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Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation awards \$485,000 in grants to help Mass. residents access health coverage

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BOSTON — The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation has awarded \$485,000 in grants to 22 community-based organizations, community health centers, and select hospital-based programs to help low-income consumers enroll in MassHealth, Commonwealth Care, the Health Safety Net, and other public and private health access programs and connect with providers. The grants range from \$20,000 to \$25,000.

“Although the state’s rate of uninsurance is at an historic low, there is still much work to do in helping people, particularly those who are new to the health care system, access care providers,” said Jarrett T. Barrios, President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “Particularly in these difficult times, this funding furthers the mission of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, by expanding health care access for all residents of the Commonwealth.”

The grants were made in the *Connecting Consumers with Care* grant program area, which was established by the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation in 2001. The funding is intended to strengthen community-based

efforts designed to ensure consumers understand, enroll, and maintain health coverage under MassHealth, Commonwealth Care, the Health Safety Net, and other public and private health access programs, and utilize the health care services to which they are entitled.

The following organizations have been awarded grants in the Connecting Consumers with Care program area:

African Community Health Initiatives (Boston) was awarded \$25,000 to support the *Early Intervention/Community Referral Program* which provides triage services to African immigrants and refugees, increases awareness of health insurance coverage programs, and refers clients to providers. Clients are screened for programs including MassHealth and Commonwealth Care, and often times, taken to the services that they need.

Berkshire Health Systems (Pittsfield) was awarded \$20,000 to support a Healthcare Specialist in the *Advocacy for Access* program. The Specialist will provide services in the inpatient Substance Abuse and Inpatient Psychiatric units of Berkshire Medical Center, as well as enrollment and follow-up to the Berkshire County House of Corrections and the Community Corrections Department. Rural uninsured working adults and individuals with special needs, such as disabilities, behavioral health issues, or correctional status, will be assisted, along with the Spanish-speaking population.

The Boston Public Health Commission was awarded \$25,000 to support the *Health Care Access Project*, which serves Vietnamese, Black, and Latino low-income and immigrant populations. Outreach will be conducted in auto body shops, nail salons, and Earned Income Tax Credit tax preparation sites. In addition to assisting clients with navigating the health care system and obtaining a primary care provider, the program will assist individuals with establishing a medical home and will work to address larger public health issues, such as reducing pollution and chemical exposure for immigrant workers.

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center was awarded \$25,000 to support the continuation of a train-the-trainer model whereby community leaders receive information about applying for and maintaining health care coverage. Information is also incorporated on prevention and wellness, and continuity of care and coverage for newly insured individuals.

Cambodian Mutual Assistance of Greater Lowell was awarded \$20,000 to support outreach and community education to inform clients of health care reform and available public health coverage programs, as well as application assistance. Members will be reached through communication channels, including Khmer radio, public-access cable television, and community forums. Additionally, the organization will conduct focus groups to assess community awareness of the health care reform law, and why some may not have applied for coverage yet.

Child Care Resource Center (Cambridge) was awarded \$20,000 to support a Health Access Specialist, who connects with families and individuals with young children who contact the organization for referrals to child care, as well as child care providers, with health insurance coverage. The organization screens all clients on their health coverage status, and refers individuals needing assistance. The agency will also author and adapt a broader inventory of health coverage materials for their clients.

Community Action Committee of Cape Cod & Islands, Inc. (Hyannis) was awarded \$25,000 to support a Health Outreach Educator, who will provide outreach and enrollment in the VNA Mobile Health Van of the *HOPE Project*. Outreach and marketing activities will target Brazilian and Hispanic communities, as well as Asian, Native American, and seasonal and immigrant workers from Jamaica, Pakistan, Russia, and Bulgaria. The project seeks to reach young-adult males, small business owners, and recently unemployed workers.

Community Action of the Franklin, Hampshire, and North Quabbin Regions (Greenfield) was awarded \$20,000 to support the *Healthy Connections* program, which is being merged with the *Community Action First Call for Help* program, in response to the challenging economic climate. *First Call for Help* works to meet the health care needs of residents in the North Quabbin region and reaches low- and moderate-income residents with health care information, assistance with health coverage issues or applications, and enrolls residents into public health insurance programs.

Community Health Connections, Inc. (Fitchburg) was awarded \$20,000 to support a bilingual/bicultural Outreach and Enrollment Coordinator, who will provide outreach, enrollment assistance, and ongoing case management to individuals and families with barriers to care and at risk of losing their health insurance. Outreach will be conducted in restaurants, businesses, public schools, and child care programs. Additionally, communication and collaboration with

health care providers, area social service agencies, and state agencies will be maintained to reduce barriers for newly enrolled applicants, generate referrals, and follow-up.

County of Dukes County (Martha's Vineyard) was awarded \$20,000 to support a Health Access Specialist and a bilingual Community Health Outreach Educator in the *Vineyard Health Care Access Program*, who will provide enrollment services to the island's low- and moderate-income residents, and work to minimize gaps in care as they impact the cycle of coverage among residents. Staff will educate clients on how to establish a primary medical home and appropriate use of the emergency room for points of care. A comprehensive outreach campaign in collaboration with local tax preparers will also take place during the 2009 tax season to reach the uninsured population.

Duffy Health Center (Hyannis) was awarded \$20,000 to support the health center's Benefit Coordinator, who serves individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and enrolls them into state programs, including MassHealth. Clients also receive referral coordination, which often leads them to housing, detox, counseling, and other services. Clients are ensured continued access to care through the encouragement of preventive services and assistance with follow-up issues.

Ecu-Health Care (North Adams) was awarded \$25,000 to support the maintenance of comprehensive public health insurance outreach and enrollment with one-on-one assistance and follow-up, as well as the institution of a broadcast and print media outreach campaign to inform the public of available health coverage programs. The organization will provide individualized enrollment assistance, and help residents in navigating the health care system including finding a primary care physician. Finally, Ecu-Health Care will assist with follow-up and evaluation of the steps involved in the enrollment process. Funding will allow for the organization to continue its widespread media campaign, of which it already has an extensive list of sources, to post various advertisements about the health care reform law, and publicize services offered by the organization.

The Joint Committee for Children's Health Care in Everett was awarded \$25,000 to support outreach to the Latino population, as well as expanding the organization's efforts to the African-American population. The Joint Committee will collaborate with 30 organizational partners to conduct a series of educational forums for parents, implement a culturally competent media campaign, and

provide individualized assistance to families at their offices and in the community, such as in churches. The program will also mobilize six bilingual Volunteer Health Advisors, thus enhancing their reach linguistically and culturally.

Manet Community Health Center (Quincy) was awarded \$20,000 to support the *Community Outreach Program*, which provides services to diverse populations including Asian, Arabic, and Brazilian communities. Services are provided to ensure linguistic and cultural competence. The program seeks to raise awareness and offer education in preventive and primary care, navigating the complex health care system, as well as offering information about the new standards of Minimum Creditable Coverage. The program participates in numerous South Shore events and collaborates with the many social service providers in the region.

Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (Cambridge) was awarded \$20,000 to support efforts connecting the Brazilian and Cape Verdean communities to health care services through the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate assistance. Immigrant case workers will provide outreach, community education, referrals to health care services, eligibility assistance, and system navigation.

The Mercy Hospital, Inc. (Springfield) was awarded \$20,000 to support services to provide at least 200 uninsured homeless and Vietnamese individuals with health insurance coverage and post-enrollment services. Additionally, the program seeks to address and eliminate barriers within the health care system that hinder an individual's ability to easily access care. The staff person whom this funding supports will advocate for systemic change, as well as collaborate with many community organizations.

Metrowest Legal Services (Framingham) was awarded \$25,000 to support a Project Paralegal who works with clients from the application through appeal processes. The Paralegal works in close collaboration with a Translator Advocate to provide services for the Brazilian population in the Metrowest region. Additionally, the Paralegal will work with clients on medical debt issues, assisting clients to work with hospital billing services to establish debt reduction payments or discount bills. The Paralegal will attend at least six outreach activities throughout the year, along with establishing a presence at the local Department of Transitional Assistance office to expand the reach of the agency.

Outer Cape Health Services, Inc. (North Eastham) was awarded \$25,000 to support *Healthy Connections*, the only enrollment agency for individuals and families on the Lower and Outer regions of Cape Cod. The program seeks to target the remaining uninsured population in the Barnstable County region, and provide them with health insurance eligibility determinations, enrollment assistance, help finding primary care and dental providers, referrals to social service agencies, and prevention education. The program seeks to assist individuals signing up for coverage amidst the increasingly acute shortage of primary care providers on the Cape. Many clients are seasonal workers, and so encounter the added complexities of demonstrating eligibility with fluctuating income criteria.

People Acting in Community Endeavors, Inc. (New Bedford) was awarded \$20,000 to support continued outreach and enrollment assistance services, and the documentation of health plan selection processes of clients, ensuring that connections are made between clients and physicians. Many in the target population are non-elderly adults who are long-term uninsured, linguistic minorities, and undocumented workers in the Greater New Bedford area. Outreach efforts will be made via media channels, personal contact, and in collaboration with other agencies and small businesses.

Stanley Street Treatment & Resources, Inc. (Fall River) was awarded \$25,000 for the *Health Access Program*, which provides outreach, eligibility determinations, and navigation assistance to individuals in Fall River and surrounding communities, and establishes partnerships with local agencies to problem-solve issues that arise for clients. A significant portion of the population is Portuguese-speaking, with the Brazilian and Hispanic populations needing substantial assistance with obtaining access to health care. In particular, the recently unemployed will be targeted, as well as a new referral partnership established with probation officers from the second district court. Through these referrals, the agency anticipates a decrease in dependence on the Health Safety Net, and therefore decreased costs on the system.

Steppingstone, Inc. (Fall River) was awarded \$20,000 to support *Project ACCTION*, which assists low- and moderate-income clients to obtain health insurance and access primary care services, and receives referrals from one of ten Steppingstone programs, which serve up to 150 substance abuse individuals. The program is based around raising consciousness in the substance abuse treatment community of health coverage issues; ongoing staff education; case management coordination; and the work of culturally competent staff. *Project ACCTION* will

utilize four education groups to educate and raise awareness among clients on issues of obtaining, maintaining, and understanding how to utilize services.

Tapestry Health (Florence) was awarded \$20,000 to support the implementation of various strategies to assist and enroll eligible and uninsured western Massachusetts residents into health coverage programs, including MassHealth, Commonwealth Care, the Women's Health Network, and Commonwealth Choice. Many clients are disproportionately affected by poverty, homelessness, and addiction. Through ten clinical sites, the program will utilize bilingual social marketing strategies, conduct outreach, and disseminate information.

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.