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## **Penobscot Community Health Care to Recruit, Train, and Retain Entry-Level Workers with Support of Major Grant**

### *State's Largest Community Health Center Will Lead Effort Focused on Training and New Career Opportunities for Maine's Health Care Workforce*

Bangor, ME – Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC) was awarded a \$199,952 grant as part of a major national initiative to recruit, train, and retain the entry-level employees required by community health centers to deliver high-quality health care. The grant was announced today by the center and 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.

PCHC's 600 employees, including 180 providers, care for over 50,000 medical and dental patients in the greater Bangor region. With the foundation's support, PCHC will focus on training frontline health center staff, especially patient service representatives (PSR's), who schedule appointments, register patients, answer a variety of patients' questions, and manage electronic medical and billing records. In addition to enhancing the skills of these workers, PCHC will work to retain them by defining clear expectations and opportunities to pursue careers in health care or in a community health center setting. Recruitment and training efforts for entry-level positions will be open to individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds, maximizing job prospects for people who may not have considered applying for health care positions before. PCHC will also work in partnership with the Maine Community College System and the state's other community health centers to ensure that the program is effective and replicable.

“We are committed to delivering the highest quality and most cutting-edge health care in order to help our patients improve their health, stay out of hospitals, and reduce the overall cost of health care. To accomplish that, we are increasing training opportunities for our hard-working staff,

including our patient service representatives, to help them provide the highest-quality services that focus on the needs of our patients,” said Ken Schmidt, Chief Executive Officer.

In addition to its grant to Penobscot Community Health Care, the New York-based RCHN CHF made grants to community health centers located in four other states: Hawaii, 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.

“We believe that Penobscot Community Health Care will lead the way for other health centers across the country by developing and testing programs to retain a strong workforce and providing new opportunities for returning veterans as well as older adults,” said Julio Bellber, President and CEO of the RCHN CHF. “This health care organization, which cares for over 50,000 patients at fifteen sites, also plays a crucial role in providing good jobs for entry-level workers, creating economic growth in Maine.”

“Community health centers are ready to build on their very strong foundations to 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 Penobscot Community Health Center**

PCHC, a non-profit organization founded in 1997, is the only federally qualified health center in the greater Bangor area. Its purpose is to ensure access to comprehensive and integrated out-patient health care services to those on MaineCare and Medicare, with or without insurance – regardless of their ability to pay. PCHC clinics are staffed by about 180 full- and part-time clinicians, including medical and dental practitioners, mental health providers, physical therapists, pharmacists, and medical specialists. The agency will provide about 350,000 patient visits for over 50,000 individuals in 2012. Its four largest clinics in Bangor, Brewer, and Old Town are open seven days a week for the convenience of its patients. Recognized by several national organizations as a leader among the nation’s community health centers and for the quality of the care it provides, PCHC is accredited by the Joint Commission in providing ambulatory care, laboratory services, and a primary care medical home for patients. PCHC was awarded National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) certification as a patient-centered medical home and for evidence-based medicine (diabetes and heart stroke), and has been named a top performer in the healthcare equality index and a top participator in the Maine Patient-Centered Medical Home Pilot project and Get Better Maine.

Fifteen clinics in the Bangor area offer a wide range of services, including family medicine, dental, pediatrics, geriatrics, nursing home care, psychiatry, mental health and substance abuse services, physical therapy, lab, x-ray, and pharmacy and healthcare for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. In addition, PCHC has a team of medical specialists that delivers a wide range of specialty services including allergy, gynecology, orthopedics, podiatry, dermatology, and osteopathic manipulative therapy. All PCHC services are provided with a sliding fee scale based on income through its Affordable Care Program to make certain that everyone can obtain the healthcare services they need. Approximately 4% of the budget of PCHC is funded by federal FQHC operating grants. For more information, visit [www.pchc.com](http://www.pchc.com).

#### **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](http://www.rchnfoundation.org).