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Contact:

Clare Kushma
Catholic Charities
412-456-6967
ckushma@ccpgh.org

Kaitlin O'Brien
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield
412-544-6006
kaitlin.obrien@highmark.com

Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center receives \$500,000 gift from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield

PITTSBURGH (June 22, 2010) – Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh today received a \$500,000 gift from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield to support its Free Health Care Center, which offers quality medical and dental care at no cost to individuals who do not have employer-sponsored health insurance, cannot afford private insurance or do not qualify for Medicaid or other types of medical assistance.

“The Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center has become a valuable resource in our community, and it serves as a model program for providing quality, low-cost health care to people in need,” said Bishop David Zubik, the Diocese of Pittsburgh. “A significant unmet need for health insurance continues to exist in southwestern Pennsylvania as the number of uninsured in our community continues to rise. The staff and volunteers are truly caring professionals, and when people leave the center, they leave feeling very special, very much loved and very much cared for.”

More than 135 active volunteer medical and dental professionals have provided 15,291 medical and dental visits to 6,902 patients at the Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center since it opened its doors in 2007. The center, however, expects to reach its maximum capacity of more than 7,000 visits per year by the end of 2010.

Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center

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“The very core of Highmark’s mission is about providing access to health care, and the work of Catholic Charities fulfills that need for thousands of people in the very community where our employees live and work,” said Kenneth R. Melani, M.D., Highmark’s president and CEO. “Even in a post-health care reform environment where access to care is being addressed, there will remain a portion of the population that continues to fall through the cracks and need access to care. Free health care centers, like the one offered by Catholic Charities, will continue to find new and emerging needs to fill.”

Preliminary data has demonstrated that the Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center delivers primary medical and dental services more efficiently and more cost-effectively than a typical visit to the emergency room. It is estimated that the cost of 5,000 visits to the emergency room totals more than \$3 million, while 5,000 visits to the center is approximately \$800,000.

During the initial planning for the health care center, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield provided a \$100,000 donation for construction. Two years ago, Highmark again awarded \$250,000 to support the center and a \$250,000 gift was received from the Highmark Foundation, a private foundation funded solely by Highmark Inc. Both gifts supported general operating costs during the initial start-up of the center, which provides medical and dental services to all individuals in need and who meet eligibility guidelines, regardless of race, gender or religion. The Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center is located at 212 Ninth St. in downtown Pittsburgh.

About the Catholic Charities Free Health Care Center

Catholic Charities opened its Free Health Care Center (CCFHCC) in November 2007 to provide access to quality medical and dental care at no cost to individuals who cannot afford private insurance, do not qualify for government assistance or whose income is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. While there are many other, smaller free health care options available locally, the CCFHCC is the largest full-time free clinic in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Services offered include primary and preventive health care, chronic disease management, health screenings and access to specialty care, including women’s health, ophthalmology and physical therapy. Dental care including cleanings, exams, X-rays, extractions, fillings and restorative care, is also available. In 2010, CCFHCC added basic mental health services to its continuum of care.

About Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield

In 2009, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield provided financial support of \$133 million for programs in support of its corporate mission to provide access to affordable, quality health care enabling individuals to live longer, healthier lives. Highmark exerts an enormous economic impact throughout Pennsylvania. A recent study states that Highmark's positive impact exceeded \$2.5 billion. The company serves 3.1 million members and employs more than 5,000 people in the region. Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans. For more information about Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, visit www.highmark.com.

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