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Health Department Expands Access to Care in Harford County through Maryland Community Health Resources Grant Award

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From the Harford County Health Department:

Recognizing the importance of improving access to health care for those in need, the Harford County Health Department applied for and was awarded a \$156,052 18-month grant for "Increasing Access to Comprehensive Women's Health Services and Reducing Infant Mortality in Harford County," from the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission (MCHRC).

Building on successful interventions from Maryland's Strategic Plan for Reducing Infant Mortality that have contributed to a 16% statewide infant mortality rate improvement over the past two years, Harford County is launching a Comprehensive Women's Health Services Program this month. Women in need of subsidized clinical family planning care may now also receive a comprehensive set of services that include Medicaid screening/eligibility, WIC nutrition services, dental referrals, substance abuse/mental health referrals, smoking cessation services, domestic violence screening/prevention, and other prevention services. Community outreach and follow up with at-risk clients will also be an integral part of the program. Harford County's Women's Health/Family Planning Program is located at 1321 Woodbridge Station Way in Edgewood.

"The timing of Harford County's Comprehensive Women's Health Program launch is ideal," says Jean Toth, Program Director, "because it coincides with a new State law that just went into effect on January 1st that expands eligibility for Medicaid family planning services to many more women." The expansion will allow Maryland women who are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and under 51 years of age to be eligible for services such as screenings for breast and reproductive cancer, pelvic examinations, high blood pressure, and tests for sexually transmitted diseases. Previously, Maryland only allowed women to be eligible for the program after they had their first baby. Program expansion will improve women's health and save the State money by reducing unintended pregnancies.

The Harford County Health Department is well positioned to expand health care access, as evidenced by its success with another MCHRC grant that it received to establish the County's first public health dental facility in 2008. Since opening, the Health Department has offered dental services to children who may never before have had a dental examination and in a county that, at one time, had one of the highest rates of dental disease in the State. The clinic provides a dental home for its patients and has demonstrated remarkable success, providing care to more than 5,300 of the 14,000 children, ages 1-20, and pregnant women enrolled in Maryland's Medical Assistance Program. The dental clinic's popularity has necessitated a renovation and expansion of its facility from three to five dental chairs at its facility located at 2204 Hanson Road in the Edgewood Plaza Shopping Center.

"In addition to offering dental cleanings, oral examinations, fluoride treatments, sealants and fillings, the clinic will now offer some oral surgery and endodontic services (root canals) on site two days a month," says Marcy Austin, Dental Clinic Manager. "These invaluable services will eliminate the need to refer patients out for specialty care so that children and pregnant women can receive a full array of general and specialty services in their dental home."

"While Harford County residents benefit from MCHRC grant opportunities for improving access to care for those in need, these two programs also serve as shining examples of how to generate potential for systematic reform in Maryland," states Harford County Health Officer, Susan Kelly. "The Harford County Health Department, through its Local Health Improvement Process, is working every day with community stakeholders to identify critical health care needs and gaps and find creative ways for addressing them."

Created by the Maryland General Assembly in 2005, the core mission of the MCHRC is to award grants that help expand access to health care for low-income Marylanders and help stimulate innovative projects such as the Comprehensive Women's Health Program and the Children's Dental Clinic programs in Harford County. "Harford County is developing an integrated model of care and providing a blueprint for policy

innovation in Maryland,” commented Mark Luckner, Executive Director, Maryland Community Health Resources Commission. “Harford County is showing the way, and they are to be commended.”

An open house that will celebrate the Children’s Dental Clinic expansion and the Comprehensive Women’s Health Program award is being planned. For more information, please contact the Harford County Health Department at 410-612-1771 or visit their website at www.harfordcountyhealth.com.

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