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North Carolina Community AIDS Fund Launches Major HIV/AIDS Initiative to Break Down Barriers to Care

Durham, NC -- The North Carolina Community AIDS Fund at the Duke University Center for Health Policy has been awarded a three-year grant from the National AIDS Fund to increase access to medical care among individuals living with HIV/AIDS in three areas across the state. The three-year initiative will bring approximately \$1 million to North Carolina, making it the largest privately funded access to care project in the state.

The goals of the first-of-its-kind initiative by the North Carolina Community AIDS Fund will be to identify and address the barriers that prevent people from receiving medical care in three selected communities, engage the HIV positive population earlier in their disease in an effort to reduce HIV transmission, and improve the ability of agencies in the state to provide HIV education and referral services. The initiative aims to reach an estimated 1,000 people living with HIV/AIDS.

According to Kathryn Whetten, Director of the Center for Health Policy, "Over a decade of research in North Carolina and throughout the Deep South has told us that some of the primary reasons that nearly one-third of those who know that they are infected with HIV are not seeking care because: they do not trust the care system to provide them with good care; they are afraid of the stigma associated with the disease if their families and communities discover their HIV status; the daily poverty in which they live creates so many competing urgent demands, the long term consequences are not as important in comparison; many of those infected have co-morbidities such as mental health or substance abuse; and for the women, who represent nearly one-third of those infected, the needs of their children are felt to be more important than their own needs for health care."

North Carolina Community AIDS Fund will work collaboratively with partners in Charlotte, Wilmington and the rural Hertford County region to organize teams of 3 to 4 HIV positive peer educators who will reach out to people with HIV to both address the various barriers to accessing care and bring the necessary HIV services to non-traditional HIV providers in these communities.



North Carolina Community AIDS Fund and partners were invited to a White House Panel on the Role of Public/Private Partnerships as a new recipient of major access to care funding for HIV/AIDS.

Partnering agencies include Hertford County Public Health Authority, New Hanover Regional Medical Center, AIDS Care and Educational Services, Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN), and the Mecklenburg County Health Department. Partners In Caring will provide training for the peer educators.

“We are honored to have been selected for the National AIDS Fund's Positive Charge Initiative. In the Charlotte - Mecklenburg area, nearly 50% of people living with HIV/AIDS are not in care. We

are deeply concerned about the barriers that are keeping these folks from accessing treatment,” said Rev. Deborah Warren, President and CEO of RAIN. “The Positive Charge grant enables RAIN to use the skills and experience of HIV positive peers who are a tremendous resource with outreach to people living with HIV/AIDS.

The announcement was made Thursday in conjunction with the White House Panel on the Role of Public Private Partnerships in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy. Grantees from across the country joined funders and advocates to discuss the important role that strategic partnerships will play in shaping the Obama administration's National HIV/AIDS Strategy, which is exploring new ways to address the continuing HIV epidemic.

The grant awarded to the North Carolina Community AIDS Fund is part of The National AIDS Fund's Positive Charge Initiative, which partnered with Bristol-Meyers Squibb to fund access to care initiatives in five locations across the country, including North Carolina, Louisiana, New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco/Oakland.

Despite three decades of progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS over a million people in the US are living with HIV, and two-thirds of those, an estimated 640,000, are either undiagnosed not in medical care or not receiving the treatment they need. In North Carolina, an estimated 11,000 people with HIV/AIDS are not in care.

“This is a unique opportunity for North Carolina to bring vulnerable populations into medical care, improving not just the individual's health, but the health of our communities,” said Beth Stringfield, program director, North Carolina Community AIDS Fund. “The lessons we learn from this initiative – the barriers to accessing medical care and how to address them – will be shared across the state to help all our residents regardless of HIV status get the medical care they need.”

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About The North Carolina Community AIDS Fund

The North Carolina Community works across the state to increase the capacity of communities to respond to the HIV epidemic locally. Through strategic partnerships including grantmaking, AmeriCorps, and new program development, NCCAF identifies innovative means of addressing the unique barriers to HIV education, prevention, and treatment in North Carolina.

The North Carolina Community AIDS Fund is a funding collaborative of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, National AIDS Fund, North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund, and The Duke Endowment. It is housed at the Duke University Center for Health Policy.

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