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NEW GEORGIA INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE CHILD HEALTH

March of Dimes, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia urge support through statewide collaboration

ATLANTA (April 16, 2009) – Georgia has the eighth largest child population in the country but consistently ranks low in child health and well-being. A new partnership between public and private organizations, Georgia Children's Health Alliance (GCHA) will leverage existing infrastructures to have a greater impact on child health and well-being in Georgia. GCHA will concentrate efforts on three issues to produce measurable changes: healthy births, childhood obesity, and child abuse and neglect.

“There are many organizations doing excellent work to improve conditions for Georgia's children. However, no single group has the ability to drive significant and meaningful change in several areas affecting youth.” said Lucy Klausner, Executive Director, GCHA. “Statewide improvement requires a coordinated systemic effort.”

March of Dimes, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia are uniting as the lead agencies for GCHA. While each organization will tackle one of the three focus areas, all three organizations will work together to develop strategies to create a supportive environment for healthy children and families. GCHA aims to consider the family as a whole when striving for change in child health.

Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, GCHA Executive Committee Chair, encourages support from individuals and organizations throughout the state.

“We know that healthy children with thoughtful habits are more likely to be healthy adults. I am proud to be a part of GCHA and the investment we will make together in Georgia's future,” said Cagle. “With more than 2.5 million children living in Georgia, we have a responsibility to do all we can to improve the life of each child.”

March of Dimes and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia have strong track records of working to improve the health of Georgia's children. In addition, Children's, one of the top pediatric health care systems in the country, will contribute to the leadership role for childhood obesity. For the first time, the three will collaborate, along with many other partners, to have a bigger impact on child health.

Seema Csukas, M.D., Ph.D. is Medical Director of GCHA and Child Health Promotion at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

"Childhood obesity has significant health and economic consequences. Thirty-two percent of children ages 10 to 17 are overweight or obese in Georgia," said Dr. Csukas. "We have to tackle obesity as a statewide issue because Georgia's children deserve a healthy foundation for lifelong success."

In the first year, GCHA will work with the lead agencies to review statewide efforts in the areas of community programs, clinical care, research and public policy. As this information is gathered, the lead agencies will develop comprehensive strategies to address their individual child health issues.

"In Georgia, 372 babies each week are born too small, too soon. The medical costs of just one premature baby could cover that of nearly a dozen healthy, full term babies. With this reality, we can think of no issue greater than the health of our babies," said Gannon Gingrey Manning, Board Chair, March of Dimes Georgia Chapter. "The March of Dimes accepts GCHA's challenge to lead the state in coordinating a streamlined, strategic approach to increase healthy births for generations to come."

"For over 25 years Prevent Child Abuse Georgia has supported Georgia's families to ensure that children are safe, healthy and ready to succeed in life. We look forward to working with GCHA to further promote successful outcomes for all of Georgia's children," said DePriest Waddy, Chief Executive Officer, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia. "Investing in the well-being of all children is crucial. When families are healthy and strong, communities are healthy and strong. It's that simple."

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia (BCBSGA) is the first organization to support GCHA. Their contribution and partnership will help the alliance to grow, expanding effective programs and conducting new research that will have the greatest impact on child well-being in Georgia.

"A core focus for BCBSGA is to improve the health of Georgians. GCHA provides a mechanism for achieving results in several key areas, which is why we came on as a supporting partner," said Monye Connolly, President, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia. "Rarely does one get the chance to be a part of a change agent such as GCHA. Being involved from the ground-up, watching it evolve and impact the community will be a reward experienced by all Georgians."

Ron Frieson, External Affairs Senior Vice President, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, also assumes a leadership role in GCHA.

“GCHA can continue to garner support from the state with support from our reputable organizations,” said Frieson. “Our approach is unique because we are engaging all of the necessary partners around three significant child health issues. With measurable results, we are determined to change the health and well-being of Georgia’s children.”

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Georgia Children’s Health Alliance (GCHA) is a statewide collaboration uniting public, private, not-for-profit, business sectors and pediatric health experts to create healthier futures for our children. By focusing on healthy births, childhood obesity, and child abuse and neglect, GCHA can improve the well-being of children in Georgia. March of Dimes, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia serve as the lead agencies for GCHA. Visit www.TheGCHA.org for more information.