Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Reveals Three Municipal Blue Innovation Award Recipients

Municipalities Recognized for Achievements in Improving Employee Health and Wellness

BOSTON — March 18, 2011 — Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA), a locally-based, community-focused health plan, today announced the winners of the annual Municipal Blue Innovation Awards. Winners include the Town of Amesbury, Town of West Springfield, and Gateway Health Group (a group of seven municipalities/schools). Now in its third year, the Municipal Innovation Awards recognize cities and towns for achievements in improving employee health and wellness.

John Coughlin, Vice President of Government and Labor at BCBSMA, presented the awards to the winners in a ceremony at their local Town Halls.

"Employee health care costs can be a city or town's largest budget item, aside from salaries," said Coughlin. "This year's winners have taken important steps to educate and motivate their employees about wellness, which has proven to have a positive impact on the reduction of heath care costs."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 75% of employers' health care costs and productivity losses are related to employee lifestyle choices. A $1 investment in wellness programs saves $3 in health care costs, according to the Wellness Council of America.

Amesbury, Wellness Education Champion, was the first Massachusetts municipality to join Well Power—a three-year program designed to help employees lead healthier lifestyles while learning to navigate the complex health care system. Initial results show that participants are actively engaged in educational seminars that teach participants to become savvier health care consumers, and personal health assessments that identify health risks and offer advice to address them.

"Wellness and education programs are ways we can better control the rising cost of health care," said Amesbury Town Mayor Thatcher Kezer. "Well Power helps our employees and their families lead healthier lives—it's good for our workers and good for the city."

West Springfield, Innovative Health and Wellness Program Champion, successfully motivated employees to get fit through creative wellness programs. The town also promoted BCBSMA's Blue Care Line, a 24-hour nurse care line members can call with medical questions. Speaking with a nurse before making a trip to the doctor or ER, is a convenient way to seek medical advice and save on health care costs such as copays and deductibles. **The town saw a 117% increase in Blue Care Line utilization in the six months following the initiative, potentially preventing unnecessary trips to a physician or the ER.**

"The goal of these programs was to give employees an opportunity to become more active in measurable and engaging ways," said West Springfield Mayor Edward J. Gibson. "Through these initiatives, our employees have recognized the positive impact wellness programs can have on improving their health. The town of West Springfield should be proud of what we've achieved working with Blue Cross—our employees are healthier and happier. There is also the end result of the positive impact these wellness initiatives will have on our town's health insurance costs, both to the employees and the municipality."

Gateway Health Group, a group of four Massachusetts cities/towns (Carver, Lakeville, Marion, Mattapoisett), and three schools/districts (Old Colony Regional Voc-Tech High School, Old Rochester Regional School District, and Southeastern Regional Voc-Tech High School) was selected as the Preventative Health Screening Champion. Gateway is the first municipality to fund a preventative health program that rewards employees with gift cards for preventative screenings like colonoscopies and mammograms. **Since Gateway's incentive program began, over 130 employees received colonoscopies, mammograms, cholesterol and blood pressure checks that otherwise may not have.**

"Early detection is a powerful tool in helping our employees stay healthy," said Gateway Chairman Patrick Meagher. "The prevention of even one case of cancer or heart disease is worth the investment in this program. We are proud to be recognized for our innovation and are encouraged by the commitment our employees have made to their health."

Past Municipal Blue Innovation Award winners include: the Town of Arlington, City of Beverly, Town of Lexington, City of Peabody, Town of Reading, the Berkshire Health Group (a group of more than 30 municipalities, school districts, and other government entities in western Massachusetts), City of Haverhill, Wachusett Regional School District, Town of Wakefield, City of Lowell, and the Town of Mansfield.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.com) was founded 74 years ago and is now the largest private health plan in the state, providing coverage to nearly 3 million members. BCBSMA believes in working with physicians, hospitals, employers and the broader community to provide quality, affordable health care in Massachusetts. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association.

Quotes from State Representatives

"With health care costs continuing to rise, it is more important than ever before to keep employees healthy," said Senator Steven A. Baddour (D-Methuen), whose district includes Amesbury. "By implementing a wellness program that will help lower costs, reduce absenteeism, and have fewer workers' compensation claims, the **Town of Amesbury** can take better care of its

most valuable assets—its employees."

"I want to congratulate Mayor Thatcher Kezer and the **Town of Amesbury** for receiving this wellness award through BCBSMA," said Representative Michael A. Costello (D-Newburyport), whose district includes Amesbury. "The Well Power program ensures that our public employees have the knowledge and the tools that they need to manage their health and associated costs. It's beneficial for them and it's beneficial for the people of Amesbury who rely on them."

"I applaud **Gateway Health Group's** commitment to employee health and wellness," said State Senator Marc R. Pacheco (D-Taunton), whose district includes Carver and Marion. "Their method of encouraging employee participation was creative and extremely effective. This wellness grant award will go a long way in assisting with future programs."

"**Gateway Health Group** is the perfect example of an organization showing its genuine commitment to the health and well being of the communities served," said Representative Susan Williams Gifford (R-Wareham) whose district includes Carver. "The creative approach used to encourage various health screenings certainly demonstrates why they are deserving of this award."

For further information: CONTACT: Jenna McPhee 617-246-4712 Jenna.McPhee@bcbsma.com

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