



Rocky Mountain Health Plans

FOUNDATION

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Kayla Arnesen, APR
Rocky Mountain Health Plans
Direct: 970-244-7967 • Cell: 970-250-4060

Lisa Fenton Free
Rocky Mountain Health Plans Foundation
Direct: 970-248-5027 • Cell: 970-985-5533

**Rocky Mountain Foundation Secures Funding
for Statewide Prenatal Smoking Cessation Program**

The Rocky Mountain Health Plans (RMHP) Foundation has secured funding to help mothers-to-be throughout Colorado quit smoking, announced Foundation Executive Director Lisa Fenton Free.

“We were awarded nearly a half million dollars from The Colorado Health Foundation to start an evidence-based program at the county level and expand statewide over the next three years,” says Fenton Free. The Colorado Health Foundation is a nonprofit organization working with others to make Colorado the healthiest state in the nation.

The program will be introduced in spring 2008 in 18 counties: Alamosa, Baca, Clear Creek, Delta, Fremont, Grand, Jackson, Larimer, Las Animas, Moffat, Montrose, Ouray, Prowers, Pueblo, Rio Blanco, Rio Grande, Routt, and Weld. It will expand to 23 additional counties in 2009 and to the remaining Colorado counties in 2010. The program is already operating in Chaffee and Mesa counties.

Pregnant smokers can be referred to the program by their physician, clinic, or health department. Women complete cessation counseling and carbon monoxide (CO) testing at their county health department or other agency. After giving birth, they return monthly for CO monitoring. Every month she remains tobacco-free, mom receives a \$25 voucher for diapers.

“Baby & Me, Tobacco Free,” an incentive-based smoking cessation program, has been used in New York for several years. “With two years of data, 87 percent of pregnant women in the program in Chautauqua County, New York, quit smoking and remained tobacco-free three months after giving birth, with 85 percent still smoke-free after nine months,” says Janice Ferguson, RNC, RMHP’s perinatal care coordinator. She will oversee the Colorado program.

“Smoking during pregnancy is the single most preventable cause of death and illness among infants,” says Fenton Free. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that smoking during pregnancy increases the risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and low birth weight.

“Low birth weight newborns more often require extended stays in neonatal intensive care units,” Fenton Free says, “and health problems don’t end when the baby goes home.” Low birth weight is associated with long-term disabilities -- cerebral palsy, autism, mental retardation, vision and hearing impairments, and developmental disabilities, she says. The CDC also estimates 150,000 to 300,000 cases of lower respiratory infection in infants and children each year are attributable to environmental tobacco smoke, primarily from a smoking mother.

The Foundation sought funding to bring “Baby & Me, Tobacco Free” to all of Colorado because of the program’s success in New York and in a pilot program in Mesa County, Ferguson explained. The combination of individual cessation counseling and support, CO testing, and the incentive of vouchers has proven very successful, she says.

The grant secured by Rocky Mountain Health Plans Foundation from The Colorado Health Foundation will fund training and compensation of county program coordinators, the purchase of CO monitors, and marketing materials. The program will be publicized in each county as it becomes available.

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About Rocky Mountain Health Plans

Rocky Mountain Health Plans is a Colorado-based, not-for-profit organization that provides medical benefit plans and services to more than 175,905 enrollees. Founded in 1974, Rocky Mountain serves individuals and families, Medicare and Medicaid-eligible persons, and children who receive care under the Child Health Plan Plus program. For more information, visit www.rmhp.org.

About Rocky Mountain Health Plans Foundation

Rocky Mountain Health Plans Foundation was formed in 1997 by Rocky Mountain Health Plans to expand the health plan’s mission by bringing quality care to Coloradans outside its membership. When a health care need or gap is identified, the Foundation brings together the partners who can get things done and locates the financing through grant opportunities. For more information visit: www.rmhp.org/about_rmhp/rocky_mountain_health_foundation.aspx.

About The Colorado Health Foundation

The Colorado Health Foundation works to make Colorado the healthiest state in the nation by improving access to affordable, quality health care and encouraging Coloradans to make healthier lifestyle choices. The Foundation invests in the community through grants and initiatives, medical education programs and direct care programs serving older adults, families, mothers and infants. For more information, please visit www.ColoradoHealth.org.

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