Local Organizations Chosen for Nationwide Asthma Initiative

BUFFALO, N.Y., Friday, Sept. 18, 2015 — YourCare Health Plan, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, and a partnership of health and housing agencies have been selected in a national search for the nationwide Green & Healthy Homes Initiative’s feasibility study to protect the health of children living in low-income families. This partnership will introduce a pilot program to improve the lives of children and mitigate the environmental risks of asthma.

The partners were chosen by the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), a national nonprofit dedicated to breaking the link between unhealthy housing and unhealthy families, and a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund’s Pay for Success program and its collaboration partner, Calvert Foundation. Buffalo was selected as a pilot city based on the strength of the region’s cross-sector housing partners that work together to address critical changes to make homes more energy efficient and healthy. Buffalo is one of five cities selected across the country to participate.

Throughout the initiative’s first phase, YourCare Health Plan will work with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and an array of health and housing partners to conduct feasibility studies of models that fund home-based asthma interventions, including remediation of asthma triggers and resident education.

“We are honored at YourCare Health Plan to be a lead organization in the national Green & Healthy Homes Pay for Success program in Buffalo, to provide resources to mitigate environmental factors in the homes of children with asthma, right here in our community,” said Joseph A. Stankaitis, M.D., chief medical officer of YourCare Health Plan. “This Pay for Success model is an innovative concept that brings together private, public and nonprofit sectors to solve social problems, including asthma. We have a long history of initiatives to improve asthma care for our members while aligning financial incentives for stakeholders.”

The Buffalo area faces significant asthma-related challenges. According to the New York State Asthma Surveillance Report (2013), the adjusted asthma hospital discharge rate for Erie County is 13.2 per 10,000 residents, one of the highest rates in the state outside of the New York City area. The age-adjusted asthma emergency department visit rate per 10,000 residents is 61.1, which is also higher than most of the state outside of the New York City area.

“Furthermore, the West Side of Buffalo in particular faces a huge burden that includes especially high asthma hospitalization rates and emergency department visit rates,” Stankaitis added. “In fact, it is four times greater than the rates in surrounding suburbs, coupled with high rates of poverty. A number of studies have linked the high rates of asthma in this area to the high volume of traffic on the nearby Peace Bridge. However, while changes were made to reduce air pollution from this traffic, respiratory health in the area continues to suffer.”

The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and its partners will work with service providers to efficiently coordinate weatherization, home health and safety interventions.

“Our goal is to help children who have asthma avoid hospitalization and stay in school,” said Cara Matteliano, vice president, community impact of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. “We are thrilled to participate in this cutting-edge model for prevention. Collectively, we have an opportunity to be one of the first communities in the country to create sustainable funding to
remove asthma triggers from children’s homes. Working side by side with our partnering agencies and homeowners on curbing preventable illnesses like asthma is imperative for a child’s quality of life.”

Community-based agencies are key to combating preventative serious illnesses by improving a home’s healthy environment. Heart of City Neighborhoods is one of the key community agencies in Buffalo to participate in this study. “Our goal is to address asthma triggers at home and educate families on preventative measures,” said Stephanie Simeon, executive director of Heart of the City Neighborhoods.

The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative and Calvert Foundation will provide technical assistance for the Buffalo effort. If successfully launched, anticipated project outcomes include reduced asthma-related hospitalizations, reduced emergency department visits and, ultimately, reduced health care costs.

“Research shows that 40 percent of asthma episodes are caused by home-based environmental health hazards,” GHHI President & CEO Ruth Ann Norton said. “Much of this cost is borne by medical and federal taxpayer dollars, yet these programs provide little to no resources to eradicate the root causes of asthma. Thanks to the generous support of the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund and to these exceptional organizations with whom we are now working, we have the opportunity to use housing as a platform to reduce the high cost associated with repeated asthma-related hospitalizations and emergency department visits.”

A private investor will provide upfront funding to finance nonprofit service delivery that benefits a healthcare entity, such as a health plan. If the services provided achieve agreed-upon outcomes, the health care entity can repays the investors. If the outcomes are not achieved, the public entity does not pay, allowing the public sector to receive the highest return on taxpayer investments.

Additional GHHI awardees include:
- Spectrum Health, Health Net of West Michigan, Asthma Network of West Michigan and Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan; Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital and Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis; Memphis, Tennessee
- University of Utah Health Plans and Salt Lake County Office of Regional Development; Salt Lake County, Utah
- Baystate Health and Partners for a Healthier Communities’ Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition; Springfield, Massachusetts

For more information on YourCare Health Plan, visit yourcarehealthplan.com. For more information on GHHI, visit greenandhealthyhomes.org.

About YourCare Health Plan
YourCare Health Plan, Inc., is a not-for-profit health plan that provides managed care insurance to residents eligible for Medicaid, Child Health Plus (CHP) and other government-sponsored programs in Western New York. YourCare is dedicated to delivering compassionate and patient-centered care by coordinating access to a network of providers and community based organizations that help members improve their health outcomes and quality of life. YourCare is a subsidiary of Monroe Plan for Medical Care, an organization providing health support services to low-income populations in Upstate New York for over 45 years. With offices in Rochester, N.Y. and Buffalo, N.Y., YourCare plans currently serve more than 50,000 members in Erie, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Allegany counties. To learn more, visit yourcarehealthplan.com or call 1-800-683-3781. Visit YourCare’s social media sites at facebook.com/YourCareHealthPlan and linkedin.com/company/yourcare-health-plan.

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