Blue Cross Accelerates Innovative Health Initiatives Through New Grant Program

Blue Cross awards $500,000 to five nonprofits to advance solutions to local health challenges

BOSTON, Nov. 21, 2019 /PRNewswire/ -- Today, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ("Blue Cross") announced the five nonprofit recipients of its new Healthy Living Accelerator Grants. The Healthy Living Accelerator Grants fund unique and innovative programs and initiatives that influence behavior change and advance the health of Massachusetts residents by addressing the inter-connectedness of healthy eating, active lifestyles, and positive environments.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts will provide an investment of $500,000 to five organizations: Food for Free, YMCA Old Colony, East Boston Airproofing, Collaborative for Educational Services, and MA Farm to School. This financial support will enable each organization to significantly scale their respective programs and improve access to nutritious meals, fitness opportunities, and healthy environments for communities across Massachusetts. In addition to the financial support, Blue Cross will provide ongoing skill-building and pro-bono support to help these organizations successfully execute their initiative.

"The goal of the Healthy Living Accelerator Grants is to support innovative ideas that address the barriers which prevent access to healthy lifestyles and environments," said Jeff Bellows, Vice President of Corporate Citizenship and Public Affairs. "Blue Cross is committed to supporting the health of all Massachusetts residents. By giving these organizations the ability to launch and scale their programs and giving them the needed support to execute them, we can help improve access to healthy eating, active lifestyles, and healthy environments for thousands of children and families across the state."

Below are descriptions of the five programs.

Food For Free – Expanding Food For Free's Family Meals program, which takes prepared food from corporate, university, and hospital dining services and turns it into attractive, balanced, single-serving meals, to reach an additional 1,000-2,000 food-insecure students at Roxbury Community College, UMass Boston, North Shore Community College, and Massachusetts College of Art.

YMCA Old Colony – Launching "Y on the Fly", a mobile van that will bring the YMCA's traditional opportunities for learning, physical activity, and healthy eating into the Brockton, Stoughton, and Taunton communities where there is limited access to safe recreation. Kids and their families will have access to sixty minutes of physical activity followed by 30 minutes of nutrition education including preparing a healthy snack at no cost.

East Boston Airproofing: Air Partners – Creating a national model based in East Boston to improve air quality in communities with high levels of ultrafine particles (UFPs). Attention will be focused on raising awareness about the sources and impacts of UFPs and other pollutants and equipping residents with strategies to reduce their exposure.

Collaborative for Educational Services – Scaling the *Healthy Food Where You Live* mobile farmers markets model to reach food desert communities in Amherst and the twelve towns in the Hilltown region. This model brings produce from local farms to communities with limited access to grocery stores.

MA Farm to School – Piloting a school breakfast model in the Salem and Webster school districts that addresses the issue of childhood hunger and healthy food access by providing an innovative approach to increasing participation in school breakfast programs. Students will receive high quality scratch-cooked meals featuring local products that will be cost effective for the schools. The program will be thoroughly evaluated, and the lessons documented in a tool that allows for easy sharing with school districts throughout the state.

In 2018, Blue Cross invested $8.4M to support 429 not-for-profits across Massachusetts and 3,200 employees contributed 28,000 volunteer hours to support 275 service projects. For more information on Blue Cross' community work and commitment to healthy living, visit their Corporate Citizenship website and 2018 Annual Report.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable health care *with* an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

SOURCE Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

For further information: Amy McHugh, amy.mchugh@bcbsma.com, 617-246-2311