

For Immediate Release

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Area Stakeholders Asked to Join County-wide Initiative to Strengthen Access to Quality Health Care

The REACH Healthcare Foundation has invited leaders from Lafayette County to collaborate on ways to strengthen access to care for the uninsured and underserved. The group, which is currently being formalized, is looking to identify unmet needs in Lafayette County and propose innovative solutions while strengthening programs already underway. A support grant has been provided by the REACH Foundation to help with planning costs, consultants and other expenses. Other counties participating in this health access initiative include Cass County, Missouri and Allen County, Kansas.

The move comes as a time when Lafayette County's morbidity rate and health risk factors are leading to higher incidences of preventable illness. Recently published County Health Rankings for Lafayette County revealed the following:

- 18% of adults smoke
- 31% of adults are obese
- 28% are sedentary (don't engage in regular physical activity)
- 12% of adults are excessive drinkers
- 15% are uninsured
- 17% of children live in poverty
- 15% have limited access to healthy foods

Phase One: Planning Stage

REACH is inviting community stakeholders to serve on a nine-month planning team that works collectively to:

1. Gather input on the county's health challenges and barriers
2. Identify solutions that substantially expand and strengthen access to health care and quality of health care services—while considering programs already underway
3. Look beyond the usual programs and players in the community to seek high-impact approaches to achieve substantial changes in access and quality of health care services
4. Create a knowledge base that is shared both locally and with other county teams involved in this initiative
5. Develop evidence-based, high-impact strategies along with a work plan for implementation

Phase Two: Implementation

The second phase of the rural health initiative, which begins in 2013, will focus on implementing strategies that have the capacity to make dramatic improvements to quality health care delivery and access for Lafayette County's underserved. The REACH Foundation will work with the planning team to assess proposed strategies for improvements in health care access, and identify additional funding to support implementation. Lafayette County will submit a proposal to the foundation by December 2012.

A Call to Action

The rural health initiative planning team is looking to formulate a committee of leaders and stakeholders to support this program. Individuals working in the following sectors are encouraged to participate: Migrant farm worker staff,

dental, social service, government, education, agriculture, senior services, faith-based and business. **For more information, contact Toniann Richard, executive director of the Health Care Collaborative of Rural Missouri, at 660.259.2440 or visit HCCNetwork.org/rhi.**