Alameda County Public Health Department Receives $200,000 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant to Increase Economic Opportunity Across the County

OAKLAND, CA— The Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) has been awarded a Roadmaps to Health Community Grant of $200,000 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to improve the long-term health of people in Alameda County by expanding economic opportunity. The grant will support the Alameda County Prosperity Project, an innovative collaboration of the Alameda County Community Assets Network convened by the Urban Strategies Council.

The Prosperity Project will improve community health by providing residents with the opportunity to protect their income from high-interest financial services, like payday lenders, and build financial assets.

“Economic well-being is fundamentally related to personal health and the health of our communities,” remarked Alex Briscoe, director of Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, which oversees public, environmental and behavioral health care. “Without access to the tools necessary to protect their economic assets, families have trouble meeting basic needs to keep themselves healthy, such as shelter, food, transportation and healthcare. Families struggling to make ends meet also can’t save for the future or afford college or save enough to buy a home – investments that we know improve health outcomes.”

In Alameda County, many residents lack access to mainstream financial products and services that credit unions and banks offer. Data from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Center for Responsible Lending, show that in Oakland alone, one in six households do not have access to a checking or savings account and use predatory financial services – such as check cashers, payday lenders, and pawn shops – to meet their banking and credit needs.

These predatory financial services divert hard-earned income away from households’ basic needs, but also out of communities that are struggling to recover economically. Payday loans - just one of the predatory financial products targeted to the under-banked - leach more than $3.89 million out of Oakland over the course of one year – enough to send about 140 Oakland youth to UC Berkeley for one year.

“We know that you can’t improve health in low-income communities without also improving economic well-being,” explained ACPHD Director Anita Siegel. “The Roadmaps grant will allow us to address the fact that many people of color in our community have been targeted by pervasive predatory lending practices. We are only beginning to understand the health consequences of the financial crisis and can’t afford to wait to take action.”

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The Prosperity Project’s innovative strategy includes advancing policies to expand non-predatory financial services in underserved neighborhoods, raising awareness about fair financial products and sound banking practices, and integrating financial empowerment curriculum into existing health programs. For more information, see http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/ameda-county

“We are in a unique period of our economic history when all of us need to become educated and assert ourselves in how we grow and protect our income and wealth individually,” said Junious Williams, Chief Executive Officer of Urban Strategies Council. “But we also have a responsibility to ensure that public policy and systems support families in securing their economic well being. This project is an important step in that process.”

The 12 Roadmaps to Health Community Grants, which support two-year state and local efforts among policymakers, business, education, health care, public health and community organizations, will be managed by Community Catalyst and are part of the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program, a collaboration of RWJF and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI).

“These projects are really exciting for two reasons: first, they are truly collaborations among diverse community partners who bring expertise, relationships and resources to improve people’s health; and second, that in addition to health behaviors such as smoking and diet, they are focused on factors such as education, family relationships and income that heavily influence our health and quality of life,” said James S. Marks, MD, MPH, senior vice president and director of the Health Group at RWJF.

The Prosperity Project and other grantees will build on the UWPHI’s County Health Rankings model, which highlights the critical role that factors such as education, jobs and our environment play in influencing how healthy people are and how long they live. The Roadmaps to Health grantees are working to create healthier places to live, learn, work and play. Taken together, the Rankings and the actions of the Roadmaps to Health grantees are a way of solving our nation’s health crisis.

The grantees will build consensus for and implement policy and systems changes that address the factors that we know are connected to health – education, income and employment, community safety and social connectedness. Community Catalyst, a national consumer health advocacy organization, will use its expertise and successful advocacy framework of coalition building, grassroots mobilization, policy research analysis, campaign design and implementation, and communications and media strategies to help each grantee group achieve results, including policy and systemic changes.

About Alameda County Public Health Department
The Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) is the agency within Alameda County Health Care Services that employs a broad range of prevention strategies to protect and improve the health and safety of County residents and the neighborhoods in which they live. We are committed to improving and promoting health among ALL the people we serve. Our programs offer a diverse range of services to address and prevent threats to residents’ health, from immunizing against disease to building community capacity to eliminate health inequities. Despite improvements in health status across all groups in Alameda County, we continue to observe large and persistent disparities in health based on race, income, and
neighborhood. As a result, in addition to service provision, we work to influence policy
decision-making upstream, as the results of such policy and planning decisions strongly
determine the social and environmental conditions in the communities we serve. For more
information, visit http://www.acphd.org/.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues
facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health
care, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify
solutions and achieve comprehensive, measureable and timely change. For nearly 40 years the
Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the
problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping
Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a
difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

About Community Catalyst
Community Catalyst is a national non-profit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to quality
affordable health care for all. Community Catalyst works in partnership with national, state and
local organizations, policymakers, and foundations, providing leadership and support to improve
the health of communities and to change the health care system so it serves everyone. For more
information, visit www.communitycatalyst.org. Read or comment on our blog at
http://blog.communitycatalyst.org. Follow us on Twitter @healthpolicyhub.