

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Montana Healthcare Foundation awards more than \$1.3 million in grants to address major health challenges in Montana communities**

*Bozeman, MT, November 17, 2015* – The Montana Healthcare Foundation, Montana’s largest health-focused philanthropic organization, today announced more than \$1.3 million in new grants to organizations seeking to address Montana’s most pressing health problems. A complete list of these new grants can be found on the foundation’s website, [www.mthcf.org](http://www.mthcf.org).

The projects funded by the foundation will focus on key health challenges such as behavioral health disorders (mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse), American Indian health disparities, and the need for innovation to control rising healthcare costs and improve health outcomes, particularly in communities already struggling with a lack of resources and personnel.

“These new grants will support new and effective solutions to important and costly problems that Montanans deal with every day,” said Dr. Aaron Wernham, the foundation’s CEO. “We were amazed by the range and quality of the proposals we received.”

The new grants were awarded in three focus areas:

1. **Behavioral Health (mental illness and drug and alcohol use):** Montana healthcare providers and community members consistently rank behavioral health problems among the major problems in the state. MHCF awarded more than \$500,000 to support innovative projects that will strengthen Montana’s behavioral health system and help people get the care they need. The projects will address harmful drug use in pregnancy; integrate behavioral and medical care to improve patient outcomes and reduce costs; and provide behavioral health services in schools.
2. **American Indian Health:** American Indian communities in Montana experience higher rates of many illnesses, a challenge that is rooted in longstanding problems including poverty, unemployment, racial discrimination, historical trauma, inadequate housing, and food insecurity, among others.

The foundation awarded more than \$400,000 to tribal health departments, urban Indian health centers, and tribally-run non-profits. These projects will address high-priority issues identified by tribal health leaders, such as strengthening billing and administration to support sustainable, tribally-led health programs; increasing insurance coverage for tribal members; developing school-based health centers to improve the lives and health of children; preventing injuries; and developing effective approaches to treating people with opioid dependence.

3. **Partnerships for Better Health:** Many communities, particularly in rural Montana, struggle with limited resources, health workforce shortages, and rising healthcare costs. This focus area supports systems-based solutions with a focus on new partnerships between healthcare and public health agencies that use existing resources more effectively.

MHCF awarded more than \$400,000 in grants to create new inter-agency partnerships designed to deliver more accessible and effective care; expand the use of care coordination; and strengthen efforts to prevent disease through addressing upstream risk factors, such as poverty and poor quality housing.

“This call for proposals is an exciting first step in addressing the needs that we’ve heard about from communities around the state,” said Dr. Aaron Wernham, “and making real progress on some of these issues will take a long time. Fortunately, though, we’re here for the long haul, and will be making new grants every year.” Montana Healthcare Foundation was established as a permanent resource, and will continue working with communities throughout the state, addressing complex health issues by making strategic investments to improve the health and well-being of all Montanans.

#### **About the Montana Healthcare Foundation**

The Montana Healthcare Foundation (MHCF) was created in 2013, and was formed as result of the sale of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Montana to a private corporation. In accordance with State law, the assets were transferred to a charitable trust to be managed for public benefit. Currently, MHCF has approximately \$100 million in assets. The foundation is a permanent resource for Montanans. The foundation will spend the income from trust investments (estimated at roughly five percent of the total value of the trust each year) on grant disbursements and related programs and expenses, and provide a stable, reliable resource supporting health for Montanans.

For more information about the foundation and future grant opportunities, interested organizations can visit the Montana Healthcare Foundation’s website, at [www.mthcf.org](http://www.mthcf.org), and sign up for the mailing list.

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