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AFFORDABLE CARE ACT IMPROVES ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE IN VT

VERMONT – Three Community Health Centers in Vermont successfully competed for \$4.3 million in Capital Improvement Grants recently made available through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. In this round of nationally competitive grants, 143 of the nation’s 1,200 community health centers received funding. Enacted in March 2010, the Affordable Care Act is opening the door to high quality primary and preventive health care for millions of Americans, including the medically underserved. The Community Health Centers receiving the grants are members of Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving New Hampshire and Vermont.

Richford Health Center Inc., d/b/a Northern Tier Center for Health (NoTCH), with clinics located in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, was awarded an \$850,000 Affordable Care Act-Capital Development Grant. NoTCH delivers primary care services (medical, dental, and pharmaceutical) in medically underserved areas and currently serves a population of about 8,300. With the region’s high unemployment rate and shortage of medical providers, patient enrollment is expected to grow to 13,000 or more by 2014. NoTCH will use the grant to expand and relocate the Enosburg Health Center, which currently operates out of leased basement space on the outskirts of the village. The project will revamp an existing structure in the center of town, thus moving the Enosburg Health Center to a self-owned, handicap-accessible facility. The new location will be more efficient, highly visible, easily accessible by pedestrians, and large enough to accommodate more providers and support staff. The building will also provide dry and secure central storage for the entire organization.

Springfield Medical Care Systems, Inc. (SMCS), a nonprofit corporation approved as a Federally-Qualified Health Center in 2009, was awarded a \$2.5 million Capital Development Grant to Renovate nearly 30,000 square feet of an unoccupied mill into a multi-purpose health center. The

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new Springfield Community Health Center project will consolidate four practices including a pediatric practice, two internal medicine practices, and one family medicine practice. Walk-in care will be available on site to help reduce inappropriate use of hospital emergency rooms. The walk-in clinic will enable patients to establish a relationship with a primary care provider and give patients a medical home for consistent care. A non-affiliated mental health practitioner and physical therapy provider will have offices on site. The developers envision other professional and commercial activities in the mill, including a pharmacy. “The Springfield project will address immediate community needs by increasing access to primary care in downtown Springfield,” noted Glenn Corder, CEO. “The vision to develop the former Fellows Gear Shaper building began with Springfield Regional Development Corporation and coincided with the need of SMCS to consolidate our Springfield activities into a single, convenient location for patients. The Springfield project seeks to improve the overall health status of residents while simultaneously improving the city’s economic health.”

The Health Center of Plainfield was awarded a \$988,700 Capital Development Grant to address a growing need for dental and behavioral health services in the communities surrounding Plainfield. In the current economic climate, fewer patients are able to receive mental health services and typically only the chronically ill. A preponderance of mental health care now happens at the office of primary care doctors. The Health Center received funding to build a Dental and Mental Health Annex on land owned and adjacent to The Health Center. The 4,500 square foot, single story annex will accommodate five additional dental operatories (three with oral surgery capabilities) and will provide storage and service space for the mobile dental care unit staffed by The Health Center of Plainfield and three other Vermont Community Health Centers. The annex will provide a mental health suite with seven individual rooms, a group therapy room, waiting room, and reception.

Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving New Hampshire and Vermont, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization working to improve access to health care services for people through developing effective health care policy, recruiting clinical providers, and providing technical assistance to communities and Community Health Centers. With offices in New Hampshire and Vermont, Bi-State works with federal, state, and regional health policy organizations, foundations, and payers to develop strategies, policies, and programs that promote and sustain community-based primary health care services in medically underserved areas. More information is available online: www.bistatepca.org.