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**CDC AWARDS \$14 MILLION TO 17 STATES, 3 CITIES AND 3 SCHOOLS
TO SET UP HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAMS**

*Grants to Support Local Efforts to Study and Prevent Chronic Disease
Will Also Strengthen Bioterrorism Preparedness*

Washington, DC – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has awarded health tracking grants to 17 states, 3 cities, and 3 Schools of Public Health to expand their ability to fight chronic diseases, such as asthma, cancer and birth defects. Chronic diseases are collectively the number one killers of Americans, responsible for 7 in 10 deaths in the United States. The CDC grants, totaling \$14 million, will help health officials at the state and local levels develop or enhance their ability to monitor where and when chronic diseases occur and explore their potential links to environmental factors.

There is currently no nationwide system for tracking chronic diseases and monitoring environmental exposures that may be linked to them, even though many chronic conditions with suspected links to environmental factors are on the rise across the country. The state pilot programs will form the building blocks for a nationwide health tracking network.

Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a national public health advocacy group, is the leading champion of health tracking. "These grants are an important step toward providing communities with the health information they have a right to know and giving health officials the tools they need to better prevent disease," said Dr. Shelley Hearne, Executive Director of TFAH. "We applaud this CDC initiative to support state and local health departments, and we congratulate each of the states that received funding for their work to obtain the grant," she added. "Now, our objective is to establish a nationwide network, with similar programs in every state."

More than 80 national organizations have voiced their support for a nationwide health tracking system. According to Hearne, a nationwide health tracking network would also serve as an early warning system in the event of a biological or chemical terrorist attack. "This type of system will not only warn officials of increases in diseases like asthma," she said, "it could also pinpoint a surge in illnesses that might indicate that a biological or chemical attack had occurred. The dual-use potential of a nationwide health tracking network offers better protection for all Americans."

As directed by Congress, the CDC program provided approximately \$14 million to establish or enhance 17 state pilot programs, three local pilot programs, and three "Centers of Excellence" at Schools of Public Health. "Now Congress should go further," said Hearne. "Chronic diseases cost society more than \$325 billion each year. Establishing a nationwide health tracking

network would cost just a fraction of that and would help us reduce the skyrocketing costs of living with chronic diseases.”

Nationwide support for health tracking was further shown by the number of applicants from across the country. All together 31 states, three local health departments, and 11 Schools of Public Health applied for the health tracking grants. Legislation pending in the Senate would provide \$30 million for similar grants in 2003, potentially doubling the number of participating states, and giving those who did not receive money this year a chance to reapply in 2003.

Grants were awarded this year to: California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, City of Houston, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, New York City, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin, and the Schools of Public Health at University of California-Berkeley, Johns Hopkins University, and Tulane University.

More information about the grants is available on TFAH's web site, www.healthyamericans.org.

Trust for America's Health is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the health and safety of all communities from current and emerging health threats by strengthening the fundamentals of our public health defenses. For more information, visit www.healthyamericans.org.