



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation awards \$768,387 in grants to address health care disparities

CONTACT:

Susan Ryan-Vollmar
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation
617.246.2404
susan.ryanvollmar@bcbsma.com

BOSTON — The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation has awarded \$768,387 in grants to 11 community health organizations around the Commonwealth to address health care disparities on the basis of race, ethnicity, immigration status, age, mental illness, and sexual orientation. Eight organizations will receive checks for \$70,000. Three others will receive funding totaling \$69,956, \$68,435, and \$69,996.

The grant represents the first phase of an intended three-year award schedule in the *Closing the Gap on Health Care Disparities* program area from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. The grants support innovative programs designed to address health care disparities. The first phase will support program planning; all grantees are eligible to apply for further funding in August, 2009 to support program implementation.

“The mission of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation is to expand health care access for all residents of the Commonwealth,” said Jarrett T. Barrios, President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “The existence of health care disparities, particularly those based on race and

ethnicity, is well known. The Foundation believes these inequities in care delivery are adaptive problems and require that community members and providers collaborate to change health care delivery and create programs that will help eliminate the barriers to care. We see this as a chance to bring new voices to the table and to raise public awareness about achieving health equity.”

An innovative component of this grant area will be the creation of a statewide “learning community” to build relationships, share best practices, and create solutions among those who work in reducing health care disparities in the state. Members of the learning community will convene in person, as well as online.

The following organizations have been awarded grants in the Closing the Gap on Health Care Disparities grant program area:

AIDS Action Committee was awarded \$70,000 to support the efforts of a group of 20 women of color with AIDS and two clinical HIV/AIDS doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital. Together, the group will define barriers to care and develop proposed system changes to eliminate disparities in the delivery of health care to women of color with AIDS.

Cambridge Cares About AIDS was awarded \$70,000 to partner with the Justice Resource Institute and develop a Community Advisory Group to address the disparities in health care for HIV positive men of color who have sex with men. Late entry to medical care contributes to the higher mortality rate experienced by HIV positive men of color who have sex with men. This project will consist of a community-based participatory research project, creation of a strategic plan, infrastructure development and the design of an evidence-based community level intervention to reduce the number of individuals who delay accessing care.

Casa Latina was awarded \$70,000 to document why Latinos in Hampshire County under-utilize available healthcare resources. Casa Latina will partner with five Hampshire County health agencies as well as members of the county’s Latino population to develop an action plan to reduce disparities in health care access among Latinos in Hampshire County.

Central Massachusetts Area Health Education Center was awarded \$69,956 to study the reasons why Brazilians and Latinos in Framingham experience disparities in accessing mental health and substance abuse services and propose an intervention plan to reduce those disparities. Central Massachusetts Area Health Education Center will partner with the MetroWest Mental Health and

Substance Abuse Task Force to establish the Framingham Mental Health and Substance Abuse Health Disparities Project to oversee the initiative.

Community Health Center of Cape Cod was awarded \$70,000 to study and plan interventions to address the higher rates of diabetes among African, Asian, Latino, and Brazilian immigrants on Cape Cod. The center will partner with the other four community health centers on the Cape and Martha's Vineyard to run a project called "Healthy Immigrant Families" and build on the existing Cape and Island Diabetes Coalition collect data, analyze findings, and develop appropriate interventions.

Lowell Community Health Center was awarded \$70,000 to address the disparities experienced by Cambodian, African, Brazilian, and Latino immigrants in accessing mental health services. The health center will create the Gateways to Care program that will identify, study, and address the gaps in access to mental health services.

Mount Auburn Hospital was awarded \$70,000 to address the higher rates of diabetes experienced by Latinos in the Waltham community. Working with Power Program, WATCH, and the Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center, they will launch *Listen and Learn*, a comprehensive community and provider assessment and outreach initiative to reduce Type 2 and gestational diabetes.

Partners for a Healthier Community was awarded \$70,000 to address the higher rates of diabetes experienced by Latinos and African Americans in Springfield and Western Massachusetts. Partners will convene Reducing Health Disparities in Blacks and Hispanics at Risk of and with Diabetes to expand the community chronic care model for accessing care.

ServiceNet, Inc. was awarded \$70,000 build a coalition with the infrastructure to address the health and wellness needs of the chronically mentally ill and developmentally disable adults in Northampton and Western Massachusetts. ServiceNet will also conduct a thorough needs assessment and ecological survey of health wellness resources and plan interventions to reduce disparities in care for the developmentally disabled and chronically mentally ill.

Tapestry Health was awarded \$68,435 to address the high rates of teen pregnancy among Latina teens in Northampton and Western Massachusetts. The grant will fund the identification of inequities in health care practices, identify potential solutions, and implement interventions. Tapestry will also develop a

task force to address the disparities that result in high rates of pregnancy among Latina teens and will support teen involvement on the task force.

The YWCA of Central Massachusetts was awarded \$69,996 to address the health care disparities that result in higher rates of obesity among Latinos in the Worcester area. The YWCA will build a community coalition and enlist the support and participation of businesses, educators, and health care providers to study and develop interventions to address disparities in care among Latinos.

#

More about the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

The mission of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation is to expand access to health care. Through grants and policy initiatives, the Foundation works with public and private organizations to broaden health coverage and reduce barriers to care. It focuses on developing measurable and sustainable solutions that benefit uninsured, vulnerable and low-income individuals and families in the Commonwealth, and served as a catalyst for the pioneering Massachusetts health care reform law passed in 2006. The Foundation was founded in 2001 with an initial endowment of \$55 million from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts; the endowment has since grown to \$108 million. The Foundation operates separately from the company and is governed by its own 18-member Board of Directors. It is one of the largest private health philanthropies in New England and in 2007 was awarded the Paul Ylvisaker Award for Public Policy Engagement by the Council on Foundations.