



# news release

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **The Wellmark Foundation Provides Funding to Support Mobile Oral Health Program in South Dakota**

**(Des Moines, Iowa)** – The Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas (CHAD) in Sioux Falls, S.D., received a two-year, \$150,000 grant from The Wellmark Foundation to implement an oral health and preventive dental program in underserved communities.

A Dental Safety Net for South Dakota Community Health Centers is designed to improve access to dental care and ultimately, the oral health of children and adults served at 24 clinics in three South Dakota community health center (CHC) service areas. The program will provide population-based oral health screenings and preventive dental treatment to more than 600 patients in identified service areas through Delta Dental's Dakota Smiles mobile dental program.

“There is increasing medical evidence of the relationship between oral health and systemic disease,” says Ann Skoglund, RN, clinical quality specialist for CHAD. “Although oral diseases are often preventable, access to dental services is out of reach for many South Dakotans due to long travel distances to a dentist in rural areas,” says Skoglund.

The program is a collaborative effort of the Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas, the Delta Dental Philanthropic Fund (Delta Dental), and three CHCs, including Prairie Community Health, Inc., Rural Health Care, Inc., and Horizon Health Care, Inc.

“Currently, the health centers lack funding to bring this mobile program to their sites,” says Skoglund. “The Wellmark Foundation grant will be used as bridge funding to allow these CHCs to develop sources of permanent funding for regular visits from Delta Dental's Dakota Smiles mobile dental program.”

When onsite, the Dakota Smiles program staff will conduct exams, cleanings and preventive services. Patients will receive cleanings, sealants and fluoride as needed. Staff will provide oral health education to patients, conduct outreach activities in the communities, provide tobacco cessation counseling and will train CHC clinical staff on basic oral health techniques.

For more information on A Dental Safety Net for South Dakota Community Health Centers, contact Ann Skoglund at askoglund@communityhealthcare.net or at (605) 223-2262.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$16.3 million to fund 412 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$593,558 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation works to improve the health of Iowans and South Dakotans,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “This comprehensive program will improve the oral health of adults and children in underserved areas of South Dakota. The funding will hopefully allow the project partners a strong basis from which to leverage additional support to continue the project on a permanent basis.”

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. The Foundation is offering two new grant programs in 2009. The **Growing Up LEAN: Living to be Energetic, Active, and Nutrition Grant Program** supporting childhood obesity prevention projects has an application deadline of April 21, 2009. The deadline for the **Healthy Communities Grant Program: Supporting a Culture of Wellness and Prevention** supporting community-based wellness and prevention projects is September 3, 2009. Visit The Wellmark Foundation's Web site at [www.wellmark.com/foundation](http://www.wellmark.com/foundation) for grant application instructions as well as a list of previous grant recipients. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.