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New National Initiative to Support and Expand Community Health Center Workforce

Foundation Makes Grants to Train and Retain Entry-Level Workforce Needed to Expand Community Health Center Capacity Under Health Reform

New York, NY – A major initiative to recruit, train, and retain the entry-level employees required by community health centers to deliver high-quality health care was announced today by the RCHN Community Health Foundation (RCHN CHF), the only national foundation dedicated solely to supporting community health centers. The foundation's Health Center Entry-Level Workforce Recruitment and Retention Initiative is designed to help the nation's 1,200 community health centers prepare for substantial growth in the next few years. Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, health centers will play an expanded role in delivering care, and more than thirty million additional Americans, many of whom are expected to seek services at community health centers, will obtain health insurance coverage.

The New York-based foundation has made grants to five community health centers, located in Hawaii, Maine, Mississippi, New York, and Washington. Working with local partners, including vocational programs, community colleges, and veterans groups, each of the centers will develop, implement, and test community-level approaches for ensuring that health centers have enough highly qualified entry-level staff to meet increasing demand. The foundation and the participating health centers will share their findings with

health centers across the country, most of which face similar challenges in recruiting and retaining entry-level workers. These staff members, including patient service representatives and medical assistants, work with clinical teams to deliver high-quality, coordinated care focused on the needs of patients, creating comprehensive “medical homes.” Key challenges for community health centers include training entry-level workers to use new electronic management and health record systems, implement new work flows, and appropriately code and bill for services while serving more patients, including an increasing number with complex health problems.

“In addition to providing essential preventive and primary health care services to nearly twenty million low-income Americans, our nation’s community health centers play a crucial role in creating good jobs for entry-level workers in economically distressed communities,” said Julio Bellber, President and CEO of the RCHN CHF. “Yet attracting, training, and retaining highly skilled, entry-level workers to support the delivery of high-quality care is challenging, especially as the health care environment becomes more complex. We’re working with health centers to help address this major challenge.”

With the support of the RCHN CHF, the following centers will pursue independent strategies in their communities:

Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center, Clarksdale, Mississippi, (\$199,948) will increase recruitment and improve retention of entry-level workers by implementing an educational and mentoring program for students interested in the health professions. The center will join with other nearby health centers to educate middle school and high school students about career opportunities in health care and to provide students in community and four-year colleges with internships and training. Moreover, the centers will develop specialized computer- and video-training modules for existing staff and offer training during work hours to enhance skills and job satisfaction.

Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, New York City, (\$200,000) will focus on retaining receptionists, medical assistants, case managers, and community health workers through an online training program. These

employees will learn more about delivering customer service, interacting effectively with the center's patients, working with electronic health records and management systems, and using appropriate medical terminology. Working with a community-based organization to develop a relevant curriculum, the center will offer bilingual English and Chinese training sessions during work hours for entry-level staff and train its mid-level managers to better mentor and support entry-level employees.

Penobscot Community Health Care, Bangor, Maine, (\$199,952) will retain more entry-level workers by focusing on training those frontline staff that speak with patients, schedule appointments, and prepare and use electronic medical records. Penobscot plans to provide professional development opportunities to its frontline employees so that they can offer more assistance and ensure a better care experience overall by creating a patient-centered environment. The center also plans to provide development skills to help staff advance along a career path. Finally, Penobscot will focus recruitment and training efforts for entry-level positions on individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds, maximizing job prospects for people who may not have considered applying for health care positions before. Penobscot will also work in partnership with the Maine Community College System as well as the state's other community health centers to ensure that the program is effective and replicable.

Seattle Indian Health Board, Seattle, Washington, (\$148,749) will create a comprehensive recruitment, development, and retention program for entry-level staff that are qualified to meet the unique needs of American Indian and Alaska Native patients. The center will recruit interns and future employees through local colleges and vocational training programs, develop student internships, focus outreach on American Indian and Alaska Native students, and enhance the skills of current staff in the areas of computer use, electronic health records, medical terminology, customer service, and cultural sensitivity. To accomplish this, the center will build on its existing relationships with community colleges, develop computer-training modules, and create clear career paths with financial incentives for those who make professional progress.

Wai'anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center, Wai'anae, Hawaii, (\$199,995) will train entry-level staff so that they are able to work both within and across multiple departments. In addition to offering its current employees opportunities for career development, Wai'anae will create internships for community college students who wish to embark on careers in health care and will increase opportunities, through existing educational programs and expanded outreach efforts, for U.S. veterans to obtain the skills they need to become successful health center employees.

“Community health centers are ready to build on their very strong foundations to both sustain and expand the delivery of comprehensive, high-quality, community-based health care as the new health care law goes into effect,” said Thomas Van Coverden, president and CEO of the National Association of Community Health Centers. “We welcome this initiative and look forward to learning from these local efforts and sharing effective strategies with our health center colleagues from coast to coast.”

About the RCHN Community Health Foundation

The RCHN Community Health Foundation, founded in October 2005, is a not-for-profit operating foundation whose mission is to support community health centers through strategic investment, outreach, education, and cutting-edge health policy research. The only foundation in the country dedicated solely to community health centers, RCHN CHF builds on health centers' forty-year commitment to the provision of accessible, high-quality, community-based healthcare services for underserved and medically vulnerable populations. For more information on RCHN CHF, visit www.rchnfoundation.org.