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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **WASHINGTON COUNTY WELLNESS INITIATIVE RECEIVES RURAL HEALTH NETWORK DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GRANT**

### **Formalizing Decades of Community Collaboration and Strong Leadership**

**Bartlesville, OK (November 15, 2014) – Washington County Wellness Initiated, Inc. (WCWI)**, a grassroots collaboration seeking to strengthen and transform the public health infrastructure through community-based action, recently announced that they have received a Health Resources and Services Administration Rural Health Network Development Planning Grant. The one-year planning grant will be utilized to focus on ways to build capacity and a network infrastructure that enables entities to coordinate care and increase access to health care for Washington County communities.

WCWI, which began in 2004, will use the new funds for increasing the awareness of the Medical Home concept which is defined by HRSA as “a cultivated partnership between the patient, family, and primary provider in cooperation with specialists and support from the community. The patient/family is the focal point of this model, and the medical home is built around this center.” The funds will also allow WCWI to conduct five surveys and four focus groups that will be utilized as part of a comprehensive community assessment to further identify gaps in services and additional health care needs of Washington County residents. WCWI will collaborate with Bartlesville Regional United Way, Bartlesville Community Foundation, Washington County Health Department, and Success by Six/ Bartlesville Smart Star to assure that the information gleaned from the community assessment will be of benefit to these and other community organizations.

"This funding will help strengthen our organizational capacity and allow us to provide support to the work groups and organizations currently serving the growing needs of Washington County residents," said Sheree L. Hukill, WCWI-HRSA Project Director. Hukill states: "This grant was awarded based upon the results of the tireless years of effort provided by WCWI leaders such as M'Liss Jenkins, Mary Beth Murray, and Ray Harris, MD. Our intent is to honor the solid foundation created by these amazing professionals by assisting the work groups in their sustainability and growth needs.

During a recent project kick-off meeting, Dr Harris who is retiring and leaving WCWI, was honored with the Washington County Wellness Initiative's Community Advocacy Award. M'Liss Jenkins presented the award and provided a brief history of Dr. Harris' community service. As soon as Dr. Harris arrived in Bartlesville, it was obvious that he had a heart for the community as he immediately began serving on various boards and committees. Dr. Harris was a member of the Washington County Public Health Guidance Center prior to the center becoming part of the public health department. He was instrumental in providing support for the county to receive the first child abuse prevention grant. This program provided protection from child abuse for over twenty years by providing support to young parents and at-risk families. Dr. Harris was the organizer and chair of the child protection team which is now known as Ray of Hope Advocacy Center.

Further, Dr. Harris has served on the March of Dimes, A Place of Hope, Women and Children in Crisis, and Early Childhood Resource Center board for years. As a founding member of WCWI, Dr. Harris was instrumental in setting the public health priority areas WCWI continues to work on today. Throughout his years of service to WCWI, he has served on the Board of Health, Medical Director of the Washington County Health Department, Access to Healthcare Committee Physicians Advisory Group Member, and Children's Sector Representative on the County Health Improvement Organization Board.

The vision and perseverance of Mary Beth Murray, former Administrative Director of Washington County Health Department, was also acknowledged during the meeting. Under Ms. Murray's leadership, WCWI became the first group in the state to be certified as a County Health Improvement Organization by the Public Health Institute of Oklahoma. Further, as a result of Ms. Murray's determination to meet the health needs of the community and the constant groundwork by Ms. Jenkins, WCWI was awarded an ImPact Small Grant for the Washington County Health Improvement Organization Suicide Prevention in Primary Practices Project. "This latest rounds of funding demonstrates that federal and state rural health organizations recognize the value of WCWI's vision and of our team. We are determined more than ever to become a leader in community-based public health initiatives," added M'Liss Jenkins, Community Volunteer. "We are very excited about WCWI's future and being able to assist them with their growth and sustainability," said WCWI-HRSA Project Director Hukill.

### **Washington County Wellness Initiative, Inc.**

The residents of Washington County came together in January, 2004 to talk about community needs and concerns. Forty-five individuals attended the first meeting from various community sectors including concerned citizens, businesses, government, social services, schools, law enforcement, neighborhoods, faith community, youth serving organizations, health care, and tribal. The group identified areas of concern which included: access for adult indigent health care, lack of affordable health care, lack of adult counseling and mental health issues, need for employee health/wellness programs, lack of affordable housing, lack of dental care, lack of transportation, high costs of medications, need for youth prevention programs, late/no prenatal care especially in the Hispanic population, as well as, medical/health literacy issues among Hispanics, need for advocacy on health issues, daycare for teen moms, children not getting immunized, and the need to educate voters on current issues. In an effort to respond to these concerns, the group formed the WCWI with a mission to strengthen and transform the public health infrastructure in Washington County. The WCWI is an Oklahoma Turning Point Coalition formed as part of the Oklahoma State Department of Health, Office of Public Health Innovation, Oklahoma Turning Point Community Partnerships initiative. WCWI has grown to a diverse group of 190 public health partners.

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