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Lane County, Central Oregon organizations win state health care grants

The state awarded two grants Friday to organizations to develop innovative ways to improve Oregon families' access to health care that is affordable and effective.

The two organizations in Lane County and the Central Oregon tri-county area were named by the Oregon Department of Human Services to receive the \$250,000 grants after the Northwest Health Foundation reviewed applications.

Named to receive the grants were:

- HealthMatters of Central Oregon, a community health collaborative serving Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties.
- United Way of Lane County, which serves uninsured Lane County residents through its 100% Access Healthcare Initiative.

"We were able to make these grants because of the good work of the Legislature's 2008 special session," said Bruce Goldberg, M.D., DHS director. "The Northwest Health Foundation did an excellent job of applying its expertise in health care delivery reform to identify two organizations that can raise the quality of health care delivery in our state."

The grants were authorized last year by House Bill 3626, which directed that one of the grants must be for a rural area. The grants include an evaluation component to measure the two organizations' success. The 2009 Oregon Legislature is expected to review proposals to expand health care coverage.

“One strategy to achieve our mission to advance, support and promote the health of the people in Oregon and Southwest Washington is to support innovative approaches taking place in communities across Oregon,” said Thomas Aschenbrener, Northwest Health Foundation president. “By establishing collaborative relationships among health stakeholders and organizing the delivery of primary care in a more effective and efficient manner, initiatives such as those of HealthMatters of Central Oregon and Lane County 100% Access are creating solutions – today – to the health care crisis.”

The legislative bill directed that grants be used to promote a number of health care values including access to appropriate, affordable and efficiently delivered primary care for families; improved health care access for children; health care effectiveness; preventive services; and alternative reimbursement models.

In its proposal, Health Matters of Central Oregon said the 19 percent uninsured rate in the three counties it serves is the state’s highest, more than one in four residents have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and the state Office of Rural Health has designated the three counties an “area of unmet medical need.” The organization seeks to improve health outcomes by enrolling uninsured people in programs for which they are eligible and connecting people with evidence-based treatments. Health Matters also is launching four community-based initiatives focusing on covering uninsured low-income workers, coordinating care for children, regionalizing chronic disease management and providing wellness and consumerism tools for Central Oregon employees.

United Way of Lane County, meanwhile, said 57,000 county residents are uninsured, giving Lane County a rate of uninsured slightly higher than the state average. United Way’s 100% Access Healthcare Initiative is the community response to a 2004 community needs assessment that revealed the top three issues affecting family stability were the cost of or access to doctors, affordable medications and health insurance. 100% Access has successfully engaged hundreds of community partners and coordinated a system of safety-net clinics for the uninsured and underinsured. Its medical access pilot program already coordinates health and social services for a group of uninsured residents who are screened for program eligibility, enrolled in medical homes and whose services are tracked on a HIPAA-compliant Web system.