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Summit Prepares the Way For Regional Health Care Safety Net 100 Partners Present Recommendations in Answer to Local and National Call for Reform

(Chicago, June 23, 2009) *Health & Medicine Policy Research Group (HMPRG)* hosted a day-long **Regional Health Care Safety Net Summit** focused on strengthening the health care safety net for the uninsured, Medicaid, and vulnerable populations in Northeastern Illinois (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will Counties). The summit was co-hosted by the **U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)**, as part of their Strategic Partnership Initiative. Launched in 2006 in collaboration with 8 other organizations, *Health & Medicine's Regional Health Care Safety Net Initiative* built on the successes of the previous Chicago/Cook County Summit, convened in 1990 by the Mayor of Chicago, the Cook County Board President and the Governor of Illinois.

This current effort engaged over 100 community partners and organizations to address the new and intensified problems of today which require that action be taken from a regional perspective of Northern Illinois: the economic downturn, skyrocketing unemployment, hospital closures, increased number of uninsured, funding cuts across the health system, shifting demographics, clinic consolidations, uncoordinated planning, and new political leadership. With a national call from the President to reform the health system, and stimulus package support for safety net institutions, this is our opportunity to answer the call and ensure the strength and sustainability of our region's health care safety net.

The collaborative effort of the **Regional Health Care Safety Net Initiative** used the World Health Organization's framework for strengthening a health system to create a **regional blueprint** to more efficiently and effectively provide quality health services for uninsured, Medicaid, and other vulnerable populations across a 7 county region.

- To date, the process has resulted in a detailed description about each county's needs and resources, and information about models in other metropolitan areas
- The summit, held at UIC, drew over 180 participants to review and endorse these recommendations and, as a unified community, call for political leadership to support further action
- These recommendations will be a catalyst to align disparate health planning efforts in the state
- Recommendations will support work with the region's new comprehensive plan, "Go to 2040," being developed by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP.)

Many participants also signed onto a **Call for Leadership and Resources to Address the Regional Health Care Safety Net**, which stated:

The health and social safety net in the Chicago metropolitan region* is tattered and stressed. The economic crisis, structural deficits in government funding at the local, county and state levels, and the profound population shifts within the region all create major challenges for those providing safety net services.

Our traditional approaches, bricks and mortar and institutional structures have not been flexible enough to respond quickly and across artificial geographic boundaries to these new challenges.

This gathering recognizes that approaches which consider the entire region in determining priorities, influencing resource allocation, and strengthening existing health systems are critical if the safety net is to survive and evolve to meet the needs of our people.

For these reasons, we urge elected officials, health care leaders, and civic and community organizations to create the political will and resources to identify and support regional approaches to address the problems of our population.

Materials from the summit will be available on the *Health & Medicine* website (www.hmprg.org) by Friday, June 26. To arrange for interviews with key summit participants or HMPRG leadership, please contact Janna Stansell or Margie Schaps at 312.372.4292.

Health & Medicine Policy Research Group is a 28-year old 501c3 nonprofit that has operated as an independent, freestanding center driven by a singular mission: **formulating health policy, advocacy, and health systems to enhance the health of the public**. We have earned a reputation as a trusted source for analysis on health reform at the local, regional and state level, and as a convener, honest broker and leader of coalitions and collaborative efforts to promote health justice. Our work is grounded in a commitment to: universal health care; quality and effective delivery systems; adequately funded and compensated primary health care providers; a special role for County, other public sector, and other safety net providers; recognition that health is ultimately dependent on material conditions more so than medical care; and the elimination of health disparities.