



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

News Release
Contact: Phillip Gonzalez
617.246.5434
phillip.gonzalez@bcbsma.com

BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MASSACHUSETTS FOUNDATION AWARDS \$1.25 MILLION TO 11 COALITIONS WORKING TO REDUCE HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES

Grants support initiatives in Greater Boston, Framingham, Cape Cod, Lowell, Springfield, Northampton, Worcester, and Hampshire County

BOSTON – October 21, 2010 – The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation has awarded \$1.25 million in grants to 11 coalitions around the Commonwealth to address health care disparities. Each coalition will receive \$113,636.

The grants represent the third installment of a three-year award in the *Closing the Gap on Health Care Disparities* grant program area. In their first year, these projects supported coalition-led efforts to assess the needs of their communities and built collaborative relationships between providers and consumer members. The second and third years of these projects are creating capacity among health care providers and community members to address the needs of populations suffering from health care disparities.

“Our eleven grantee coalitions have designed important programs that can make a real difference for their communities,” said Sarah Iselin, President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “With this third year of funding, we expect these coalitions of community-based organizations, providers, and consumers will take a leading role as Massachusetts continues to improve the health and health care access of communities experiencing disparities.”

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

AIDS Action Committee will continue implementing the *Peer Advocate Leaders (PALS) Program* in collaboration with the Massachusetts General Hospital. This effort intends to address the disproportionately high rates of morbidity and mortality among HIV-infected women of color. The coalition has trained and deployed its first peer navigator, who works as part of the medical team in the Massachusetts General Hospital's outpatient primary care clinic. Additional peer navigators will be deployed as they complete their training. The peer navigators provide support to patients and insights to the medical providers, improving access to and retention in care for women of color newly diagnosed with HIV.

Cambridge Cares About AIDS will continue implementing the *We're Still Here* initiative which is focused on black and African American men who have sex with men. These men experience significant barriers to health care access and a lack of provider capacity to address their specific health needs. A training curriculum has been developed using the Theatre of the Oppressed framework, which enables members of the target population to identify barriers and solutions by acting out their experiences. The coalition has

organized a learning community that includes other provider organizations serving this population and is working with policymakers and academic institutions in Cambridge to share effective practices. The coalition is also developing cultural competence workshops specifically focused on promoting effective practices for working with men of color who have sex with men.

Casa Latina will continue implementing the *Bridges to Latino Health/Puentes a la Salud Coalition* which is focused on addressing health care disparities suffered by the Latino community in Hampshire County. The organization is utilizing a community health worker who has developed a case management infrastructure for clients who experience barriers to accessing care. In addition, they will adapt bilingual education materials and signage in the provider facilities of Valley Medical Group and Northampton Area Pediatrics to create a more welcoming and accessible environment for patients.

Central Massachusetts Area Health Education Center will continue its partnership with the MetroWest Mental Health and Substance Abuse Task Force to increase access to behavioral health services for Latinos and Brazilians in Framingham. The coalition is implementing a behavioral health curriculum with Portuguese-speakers entitled *Conversemos em Familia*, and is beginning to coordinate behavioral health and primary care services at the Framingham Community Health Center. The coalition is also providing a mini-grant to the Framingham English as a Second Language Program, which will enable instructors to screen for behavioral health needs among their students and refer them for appropriate services.

Community Health Center of Cape Cod will continue implementing the *Healthy Immigrant Families Initiative* which is addressing the increased obesity and diabetes rates among immigrants on Cape Cod. The coalition includes community members, church members and businesses. It has developed a training model entitled *promotoras de saude e da beleza*, in which salon workers are trained as health and beauty promoters to educate customers about healthy diet, physical activity and stress reduction. The coalition is also training other community health workers in the Chronic Disease Self Management model.

Lowell Community Health Center will continue implementing the *Gateways to Care Program* which works to improve the health of Cambodians, Africans, Brazilians and Latinos suffering from depression. A *Promotoras de Salud* community health worker model will be used to train Spanish-speaking *promotoras* about depression, anxiety, stress and mental health resources in the Lowell area, with a version to be developed for Portuguese-speaking *promotoras*. Mini-grants have been awarded to several community-based organizations, including the Latino Health Institute, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers and Christ Jubilee International Ministries. These organizations are working in a coordinated fashion to increase public awareness of mental health issues and how to get needed care.

Mount Auburn Hospital will continue implementing *Listen and Learn* which seeks to reduce the incidence of type 2 diabetes among Latinos in Waltham. The coalition is developing the leadership capacity of the community by providing training and education to community members on issues ranging from racism to cultural competency. The coalition is also improving the ability of health care providers by training the staff of Mount Auburn Hospital and the Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center on health care disparities and cultural competency.

Partners for a Healthier Community will continue implementing the *FIT+* project which works to reduce childhood obesity in Springfield and reduce the incidence of type 2 diabetes. A training series is being implemented with Spanish-speaking facilitators and interpreters from the North End Outreach Network. The content of the series includes topics such as facilitative leadership, the impact of social determinants of health, and other public health concepts. Resources will also be shared with community members who seek to form neighborhood prevention teams with plans for addressing obesity among children and families through policy change.

ServiceNet will continue implementing the *Your Way (Wellness and You)* effort that targets the increased rates of obesity and chronic health conditions among the severely mentally ill. The project includes a strong focus on developing the skills of individuals with mental illness so they serve as peer leaders. The coalition effort is also educating medical and mental health providers through a marketing campaign and

training opportunities about how to address the health care disparities experienced by the severely mentally ill. Additionally, a training program for facilitators of smoking cessation classes is being developed.

Tapestry Health will continue implementing the *Addressing Latina Health Disparities* program which is addressing the high rate of teen pregnancy among Latina residents in Springfield and Holyoke. The coalition has established a new sex education curriculum in the Holyoke and Springfield school systems, and teen members of the coalition are monitoring the implementation of the curriculum. The coalition is exploring the possibility of establishing satellite and express clinics in neighborhood-based organizations, as well as potentially creating a teen clinic on board the organization's mobile health van.

The **YWCA of Central Massachusetts** will continue implementing the *Peso Sano Ahora (PASA) Coalition* which is addressing the elevated rates of obesity among Latinos in Worcester. The coalition has provided a significant number of families with access to educational and fitness activities through a program called Club Pasa. The Club Pasa effort also provides assistance to members of the Latino community so they can work with their health providers and schools to adopt a healthier lifestyle. The coalition hosts a monthly educational dinner event, *La Hora de Cena Saludable*, which will be taken to other locations to engage more stakeholders. The YWCA will also be including more family friendly programming and increased hiring of staff from the Latino community.

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. It focuses on collaborating with public and private stakeholders to develop measurable and sustainable solutions that benefit uninsured, vulnerable, and low-income individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The Foundation was formed in 2001 with an endowment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. It operates separately from the company and is governed by its own Board of Directors.

###