

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation Awards \$3 Million in Grants to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Health Care Disparities in Massachusetts

BOSTON – October 3, 2005 - The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) Foundation has awarded \$3 million in grants to 10 nonprofit health care organizations across the state in an effort to reduce racial and ethnic health care disparities in Massachusetts.

Many racial and ethnic groups face significant barriers to quality health care and as a result have higher disease and mortality rates compared to white, non-Hispanic residents. African American babies in Massachusetts are twice as likely to die during the first year of life as white babies. While African-American and Latinos are just 15% of the state's population, they account for more than 50% of all new AIDS patients reported. Boston has double the statewide average of asthma hospitalizations for children under five, most of whom are Black and Latino.

The Foundation's *Closing the Gap on Racial and Ethnic Health Care Disparities* grants will support initiatives that take a comprehensive and innovative approach to improving access and reducing barriers to health care and support services for racial and ethnic minorities. In the largest grant program yet established by the Foundation, each of the grant recipients will receive \$300,000 to fund one year of program planning and two years of program implementation.

"There is clear evidence that health care disparities have a significant impact on the physical and mental health of many in our communities," said Philip W. Johnston, chair of the BCBSMA Foundation. "We are hopeful that the Foundation's grant program will assist in laying the groundwork for long-term institutionalized solutions to this problem that can be implemented throughout our health care system."

"Patient advocates, providers, and public officials are coming together as a community to solve this local health care crisis and we are proud to join in their efforts," said Celeste Reid Lee, director of community health programs, BCBSMA Foundation. "Since there is no single solution, our program supports a variety of strategies designed to reduce disparities and improve access for all residents of the Commonwealth to high quality health services and medical treatment."

The Foundation has enlisted Massachusetts General Hospital's Disparities Solutions Center to evaluate the overall impact of this grant initiative and assist grant recipients with their individual program evaluation. Launched in July of this year, the Center is dedicated to developing policies and changing the delivery of care to help eliminate racial and ethnic differences in health care.

"The Foundation's commitment to addressing the issue of health disparities has the potential to improve the quality of life for residents throughout the state in the short and long term," said Joseph Betancourt, MD, MPH, Director of the MGH Disparities Solutions Center.

"Furthermore, the knowledge and insights gained over the next three years could be used to expand these initiatives and replicate the models both locally and nationally."

The recipients and their proposed initiatives are as follows:

Alliance for Inclusion and Prevention, Inc. will launch an initiative to address the high levels of untreated mental health problems and the pervasive presence of traumatic stress among African American, Latino and Somali youth in the Grove Hall neighborhood of Dorchester and the surrounding areas.

Boston Medical Center will help to reduce infant mortality by addressing health care disparities that affect pregnant and postpartum African American women in Boston inner city neighborhoods.

Caring Health Center, Inc. will reduce diabetes-related health disparities affecting African American and Hispanic residents in the Greater Springfield area by addressing patient, provider and system-level issues.

Cape Cod Free Clinic and Community Health Center will develop a continuum of services to identify and coordinate care for African American, Latin American, and Native American residents that have untreated and poorly controlled diabetes.

Center for Community Health Education Research and Services (CCHERS) will implement a clinical pharmacy intervention program in Dorchester and Roxbury community health centers to reduce persistent health care disparities among African American and Latino children with asthma.

DotWell, a collaborative effort of Codman Square Health Center and the Dorchester House Multi-Service Center, will implement a comprehensive program that targets African American residents who have diabetes or are at risk for developing the disease to prevent acute incidents and complications, and help patients address the lifestyle issues related to diabetes.

Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Inc. will address the disproportionate prevalence of asthma among Latino adults and children in Lawrence through an intensive nurse case manager program and comprehensive patient action plan.

Holyoke Health Center will improve and maintain positive behavioral changes and health outcomes by providing a series of interventions tailored to the psychosocial and cultural needs of Holyoke Latinos who have or are at high risk for developing cardiovascular disease.

Partners in Health/PACT will partner with two Greater Boston community health centers to improve health outcomes among African American and Latino HIV positive patients.

Tufts-New England Medical Center, Inc. (NEMC) will partner with two Boston Public Schools in Chinatown to create a comprehensive initiative that addresses the extremely high incidence of asthma among Asian American children.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

Since its inception in 2001, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation (www.bcbsmafoundation.org) has awarded grants of more than \$12 million to spark innovation

and strengthen services for uninsured and low-income individuals and families in Massachusetts. The Foundation is governed by its own 17-member Board of Directors and operates separately from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. The Foundation has an endowment of more than \$73 million making it one of the largest health philanthropies in Massachusetts.

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