Massachusetts Communities Receive Municipal Blue Innovation Award for Affordability and Wellness Initiatives

Four municipalities reduce health care cost trends while improving employee health

BOSTON — May 1, 2012 — Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA), the trusted health plan of cities and towns for more than 70 years, today announced the winners of its fourth annual Municipal Blue Innovation Awards. The City of Gardner, Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust, Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust, and Town of Middleborough are this year's winners. The Municipal Blue Innovation Awards—a *first-of-a-kind* program in Massachusetts—recognize cities and towns for successfully implementing plan design changes and health and wellness initiatives to make health care more affordable, while improving employee health.

The awards were presented, along with a $5,000 wellness grant to the winners in a ceremony at local City/Town HallsView a video about the winners.

"Cities and towns are in a unique position to create wellness initiatives and implement insurance programs to meet the needs of their community in an effort to make health care more affordable," said Larry Croes, Vice President, Commercial Markets. "The Municipal Blue Innovation Awards recognize those communities that are taking a holistic approach by implementing both wellness and plan design."

Award Categories / Winners

Leadership in Health Plan Innovation: City of Gardner
Like many other communities, health care costs were taking a big bite out of Gardner's budget. Seeking a way to reduce costs—Gardner was the first to adopt the state's new municipal health care law, which makes it easier for cities and towns to achieve savings. View a video about Gardner's accomplishments.

Gardner had many choices, but chose to adopt BCBSMA's Blue Options plan—a tiered network plan that provides significant cost-savings for cities and towns. Blue Options, tiers hospitals and primary care providers into three benefit levels based on cost and nationally accepted standards for quality. Out-of-pocket costs are lower when employees seek care from low cost, high-quality doctors/hospitals—and cities and towns benefit from lower premiums.

Switching to Blue Options helped Gardner achieve **more than $800,000 in savings**. A percentage of which was shared with city employees through a February "premium holiday", employees were exempt from paying health care contributions for one month. Gardner also increased its fitness benefits to encourage more active, healthier lifestyles among its employees.

"BCBSMA has been our trusted health plan of choice for more than a decade," said Mayor Mark Hawke. "When it came down to affordability—they offered us the best value for our fiscal health—and the health of our teachers, police officers, firefighters and other city workers who keep our community strong. Staying with BCBSMA also enabled us to retain local control of our health care, and benefit from the unparalleled service and wellness offerings BCBSMA provides."

"Cities and towns across the Commonwealth are facing difficult fiscal times," said State Representative Richard Bastien who represents Gardner. "Escalating health care costs are budget breakers for municipalities, businesses, and families alike. That's why I supported municipal health insurance reform. I applaud the Mayor and city of Gardner for leading the way in implementing plan design in the Commonwealth. It will lower costs for the city and taxpayers as well as benefit municipal employees through lower premiums. It is a win-win for everyone."

Healthy Lifestyle Champion: Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust
Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust has also made significant strides in improving the health and wellness of its members. The Trust has several initiatives in place to promote exercise, nutrition, stress reduction, ergonomics, and sleep management among other things. Highlights include:

- **Physical Fitness Challenges:** Each spring the Trust kicks-off an annual fitness challenge with the help of BCBSMA. The challenge encourages employees and their families to track physical activity for eight weeks using pedometers. Fifteen teams, 200 participants in total, participated in the last challenge. The top performers logged nearly 12,000 minutes of exercise and more than 640,000 steps—that's over 414 miles!

- **Colonoscopy Promotion:** In partnership with BCBSMA, the Trust launched an educational colonoscopy screening program to prevent colorectal cancers. Participants earned a $50 gift card incentive for screenings. Since the program began, numerous employees received colonoscopies that otherwise may not have, including one that led to early prevention of colon cancer in an employee.

- **Mini grants:** Municipal worksites often don't have the money or staff to champion wellness in the work place. To foster these important initiatives, the Trust has a mini grant program in place to help employees implement wellness programs. Now in its second year, the program has awarded nine grants ranging from $800 to $1200.

"I commend Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust for its enlightened approach to advancing the health and wellness of its members," said State Senator Benjamin B. Downing who represents part of Hampshire County. "This prestigious acknowledgment illustrates that western Massachusetts is not only committed to a healthy lifestyle, but that our residents fully enjoy the benefits of quality, affordable and accessible health insurance." Downing represents the nine Hampshire County communities of Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Huntington, Middlefield, Plainfield, Westhampton, Williamsburg, and Worthington.

"By encouraging employees to take a more active role in their health and wellbeing, we are making significant strides in maintaining the health of our well members and improving the health of employees at risk for chronic conditions," said John J. Lillis, Chief Financial Officer & Trust Administrator, Hampshire Council of Governments. "There is a direct correlation between healthy behaviors and health care costs. Our achievements, in partnership with BCBSMA, have enabled us to keep our health care premiums level for the past two years, and without reducing benefits. It's a win-win for the Trust, its members and the communities they represent."

Wellness Incentive Champion: Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust (SVRHT)
Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust also understands the relationship between healthy behaviors and health care costs. To encourage employees to quit smoking, get fit, and seek necessary health screenings—they created several incentive programs that reward employees for being proactive about their health while keeping them engaged. Incentives ranged from a $100 gift card for staying quit to a $100 colonoscopy screening incentive. The Trust also engaged employees in staying fit through a six-week strength training program and an eight-week Healthy Choices 101 program that encouraged various healthy behaviors such as limiting alcohol consumption, practicing yoga/breathing to reduce stress, and eating the recommended number of nutrients a day. They even have a Facebook page dedicated to wellness.

"Incentives can be powerful tools in helping employees stay healthy," said Arlene Miller, Chair of SVRHT Board from Longmeadow. "Since the implementation of these programs, 33% of our smoking cessation participants have stayed smoke-free for a year or longer, 25 employees received colonoscopies that otherwise may not have, and nearly 180 participants took part in our strength training and Healthy Choices 101 programs combined."

"This is a great day for the Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust," stated State Representative Angelo J. Puppolo, Jr. who represents part of Scantic Valley. "To receive the Municipal Blue Innovation Award recognizes their dedication to improving the health of their employees through creative programs and this $5,000 grant will allow them to continue these successful initiatives. It also confirms Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts commitment to our area and their support of great organizations that concentrate on promoting health and well-being."

Studies show wellness programs are one of the most effective ways to prevent absenteeism and improve employee productivity. In fact, an average ROI of $3-$5 for $1 invested in wellness programs is achieved through reduced health care costs, increased productivity, lower employee absenteeism and improved employee recruitment, and satisfaction/retention according to the Wellness Council of America.

Healthy Lifestyle Champion: Town of Middleborough
Middleborough, a Blue Options adopter since 2010 through the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association, is also a strong wellness proponent. The town successfully motivated employees to get fit through several creative wellness programs designed to target the top employee cost drivers: cardiovascular disease, obesity, musculoskeletal issues and other lifestyle related conditions. According to the Partnership for Solutions, the average health care costs for someone who has one or more chronic conditions, such as heart disease, is five times greater than for someone without.

One of the wellness initiatives Middleborough is being recognized for is an 11-week Heart Matters Program that promoted good health through nutrition consultations with a registered dietician, exercise and stress management programs. Nineteen employees took part loosing a total of 131 pounds; 11 also saw a drop in their blood pressure. Other initiatives included an eight-week mind/body fusion and circuit training program, a retiree pedometer program, 10-week online Biggest Winner competition, and a QuitPower tobacco cessation program.

"We've been attempting to reduce our health care costs through greater attention to the wellness of our employees and retirees," said Town Manager Charles J. Cristello. "We're extremely proud of what we've accomplished working with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, our Health Officer Jeanne Spalding/the wellness committee, and our employees—it's really everybody's award."

State Representative Tom Calter who represents Middleborough said, "I am grateful to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts for its Municipal Blue Innovation Award program. I am thrilled that Middleborough received this award, and I applaud the town for its leadership and commitment to employee wellness."

Past Municipal Blue Innovation Award winners include:

- 2012: Gardner, Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust, Middleborough, Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust
- 2011: Amesbury, West Springfield, Gateway Health Group
- 2010: Arlington, Beverly, Lexington, Peabody, Reading, Berkshire Health Group

- 2009: Haverhill, Wachusett Regional School District, Wakefield, Lowell, Mansfield

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. Celebrating our 75th anniversary in 2012, we are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality.

Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust provides employee health insurance to local public employers including: the Towns of Ashfield, Belchertown, Bernardston, Buckland, Charlemont, Chesterfield, Colrain, Conway, Cummington, Deerfield, Easthampton, Erving, Gill, Goshen, Granby, Hadley, Hatfield, Hawley, Heath, Leverett, Leyden, Middlefield, Monroe, Montague, New Salem, Northfield, Plainfield, Rowe, Shelburne, Shutesbury, South Hadley, Southampton, Southwick, Sunderland, Warwick, Wendell, Westhampton, Whatley, Williamsburg, Belchertown Water District, Chesterfield/Goshen Regional School District (RSD), Deerfield Fire District, Regional Retirement System, Franklin County Solid Waste Management, Franklin County Tech School, Franklin Regional Council of Govt., Franklin Regional Transit Authority, Frontier RSD, Gateway RSD, Granby Schools, Hampshire Council of Govt., Hampshire County Insurance Trust, Hampshire County Retirement System, Hampshire RSD, Hilltown Community Development Corp., New Salem/Wendell Union SD, Pioneer Valley RSD, Quabbin Health District, South Deerfield Water Supply District, South Hadley Fire District #1 & #2, Springfield Water & Sewer Commission, Sunderland Water District, Turner Falls Fire District, and Valley Community Development.

Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust is a health trust serving the Towns of East Longmeadow, Hampden, Longmeadow, and Wilbraham, as well as the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative and the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District.

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