

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**October 6, 2007**

## **NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commits \$1 Million to Support NC Rural Hospitals**

**Raleigh, NC** – Today, the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) Commission joined the North Carolina Hospital Association, the Golden Leaf Foundation, and the North Carolina Rural Center in announcing the launch of North Carolina's Rural HOPE (**H**Ospital **P**roject **E**nhancements), a credit enhancement program that will enable rural hospitals to secure low-cost financing for desperately needed upgrades.

"In many areas of our state, hospitals represent the only access to critical care for miles," said Lt. Governor Bev Perdue, HWTF Chair, "yet too many of our rural hospitals are operating on such tight budgets they cannot gain financing for crucial modernization investments."

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission jumpstarted the credit enhancement program with a \$1 million commitment at its meeting on September 24, 2007. The Golden Leaf Foundation subsequently approved a matching grant of \$1 million. The \$2 million loss reserve fund enables North Carolina's rural hospitals to gain access to financing from private lending institutions -- financing that is needed to make critical upgrades and renovations to clinical equipment, physical facilities and health information technology systems.

"Rural North Carolina hospitals provide essential health services to over 160,000 acute care patients, over 1.5 million outpatients, and nearly half a million emergency patients every single year," noted Jeff Spade, Executive Director of the NC Rural Health Center, based at the North Carolina Hospital Association, "so they are vital for meeting the basic health care needs of so many of our state's rural communities."

The North Carolina Hospital Foundation will administer Rural HOPE. The low-cost financing will be available only to non-profit, rural hospitals with an average daily census of less than 100 inpatients.

### **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](http://www.HealthWellNC.com).*

###