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ACHIEVING ACCESS TO HEALTH FOR ALL COLORADANS

NEWS RELEASE

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COLORADO RURAL HEALTH CENTER RECEIVES GRANT TO STRENGTHEN THE STATE'S HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE

Denver, CO – Nurses, doctors and other health professionals are working together with higher education institutions, state health and labor agencies and others to collectively address the long-standing problem of too-few health care providers available to care for Coloradans. With more than 30 members, the Colorado Health Professions Workforce Policy Collaborative is developing policy solutions to close the health professions gap. To strengthen and sustain this grassroots effort, The Colorado Trust today announced it has awarded a \$205,000 grant to the Colorado Rural Health Center (Colorado's nonprofit state office of rural health) to lead the Collaborative.

“While the current and worsening shortage of health care professionals has been understood for some time, what's new and much needed is the resolve of a broad group to proactively work together to address this complex issue,” said Irene M. Ibarra, President and CEO of The Colorado Trust. “With the dedicated leadership of the Colorado Rural Health Center, the Collaborative is positioned to expand and sustain its ability to develop policy recommendations to fill the gaps and strengthen the state's health care workforce.”

In Colorado, there is an 11% shortage of nurses statewide, and it's expected that this shortage will triple by 2020. As well, the number of health care jobs in Colorado is expected to grow by 20% over the next 10 years, even as the number of health care workers is expected to shrink by 17% as aging workers retire. This shortage extends across many health care professions, including physicians, surgeons, nurses, pharmacists, dental hygienists, physician assistants and physical therapists. Perhaps of greatest concern is a predicted shortage of nearly 2,200 primary care providers in Colorado by 2025 if current trends continue (Colorado Health Institute, 2009).

In December 2009, the Collaborative released its first set of recommendations to policymakers, health care professionals, workforce experts, educators and others. Taking into consideration the current fiscal environment, the Collaborative prioritized six primary care policy recommendations for immediate action, including:

- Provide solid data to policymakers on the effectiveness of specific policies and programs that address the health professions shortage
- Support adequate reimbursement for primary care providers, and ensure consistent reimbursement policies and practices among health plans, vendors and other payers
- Increase the number of primary care providers by coordinating onsite training and other health professions learning programs.

In managing and facilitating the Collaborative, the Colorado Rural Health Center will:

- Assist the Collaborative in developing its policy agenda for 2010-2011
- Engage new Collaborative partner organizations and members
- Establish a unified voice to move the Collaborative's policy recommendations into action
- Assist in developing a long-term plan that ensures the Collaborative's continued progress.

“We are committed to the Collaborative’s statewide focus on both urban and rural workforce needs,” said Lou Ann Wilroy, Executive Director of the Colorado Rural Health Center. “In working with this diverse and committed group over the past 18 months, we have every reason to be optimistic that our collective activities will increase the number of health professionals across our state, particularly in rural and underserved areas. In turn, this will lead to increased access to care, decreased health care costs and healthier communities.”

For additional information, contact Lou Ann Wilroy, Chief Executive Officer, Colorado Rural Health Center, 303-832-7493.

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The Colorado Trust – www.coloradotrust.org – is a grantmaking foundation dedicated to achieving access to health for all Coloradans.