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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, December 2, 2009

Contact: HHS Press Office
(202) 690-6343

HHS Secretary Sebelius Announces Plans to Establish Health IT "Beacon Communities"

\$235 million set aside to fund nationwide Beacon Community Program

HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Dr. David Blumenthal, HHS' National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, announced today plans to make available \$235 million to support an innovative Beacon Community Program. The program will work to accelerate and demonstrate the ability of health information technology to transform local health care systems, and improve the lives of Americans and the performance of the health care providers who serve them. The Beacon Community Program will include \$220 million in grants to build and strengthen health IT infrastructure and health information exchange capabilities, including strong privacy and security measures for data exchange, within 15 communities. An additional \$15 million will be provided for technical assistance to the communities and to evaluate the success of the program.

"Health information technology will make our health care system more efficient and improve care for every American," Secretary Sebelius said. "The Beacon Community Program is a critical step forward as we work to expand the use of health information technology in hospitals and doctor's offices across the country."

Funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Beacon Community Program will take communities at the cutting edge of electronic health record (EHR) adoption and health information exchange and push them to a new level of health care quality and efficiency. The program will establish cooperative agreements with communities to build and strengthen their health IT infrastructure and health information exchange capabilities to achieve measurable improvements in health care quality, safety, efficiency, and population health. The resulting experience will inform efforts throughout the United States to support the meaningful use of EHRs, the primary goal of the federal government's new health IT initiative.

"We recognize that better health care does not come solely from the adoption of technology itself but through the ongoing private and secure exchange and use of health information to provide the best possible information at the point of patient care," said Dr. Blumenthal.

Cooperative agreements will be awarded to 15 qualified non-profit organizations or government entities representing diverse geographic areas, including rural and underserved communities. To qualify for the Beacon Community Program, applicants are expected to:

- Build off of existing health IT infrastructure and exchange to demonstrate care and cost savings;
- Have rates of EHR adoption that are significantly higher than published national estimates; and,
- Coordinate with recently announced Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) programs for Regional Extension Centers and State Health Information Exchange to develop and disseminate best practices for adoption and meaningful use of EHRs to support national goals for widespread use of health IT.

"The Beacon Community Program will help provide more hard evidence that health IT exchange can make a significant and positive difference in the delivery and value of care," stated Dr. Blumenthal.

Information about cooperative agreement applications will be available shortly at <http://HealthIT.HHS.gov/>.

For more information about the implementation of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act programs in the US Department of Health and Human Services, please see: <http://www.hhs.gov/recovery>.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.

Last revised: December 02, 2009

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