

**CONTACT:**

Bridget Kelly  
Director, Communications  
714-246-8765  
bkelly@caloptima.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CALOPTIMA MEMBER AWARDED NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP**

*Local students also win scholarships from CalOptima Employee Activities Committee*

**ORANGE, California (September 18, 2017)** — After being nominated by CalOptima, Jacqueline Ruddy, a member since 2009, won a national scholarship from the Association for Community Affiliated Plans (ACAP). Jacqueline’s compelling story about being a mother, full-time student and two-time breast cancer survivor helped her achieve this national honor and a \$5,000 scholarship. She is pursuing a master’s degree in social work at USC.

To be eligible for the ACAP scholarship, Jacqueline first entered and won CalOptima’s local scholarship essay contest, which was sponsored for the second year in a row by the CalOptima Employee Activities Committee (EAC). The EAC scholarships are paid for entirely through employee-supported fundraisers.

CalOptima’s EAC scholarship contest was open to members of all ages pursuing degrees in health care or social services. Members were asked to share in their essays how they have benefited from CalOptima’s services, how their current studies will help them in the field of health care or social services, and why they are good candidates to receive the scholarships. Writers of the top three essays were awarded scholarships in the amount of \$1,000, \$750 and \$500.



*From left: CalOptima Director of Government Affairs Arif Shaikh, ACAP Senior Communications Director Jeff Van Ness, scholarship winner and CalOptima member Jacqueline Ruddy, and ACAP CEO Meg Murray.*

—more—

Read an excerpt from each scholarship winner's essay below:

**First Place EAC \$1,000 Scholarship Winner and ACAP \$5,000 Scholarship Winner:  
Jacqueline Ruddy, a mother and breast cancer survivor, finishing her final year at USC  
with a Master of Social Work**



“I was raising my sons on my own when I went back to college. On my son's second birthday, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had a mastectomy and two weeks later was back in school full time. I learned I would have chemotherapy and scheduled it around my classes. Despite blood clots, infections, domestic violence and poverty, I stayed in school to change our future and to demonstrate to my sons the importance of education. During my second battle with breast cancer, I graduated from UC Irvine, becoming the first in my family to be awarded a bachelor's degree. ... I held onto my vision for my family's future and the people I will someday be able to help.”

**Second Place EAC \$750 Scholarship Winner:  
Nichole Flores, a single mother, enrolled in Cal State Fullerton School of Nursing**



“My son is 9 years old and has been using CalOptima benefits since he was 4. CalOptima helps him get occupational therapy and provides him with an amazing and supportive pediatrician. He has been able to understand himself and the world around him with his Applied Behavior Analysis therapy. Because of all this support, both of our lives have been enriched and we have so much time together as a family. I have been able to go to college, finish my college degree, work on becoming a registered nurse and now go back to Cal State Fullerton for my bachelor's degree.”

**Third Place EAC \$500 Scholarship Winner:  
Kathy Dang, a nursing school candidate, enrolled in Golden West College School of Nursing**



“It will be both an honor and blessing to receive this award because with the intense hours that I have been devoting to school, I don't get the advantage to work as often as I did before the program started. The nursing program is expected to be a rigorous two-year experience, which requires 110% of my attention and focus because I am a passion-driven person. This scholarship will enhance my educational and career plan. ... The degree will open up many opportunities for me to give back and serve the community that once helped me.”

###

**About CalOptima**

A county organized health system, CalOptima provides publicly funded health care coverage for low-income children, adults, seniors and people with disabilities in Orange County, Calif. CalOptima's mission is to provide members with access to quality health care services delivered in a cost-effective and compassionate manner. In total, CalOptima serves nearly 800,000 members with a network of more than 7,200 primary care doctors and specialists, as well as 30 hospitals.

**About Association for Community Affiliated Plans (ACAP)**

ACAP is a national trade association that represents not-for-profit Medicaid health plans across the country. ACAP plans serve more than 17 million beneficiaries. The association is based in Washington, D.C.