge General Medical Center, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana, Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center, Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, Ochsner Health Systems, Pennington Biomedical Research Center at Louisiana State University and Woman’s Hospital. More information is available at <http://brhealthdistrict.com/>.

About the American Rescue Plan Programs

The Build Back Better Regional Challenge is one of many EDA programs aimed at building strong regional economies and supporting community-led economic development. Under the American Rescue Plan, EDA was allocated \$3 billion in supplemental funding to assist communities nationwide in their efforts to build back better by accelerating the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and building local economies that will be resilient to future economic shocks.

American Rescue Plan funding enables EDA to provide larger, transformational investments across the nation while utilizing its greatest strengths, including flexible funding to support community-led economic development. With an emphasis on equity, EDA investments made under the American Rescue Plan will directly benefit previously underserved communities impacted by COVID-19. For more information, visit www.eda.gov/ARPA.

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