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CENTER FOR MINORITY HEALTH LAUNCHES THE HEALTHY BLACK FAMILY PROJECT IN EFFORT TO DECREASE DIABETES AND HYPERTENSION IN PITTSBURGH NEIGHBORHOODS

PITTSBURGH, Oct. 26, 2004 –The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH) Center for Minority Health (CMH) has taken their public health campaign to city neighborhoods by launching the Healthy Black Family Project (HBFP), an ambitious intervention designed to prevent diabetes and hypertension in black neighborhoods in Pittsburgh’s East End.

The program was announced today in a news conference at the Kingsley Association Community Center, 6435 Frankstown Ave., in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood.

“Today we plant the flag of health promotion and disease prevention by opening a field office right here in the Kingsley Association’s new facility,” said Stephen Thomas, Ph.D., director of CMH and Philip Hallen Professor of Community Health and Social Justice at GSPH.

Also participating in today’s news conference were Mark Nordenberg, chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh; Kenneth Melani, M.D., chief executive officer of Highmark Blue Cross-Blue Shield; and William Trueheart, Ed.D., president and chief executive officer of The Pittsburgh Foundation.

With funding support from The Pittsburgh Foundation, DSF Charitable Foundation and Highmark Foundation, the HBFP team will conduct door-to-door recruitment of black families to join in a multi-year effort to improve



diet, increase physical activity and reduce stress as a demonstration of translating the best public health and medical science into practical steps people can make to take control of their health by reducing risk factors for chronic disease.

With more than 18 million Americans living with diabetes and another 16 million aged 40 to 74 with a condition called pre-diabetes (blood glucose levels higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes), the CMH has assembled a team of trusted community based organizations including the Centers for Healthy Hearts and Souls, the Kingsley Association and Hosanna House along with medical experts from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Healthy Lifestyle program and computer technology specialists from Carnegie Mellon University all focused on breaking the cycle of heart disease and diabetes through lifestyle behavior change, chronic disease management, access to medical care, access to preventive services and eliminating exposure to environmental toxins in the home and neighborhood.

Additionally, the BTC Center of Baptist Temple Church in Homewood will provide linkages to church partners and other community based organizations focused on making health and wellness a priority. The HBFP also will engage public housing communities in partnership with the Family Resources' Beverly J. Wall-Lovelace Children's Program.

"It is critical that we accept the evidence and begin to act on what we know," Dr. Thomas said. "For example, disparities between the health status of blacks and whites were well-documented in the 2002 publication of the Black Papers on Health Status of African Americans in Allegheny County by the University of Pittsburgh Center on Social and Urban Research and the Urban League of Pittsburgh."

He noted that diabetes death rates for black females and males are about two times the rate for whites. Also in 2002, the Pennsylvania Department of Health released a report that examined Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey data for Pennsylvania that identified racial disparities in risk factors for diabetes and heart disease.



The state reported that significantly higher percentages of African American adults and children were overweight and only 20 percent reported eating at least two servings of vegetables a day. Additionally, 31 percent of African American adults were smokers.

“Further, at the neighborhood level, a Homewood-Brushton community needs assessment, funded by The Pittsburgh Foundation, examined social conditions and reported that between 1995 and 1999, heart disease accounted for the highest mortality rate (20.7%) in persons less than 65 years of age,” Dr. Thomas said.

“Cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes are preventable and we aim to ensure that culturally appropriate and scientifically sound health promotion and disease prevention efforts reach Pittsburgh’s African American community. The evidence is clear that risk factors for chronic disease are concentrated in African American communities and we must reach them where they live,” said Dr. Thomas. “We believe it is in the best interest of insurance companies, like Highmark, to invest in programs like the Healthy Black Family Project as one way to engage the African American community in disease prevention,” he said.

With analytic support from the Allegheny County Health Department, the East End of the city has been designated a “Health Empowerment Zone” for the project with the neighborhoods consisting of 80 percent African American residents and approximately 26 percent of the people living below the federal poverty line. The priority neighborhoods include, but are not limited to the East Hills, East Liberty, Homewood North, Homewood South, Homewood West, Larimer, Lincoln-Larimer and Wilkinsburg.

Another goal of the project is to engage at least 10 percent of the 47,519 individuals living in these neighborhoods in healthy behaviors such as nutrition, exercise, support groups or health ministries. With blacks being twice as likely to develop diabetes than whites and the leading cause of death among people who have diabetes being heart disease or stroke, there is a definite need to inform blacks of the risks and prevention methods for both diabetes and hypertension.



According to the American Diabetes Association, research shows that if individuals take action to control their blood glucose levels when they have pre-diabetes, or lower blood pressure levels when they are pre-hypertensive, they can delay or even prevent Type 2 diabetes and other chronic conditions from ever developing.

Founded in 1948, and fully accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health, GSPH is world-renowned for contributions that have influenced public health practices and medical care for millions of people. One of the top-ranked schools of public health in the United States, GSPH is the only fully-accredited school of public health in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, with alumni who are among the leaders in their fields of public health. A member of the Association of Schools of Public Health, GSPH currently ranks third among schools of public health in NIH funding received. The only school of public health in the nation with a chair in minority health, GSPH is a leader in research related to women's health, HIV/AIDS, and human genetics, among others.

CMH was established in 1994 with a generous grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation. CMH is committed to taking a lead role in the nation's prevention agenda to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities as described in Healthy People 2010, a DHHS initiative.