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DMHC Announces Grant to Provide Better Health Care for California Farmworkers through Personal Health Cards

MiVia system will provide portable personal health records for San Joaquin County farmworkers, saving lives and lowering health care costs

(Lodi, California) – California Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) Director Cindy Ehnes today was joined by local agencies and farmworker advocates to announce a grant that will bring personal health record cards to local San Joaquin County farmworkers, using a web-based technology.

The \$444,470 grant was awarded to La Cooperativa Campesina de California and its partners as part of more than \$6 million in new grants to health care providers, clinics, and community groups announced by Governor Schwarzenegger on June 16 for projects that will improve California's health care delivery system for underserved populations. The funding for the grant comes from a \$50 million charitable investment required by the DMHC and the California Department of Insurance from PacificCare Health Systems when it merged with UnitedHealth Group in 2005.

“This grant will help to improve health care for local farmworkers, using advanced technology that will allow them to bring their personal health histories with them as they travel throughout the state to harvest crops,” said Cindy Ehnes, Director of the DMHC. “It sets the example for other health care providers to invest in health information technology by showing how portable, electronic health records can benefit all Californians.”

A pilot project will be funded by the grant to enroll 5,000 San Joaquin County farmworkers and their family members in the MiVIA Health Advocacy and Personal Health Record Project, the only one in the country designed for farmworkers and other low-income patients. Studies show that farmworkers suffer disproportionately from undiagnosed and/or unattended chronic medical conditions due to the fragmentation of care that results from their transient lifestyle, contributing to poor health outcomes and increased costs.

(more)

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The MiVIA personal health record system provides a snapshot of each worker's health history to health care providers, who can access and download it through the Web, as the workers follow the harvests throughout the state. The records will contain critical health information such as diagnoses, medications, allergies, chronic conditions, treatment plans, and test results.

"Something as simple as this type of personal health record can empower our workers to take charge of their own health care," said Raul Meyreles, Executive Director of La Cooperativa Campesina de California. "For this type of project to be successful, especially with a migrant population, we also need the support of a broad network of partners."

Partners in the La Cooperativa Campesina de California personal health records project include the Community Health Resource and Development Center, MiVIA, California Human Development, Kaiser Permanente, Community Medical Centers, Inc., and St. Joseph's Medical Center.

As part of the \$50 million in charitable grants resulting from the 2005 PacifiCare/UnitedHealth merger, \$25 million is dedicated to grants to be distributed in four funding cycles, targeting projects such as developing telemedicine and electronic health record systems for hospitals and clinics, funding preventive health programs, and expanding medical education efforts. A separate \$22 million grant program was announced by Governor Schwarzenegger in November to expand telemedicine across the state. The California Telehealth Network program is being led by the University of California Office of the President.

The third application cycle for proposals is July 2 to August 18, 2008. A description of the grant program and current application criteria are available at <http://www.dmhc.ca.gov/>. The awards are based on a competitive grant process.

The California Department of Managed Health Care is the only stand-alone HMO watchdog agency in the nation, touching the lives of more than 21 million enrollees. The Department has assisted more than 633,000 Californians resolve their HMO problems through its 24-hour Help Center, educates consumers on health care rights and responsibilities, and works closely with HMO plans to ensure a solvent and stable managed health care system.

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