



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT:

Liz Hall, (860) 523-8042  
The Partnership

Sarah Yeager, (203) 234-5402  
Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield

## **Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation Funds New Health Initiative by the Governor's Prevention Partnership**

### ***"Healthy Conversations" Provides Mentors with the Tools to Help Combat Childhood Obesity and Smoking***

HARTFORD, Conn. April 20, 2009 – The Governor's Prevention Partnership, which leads the state's network of mentoring programs, was awarded a \$95,500 grant from the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation to enlist mentors of middle school students in combating obesity and smoking.

The program will be launched as pilots in Bridgeport, Hartford and Waterbury and then rolled out statewide. Drawing on the close bonds mentoring creates, the program equips mentors with activities and tips to encourage students to adopt healthier attitudes and choices during the pivotal years of early adolescence, when diet, exercise and other habits formed are likely to carry into adulthood.

"Mentoring is a powerful force for leading youth in positive directions, and we are grateful for Anthem's support," said Jill Spinetti, president and chief executive officer of The Governor's Prevention Partnership. "Improving our children's health requires the commitment and partnership of adults. This initiative strives to further the role of mentors as allies and advocates for the healthy development of our young people."

During the next 12 months, The Partnership will be developing toolkits to guide mentors on how to talk with their mentees about healthy eating, exercise and tobacco use. These guides will contain enjoyable physical activities the pairs can do together during their weekly mentoring sessions. About 200 mentors and coordinators from 13 mentoring programs in the three pilot communities will receive training. The toolkits will be reviewed by a committee of experts in child development, including a nutritionist from the state Department of Education. They will be provided to all mentoring programs in the state. Programs participating in the initiative will also share information about these health topics with parents.

(more)

“As Connecticut’s largest health insurer, we have a unique responsibility to improve the health of our members as well as the overall health of the communities in which they live,” said David R. Fusco, president of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield. “The Governor’s Prevention Partnership has a direct impact on the lives of Connecticut’s children. Its programs specifically target at-risk children in an effort to improve their lives and overall well-being. Eradicating smoking and reversing the epidemic rise of obesity among children are two very important health care imperatives, and we see the Healthy Conversations initiative as a worthwhile program for our Foundation to support.”

Hall Neighborhood House in Bridgeport, which runs mentoring programs for middle and high school students, is one of the pilot sites for the innovative program. In Bridgeport alone, the rate of young children 3 to 5 who are obese is 20 percent, while another 16 percent are at risk of becoming obese, according to 2006 study by the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition.

“Programs like Healthy Conversations are greatly needed to address the overall fitness of children in Connecticut’s cities,” said Rachel Smith, Hall Neighborhood House’s youth services director. “Obesity and diabetes are really prevalent in the youth community. Engaging mentors to speak with students and participate in different activities will not only help them become more educated and aware, but raise their self-esteem. When students feel good about themselves inside and out, they’re more productive and successful.”

#### Health Facts:

- Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death.
- Obesity contributes to numerous chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.
- Childhood and adolescent obesity has tripled since the 1970s, leading to the appearance of health conditions hardly seen in children 30 years ago, including Type 2 diabetes, once commonly referred to as adult-onset diabetes.
- Estimates predict that one in three children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes at some point in his or her life, but the rate is nearly one in two for minority children.
- An estimated one in four Connecticut high school students are either overweight (13 percent) or obese (12 percent). (2007 Connecticut School Health Survey)
- More than three-quarters of high school students do not eat the recommended daily servings of fruit and vegetables.
- Fewer than half (45 percent) get the recommended amount of daily exercise.
- An estimated 21 percent of high school students has smoked at least one cigarette in the past 30 days; 9 percent are frequent smokers.
- In Hartford, a recent study the local Department of Health and Human Services found that rates of smoking, obesity and asthma are higher in the city than in the whole of Connecticut. It also found that childhood obesity is the leading cause of negative health outcomes for Hartford’s children.

(more)

Through charitable grant making, the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation LLC, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, promotes Anthem's inherent commitment to enhance the health and well-being of individuals and families in communities that Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield serves. The Foundation focuses its funding on strategic initiatives that, among other health related programs, address and provide innovative solutions to promoting the Healthy Generations Program, a multi-generational initiative that targets specific disease states and medical conditions. These include: prenatal care in the first trimester, low birth weight babies, cardiac morbidity rates, long term activities that decrease obesity and increase physical activity, diabetes prevalence in adult populations, adult pneumococcal and influenza vaccinations and smoking cessation. The Foundation also coordinates the company's annual associate giving campaign and its parent foundation provides a 50 percent match of associates' campaign pledges. ® ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield names and symbols are registered marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. To learn more about the Foundation please visit [www.wellpointfoundation.org](http://www.wellpointfoundation.org).

#### **About the Governors Prevention Partnership**

Co-chaired by Gov. M. Jodi Rell and a leader of the business community, The Governor's Prevention Partnership is a public-private partnership devoted to building a strong, healthy workforce through its leadership in youth mentoring and the prevention of underage drinking, violence and substance abuse.

###