

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**June 4, 2009**

**NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund Awards Nearly \$2 Million in Grant Funding to Address Oral Health in North Carolina**

**Raleigh, N.C.** – Today the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) announced grant awards totaling \$1,930,000 to seven organizations as part of its Oral Health Initiative (OHI).

At the June 1, 2009 meeting of HWTF, nearly \$2 million in funding was approved for Phase I of the OHI to seven organizations to increase access to treatment and preventive services for low-income, high-need populations and to train dental and other health care providers to better serve these populations. The full list of grant awards can be viewed at [www.HealthWellNC.com](http://www.HealthWellNC.com) (click on 'HWTF Funding Priorities' in the upper right corner).

“It is unfortunate that many North Carolina citizens do not receive basic dental care which is so critical for overall good health,” said Vandana Shah, HWTF Executive Director. “We hope that these grant funds will provide more North Carolina citizens with access to high quality, accessible oral health care.”

Untreated oral health problems can have significant consequences on other health issues. Research has shown associations between chronic oral health infections and other serious conditions, such as diabetes, heart and lung diseases, stroke, low birth weight and premature births.

In 2006, roughly 32% of North Carolina adults reported not visiting a dentist within the last year. The rates are even higher among the state’s minority populations (39% of Native Americans, 42% of African Americans and 56% of Hispanics).

In seeking oral health care, many people face financial, transportation and child care barriers, as well as the inability to leave work. These challenges are more pronounced in rural areas of the state where the number of practicing dental professionals is limited or non-existent. Based on 2004 data, 60 North Carolina counties were considered dental health shortage areas.

Also, HWTF awarded a grant for \$350,000 to The Carolinas Center for Medical Excellence (CCME) to provide technical assistance as well as evaluation for the Oral Health Initiative. CCME is a non-profit organization that has over two decades of experience providing technical assistance and evaluation to health care programs across a variety of settings.

**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 \$199 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).*

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All grant recipients are listed by name, region served and award amount on the attached page.

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<b>Phase I Oral Health Initiative Grantees</b>		
<b>Organization</b>	<b>Counties Served</b>	<b>Amount Awarded</b>
Blue Ridge Community Health Services (BRCHS)	Henderson, McDowell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania	\$300,000
Cape Fear HealthNet	Brunswick, New Hanover	\$300,000
Carolina Family Health Centers, Inc.	Edgecombe, Nash, Wilson	\$300,000
Carolinas HealthCare System/Carolinas Mobile Dentistry	Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Mecklenburg, Union	\$300,000
FirstHealth of the Carolinas Dental Care Centers	Hoke, Montgomery, Moore	\$180,000
Madison County Health Department	Madison, Mitchell, Yancey	\$300,000
National Foundation of Dentistry for the Handicapped	Statewide	\$250,000
	<b>Total amount awarded</b>	<b>\$1,930,000</b>