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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

**Affects Cambridge, Boston, Framingham, Cape Cod, Lowell, Springfield, Northampton, Worcester, and Hampshire County**

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**BOSTON** — The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation has awarded \$1.25 million 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. Each organization will receive \$113,636.

The grants represent the second 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 first phase focused on assessing community need, and building collaborative relationships with providers and relevant community organizations. In this second phase, grantees will begin implementing their programs. All grantees are eligible to apply for further funding in August, 2010 for the project's final phase.

"Our grantees have come up with some innovative ways to address health care disparities in their communities," said Anya Rader Wallack, Interim President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. "We will share what we learn from these programs about closing gaps on health care disparities. It's one of the fundamental ways we can expand access to health care in the Commonwealth."

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

**AIDS Action Committee** will partner with Massachusetts General Hospital to run a peer navigation program in the Infectious Disease Clinic at the hospital. HIV+ women will work with newly diagnosed HIV positive women of color to improve their access to and retention in optimal care.

**Cambridge Cares About AIDS** will implement the We're Still Here Health Disparities Project which will train HIV positive Black men in theater and leadership skills. The Disparities Project will work with providers to change the way they interact with men of color who have sex with men — a population that has historically seen a higher mortality rate from HIV than average due, in part, to their delays in seeking care.

**Casa Latina** will implement the Bridges to Latino Health/Puentes A La Salud Latina program to help reduce disparities in health care access among Latinos in Hampshire County. Bridges will

focus on training community health workers to help providers and patients communicate more effectively; consumer education to promote prevention activities and chronic disease self-management; and building community awareness of health equity and disparities.

**Central Massachusetts Area Health Education Center** has partnered with the MetroWest Mental Health and Substance Abuse Task Force to increase access to behavioral health services for Latinos and Brazilians in the Framingham area. The project will use community health workers to educate the community and will improve the cultural competence and accessibility of behavioral health providers in the region.

**Community Health Center of Cape Cod** will implement the Healthy Immigrant Families (HIF) project to enhance opportunities for healthy eating and exercise among immigrant children on Cape Cod. HIF intends to reach 5,000 immigrants through school workshops and public awareness activities. The project will facilitate coordination among schools, families, and health care providers to deliver consistent health messages, foster positive health behavior change, and make healthier food options available at schools.

**Lowell Community Health Center** will implement the Gateways to Care (GTC) Program to address the disparities experienced by Cambodian, African, Brazilian, and Latino immigrants in accessing behavioral health services. GTC will focus on increasing community awareness about depression and how it can be treated. It will do this, in part, by screening for depression at health promotion events and creating a mini-grants program for community education projects.

**Mount Auburn Hospital** will implement Listen and Learn, a program focused on reducing Type 2 diabetes among Latinos in Waltham. The Listen and Learn project will educate providers about health disparities, support the development of a Latino Health Leadership Group, and lead a public awareness campaign about health disparities.

**Partners for a Healthier Community** will focus on reducing childhood obesity among Blacks and Latinos living in three Springfield neighborhoods. The project will train community health workers, support business and neighborhood efforts to increase access to healthy foods, and provide educational efforts to promote healthier eating habits in school and within families to reduce childhood obesity.

**ServiceNet, Inc.** will support a coalition created to address the health and wellness needs of developmentally disabled adults and the chronically mentally ill in Northampton and Western Massachusetts who have, on average, a 25 year reduced lifespan. The coalition will create a support network among primary care doctors, clients and behavioral health staff to communicate about wellness and support positive health changes with a focus on exercise, healthy eating and smoking cessation.

**Tapestry Health** will implement a project aimed at reducing the high rates of teen pregnancy among Latina teens in Northampton and Western Massachusetts. In addition to improving cultural competency at Tapestry through the implementation of community health worker, the project will develop leadership skills among teens who can engage with their peers. The coalition will also produce a media campaign on the issues related to teen pregnancy.

**The YWCA of Central Massachusetts** will implement Worcester Healthy Weight Now/Worcester Peso Sano Ahora to increase healthy eating and physical activity among Latinos living in four Worcester neighborhoods. The goal of the project is to reduce the high rates of obesity among Latinos in Worcester. The program will launch with a Worcester-wide public awareness effort.

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**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 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 for its work on Massachusetts health care reform by the Council on Foundations.