

Healthcare Georgia Foundation
grantmaking for health

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October 14, 2009

Rhonda M. Medows, MD
Commissioner
Georgia Department of Community Health
2 Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Subject: *Advancing Public Health in Georgia*

Dear Dr. Medows:

As you know, Healthcare Georgia Foundation's mission is to advance the health of all Georgians and to expand access to affordable, quality healthcare for underserved individuals and communities. Since 2002, we have made hundreds of grants to nonprofit organizations throughout Georgia, whose work supported our mission.

Now, however, we are embarking upon perhaps the most ambitious and exciting initiative in our Foundation's history, and I wanted to take a moment to make you and other healthcare leaders in Georgia aware of it, and to solicit your involvement.

As you understand perhaps better than anybody, Georgia's public health system has essentially been weakened in recent years through a series of state budget cuts. Today, per capita spending on public health in Georgia is down to about a nickel a day. Among other unfortunate measures, Georgia ranks in the bottom ten unhealthiest states on several measures including infant mortality, percentage of population without insurance, percentage of low-birth weight babies, the number of children with AIDS, etc.

To redress this dire situation, Healthcare Georgia Foundation has recently launched an initiative aimed at building the public and political will necessary to reverse the dangerous and harmful trends in public health capacity that we have all directly experienced in recent years. I call upon the leadership within each of Georgia's Public Health Districts to join us, to guide us, and to lead us in our efforts to advance public health in Georgia.

At the heart of this initiative is a grant to Hayslett Group LLC, an Atlanta based communications firm, to fund a two-year program called *Advancing Public Health in Georgia*. Simply put, the goal of this program will be to prepare public health leaders in Georgia to be more effective advocates in the public policy arena and to use media and other public communications tools to shape the policy environment so that it becomes

possible to begin improving Georgia's public health system. The Hayslett firm has proven itself over the years as exemplary in this work, and I am pleased to have Charlie Hayslett and his team leading this effort. Broadly, the goals of the campaign are to:


- build local advocacy capacity for public health programs and policies.
- promote policies that strengthen state and local public health.
- inform state and local decision makers regarding the allocation of resources for public health.
- strengthen public health leadership (individual/organizational) at state and local levels.
- facilitate collaboration across professions, associations, and organizations in support of public health.
- and promote community awareness of the need for benefits from an investment in public health.

In addition, Healthcare Georgia Foundation has awarded a grant to the Georgia Public Health Association. The Georgia Public Health Association is made up of more than 1,000 local, state and federal public health professionals working in Georgia, but it has lacked the resources needed to have a meaningful impact on Georgia's public health dialogue. Our grant will enable the Association to hire its first executive director and bring more organizational muscle and focus to its efforts.

Finally, the Foundation anticipates making additional strategic investments to advance public health in Georgia. Specifically, I will be contacting the leadership representing the schools of public health and health related membership associations to join us as potential grant recipients in this statewide campaign.

Again, we at Healthcare Georgia Foundation are very excited about this new initiative and have every confidence it will have a beneficial effect on Georgia's public health system. We hope you concur, and would welcome your counsel and involvement in this campaign. If you are interested in knowing more about this effort, please feel free to contact me at gnelson@healthcaregeorgia.org (404-653-0990).

Sincerely,



Gary D. Nelson, Ph.D.
President

Cc: Charlie Hayslett
Russ Toal, GPHA