

For Immediate Release

May 8, 2007

Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission Announces Grant Funding to Access Mental Health Drugs *Grants Available for Qualified Mental Health Providers*

RALEIGH, NC – The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission (HWTF) announced a new initiative today to help mental health providers with their prescription drug needs. The statewide program will award grants to around 40 qualified organizations serving mental health patients. Grant amounts start at \$15,000 and may range higher based on the service area and target population served by individual grantees.

According to the NC chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), it is estimated that 1.5 million North Carolinians have a mental illness; about 680,000 of which experience functional impairment.

“Mental illness is a real and growing problem in our state,” said HWTF Chair Lt. Governor Bev Perdue. “These grants will help provide critical medications to patients who need it the most.”

HWTF has a proven track record in designing medication-related services for low-income North Carolinians. From January 2003 through August 2006, HWTF’s statewide Medication Assistance Program (MAP) grantees provided more than \$83 million in free drugs to their patients, representing a 6:1 return on HWTF’s grant investment. As a result, North Carolina’s Institute of Medicine listed MAP as a “significant safety net for the uninsured” in its NC Healthcare Safety Net Report in 2005.

Mental health concerns have recently taken center stage in North Carolina. Providers across the state have noted an increasing need for prescription drug assistance for patients with mental health-related diagnoses. Representative Verla Insko, a strong champion of mental health services said “Medications used to treat mental health conditions have a higher average cost than medications in general, and are critical to allowing patients to manage their illness.”

As part of this initiative, HWTF has provided \$1 million to NC-DHHS Office of Rural Health and Community Care (ORHCC) to administer the grant program and to identify eligible applicants. Grantees will receive funds to provide medication assistance services to mental health patients specifically, and will receive start-up costs including hardware and software upgrades, as well as a portion of staff salary. ORHCC will provide the Medication Access and Review Program (MARF) software free of charge to each grantee. MARF automates the application, tracking and dispensing of free medications available to limited income residents from pharmaceutical manufacturers.

The first grantees selected for the award include three non-profit providers of mental and general health care services. New River Behavioral Health Care is being awarded \$64,480 for a multi-site project serving patients from Wilkes, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery and Watauga counties. Catawba Valley Behavioral Health Care serving patients from Catawba, Burke, Caldwell and McDowell Counties will receive \$15,000. Saluda Medical Center which serves Polk County is being awarded a \$15,000 grant.

Information on how to apply for a mental health MAP grant can be obtained by contacting Vince Stevens at ORHCC at 919-733-2040 or vince.a.stevens@ncmail.net.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

-END-