Howard County Health Department

MEDIA RELEASE

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Howard County Taking Action on Local Health Disparities:

Two-year action plan prioritizes access to care, obesity prevention, and behavioral health

Columbia, MD – In a meeting today at the Howard County Health Department, Health Officer Dr. Peter Beilenson and over fifty members of Howard County's Local Health Improvement Coalition released the *2012-2014 Local Health Improvement Action Plan*. The plan, developed as part of the Howard County's participation in the State Health Improvement Process (SHIP), prioritizes three categories of local health need: increasing access to affordable care, obesity prevention for children and adults, and improving behavioral health outcomes. The *2012-2014 Local Health Improvement Action Plan* provides a framework to guide local action to reduce health disparities and inequities and improve local health outcomes for all.

"Creating this action plan has truly been a collaborative effort across all segments of the Howard County community," says Dr. Beilenson. "Implementing the 2012-2014 plan is sure to significantly improve the health of all County residents and, more importantly, reduce critical disparities that exist."

Howard County's Local Health Improvement Coalition includes over fifty actively engaged and dedicated stakeholders from across Howard County who represent a variety of key agencies, organizations, and communities affected by health disparities.

"Over the past few years we have made significant strides in the areas of public policy and community programs to address health disparities, but we still have more work to do," says County Executive Ken Ulman. "Thanks to the dedicated LHIC members, we now have an important roadmap to help guide our key priority areas."

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Howard County Taking Action on Local Health Disparities:

Two-year action plan prioritizes access to care, obesity prevention, and behavioral health (continued)

Upon first convening in December 2011, the group took immediate steps toward setting and advancing its vision "All residents of Howard County will have access to health care and health outcomes will be equitable for all." The Coalition has continued its work through a transparent, inclusive local process that engages diverse stakeholders and uses data and evidence-based research to determine the prevalence, causes, and promising strategies for addressing local health disparities.

"It has been a delight to support Howard County's Local Health Improvement effort. Howard has a great action plan that is driven by SHIP data and strong community input to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health care access, healthy living, and behavioral health," says Madeleine Shea, Director of the Office of Population Health Improvement at the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

The Howard County Health Department received $50,000 in start-up funding from the Maryland Hospital Association, and is seeking implementation funding from public and private sources to sustain the work of the Local Health Improvement Coalition and evaluate the impact of the *2012-2014 Local Health Improvement Action Plan.*

For more information on Howard County's Local Health Improvement Process, including a downloadable copy of the *2012-2014 Local Health Improvement Action Plan and* a list of Coalition members, go to www.hchealth.org and click on "Special Initiatives." For more information about Maryland's SHIP, go to http://www.dhmh.maryland.gov/ship/SitePages/Home.aspx.

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