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*****Do You Have Friends with Benefits?*****

Missouri Consumer Groups celebrate second anniversary of Affordable Care Act, its benefits and protections for Missourians

Jefferson City, MO, March 20, 2012 –

Consumer groups and safety net health care providers from throughout Missouri will participate in several events during the week of March 19-26 to celebrate the second anniversary of the signing of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) into law.

The ACA is already providing benefits for over a million Missouri citizens and is requiring health insurers to play by new rules in the law that prohibit them from dropping coverage when people get sick, or selling policies with lifetime and annual limits, coverage caps that caused many families to declare bankruptcy when someone in their family got sick or injured. After 2014 the law will stop insurance companies from discriminating against anyone with a pre-existing condition and will protect women from being charged higher premiums just because of their gender.

Some of the Missouri anniversary events include:

Monday, March 19, 2012, 2:30pm at St. Louis Community College in Forest Park, St. Louis. Sponsored by The Missouri Alliance for Retired Persons, includes a presentation by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and a panel of seniors and others to discuss how the ACA is benefiting older Missourians, including those on Medicare.

“Missouri seniors and people with disabilities have benefitted under the law,” says *Kirsten Dunham with the Disability Coalition on Healthcare Reform*. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, over 83,000 Medicare recipients received a \$250 rebate to help cover the cost of prescription drugs in 2010. In 2011, over 78,500 on Medicare in the state received a 50% discount on their covered brand named prescriptions when they hit the donut hole. This discount amounted to an average savings of \$595 per person. “That is a big savings for people who tend to be on a fixed income,” Dunham adds.

Tuesday, March 20, 2012, many consumer groups will be highlighting the benefits of the ACA for women and women’s health in a social media campaign.

Over one million Missourians, many of them women, are also now getting preventive screenings, like colonoscopies and mammograms, in their private health plans with no cost-sharing, that is no deductibles and co-pays apply. And, some 792,000 women with breast cancer and other chronic diseases are now protected from insurers placing annual and lifetime limits on their treatment costs.

Wednesday, March 21, 2012, Missouri’s own, Alice Kitchen, retired from the Social Work department at Children’s Mercy Hospital in KC and a long time health activist in Kansas City, will be honored at the White House celebration of “Champions of Change.” Alice has worked tirelessly and boldly for access to quality, affordable health care in Missouri for several decades and now spends much of her time volunteering to help educate people about the Affordable Care Act. The event will be available on line at 12:15 CST.

“How appropriate that Alice is acknowledged for her work during this special week, and on the day that many groups in the country will be celebrating the ACA benefits for children and young people,” says *Rebecca McClanahan, Executive Director of Missouri Health Care for All!* “Some 39,667 young adults in Missouri gained insurance coverage as of June of last year when the reform law required health plans to allow parents to keep children under 26 years of age on their family’s policies. Advocacy by people like Alice for health care access for children, and really all Missourians, has helped to make this possible.”

Thursday, March 22, 2012, Clergy from throughout the state will be meeting in Jefferson City as part of Missouri Faith Voices, to discuss issues impacting congregations and communities in the state, including pay day lending and health care.

Friday, March 23, 2012, citizens in the Kansas City area will meet at the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) office building at noon to celebrate the actual anniversary of the ACA with birthday cake and special remarks from Richard Brummell, former Regional Director of Health and Human Services in Kansas City.

Sunday, March 25, 2012, 3-5PM at Congregation Shaare Emeth, 11645 Ladue Rd., St. Louis, there will be a public meeting sponsored by several faith based groups, including Central Reform Congregation, Jobs With Justice, and the Disability Coalition for Health Care Reform to discuss the ACA, its benefits and protections with area legislators.

Andrea Routh, Executive Director of the Missouri Health Advocacy Alliance, says this event and others like it will be an important dialogue between citizens and their state policymakers over the coming weeks. “Many are seeing tremendous benefits from this law after two years, and we feel it is important for legislators to know that a lot of us do have friends with benefits from the ACA.”

Monday, March 26, 2012, Consumer groups from throughout the state will hold a press conference in Jefferson City to demonstrate support for the ACA and highlight the benefits and protections of the law just prior to the Supreme Court oral arguments on the ACA cases. (Details will be issued in a release later this week.)

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About the Missouri Health Advocacy Alliance

The Missouri Health Advocacy Alliance is a non-profit statewide coalition of over forty organizations based in Jefferson City. These organizations are consumer advocacy groups and safety net providers representing thousands of Missourians. The mission of the Alliance is to provide a united consumer voice for quality, affordable health care choices in Missouri. The vision of the Alliance is that Missouri becomes a national leader in health access, quality, equity and outcomes.