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**Access Health Receives \$6 Million NIH Award to Tackle Barriers to Health and Economic Mobility in Muskegon County**

**Muskegon County, October 3, 2023** — Access Health is excited to announce that it has been awarded a transformative \$6 million team award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Common Fund as part of the Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society (CompPASS) program, a first-of-its kind community-led research program received by 25 communities across the nation. This landmark 5-year team award will enable Access Health to spearhead an innovative initiative aimed at dismantling the systemic barriers to economic mobility and improved health for under-resourced populations in Muskegon County.

Jeff Fortenbacher, Access Health's Executive Director, expresses his enthusiasm for the project, stating, "This extraordinary opportunity empowers our community to confront the local factors that hinder workforce development and economic self-sufficiency. The research effort will have a specific focus on the ALICE population, consisting of low-income workers who are particularly susceptible to economic fluctuations and personal challenges such as dependable transportation, affordable childcare, unexpected health events, and debt."

The NIH award will act as a powerful catalyst, bringing together local innovations in healthcare coverage, childcare, and transportation to alleviate the socio-economic challenges faced by individuals and families in Muskegon County. Access Health is proud to collaborate on this project with research partners, the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI), and the W.E. UpJohn Institute for Employment Research, alongside community impact partners, the United Way of the Lakeshore's Childcare Action Team and Hope Network's Wheels to Work program, health system partner Trinity Health – Muskegon, and with support from Care Convene to align medical and community social care data.

Samantha Cornell, Director of Community-Based Services at Access Health, shared her enthusiasm for the project, stating, "I am both honored and energized by this NIH team award. It underscores our shared commitment to breaking down barriers to economic stability and improved health in Muskegon County. This initiative is a testament to the power of collaboration, and we are eager to work hand in hand with our partners to create lasting change in the lives of our community members."

One of the most significant barriers faced by individuals in this population is the "benefits cliff," where the loss of government-sponsored benefits hinders their transition from government dependency to sustainable employment. Access Health's research will be laser-focused on realigning existing community resources to create a more integrated and effective human services delivery system.

This project builds on and expands over two decades of local work, recognizing the proven impact and continued need. Don Shampine, Access Health Board President, explained, "You can measure the success of Access Health through charts and spreadsheets, but the true measurement of the impact is told in the stories of the people we have served for over twenty-four years. The NIH grant will allow us to expand those stories."

This initiative marks one of NIH's initial forays into community-led awards, exploring the profound influence of social factors on economic, physical, and behavioral well-being. Since its inception in 1999,

Access Health has consistently showcased its innovative expertise in designing community-driven health coverage models, which have positively impacted over 60,000 Muskegon County residents.

"Today, we embark on an expansion of our vision, with the aim of ensuring that every individual in Muskegon County has the opportunity to reach their full potential," stated Jeff Fortenbacher, Access Health's Executive Director. "We firmly believe that the impact of our work in Muskegon will serve as a guiding beacon for communities across the state and the nation. Access Health is enthusiastic about this opportunity to continue its legacy of innovation, not only in healthcare but also in addressing the various social needs that hinder individuals from attaining full employment and leading healthier lives."

The NIH award number for Access Health's ComPASS award is: 1OT2OD035801-01. The project title is "Strengthening Community-Driven Safety-Net Interventions to Improve Health and Economic Equity"

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Established in 1999, Access Health has supported the health of Muskegon County by providing affordable, quality health coverage for workers who don't qualify for Medicaid but are unable to afford traditional health insurance. Its community developed plan includes affordable monthly premium, zero deductible, nominal co-payments and individualized health coaching to support workforce readiness and health improvement. Access Health also serves as the backbone organization for Muskegon's Community Health Innovation Region (CHIR) , a state-partnered initiative to improve local health and well-being. As the backbone, Access Health is fostering numerous local initiatives addressing health inequity, community and economic development, care coordination, safety net capacity and interoperability of data.

To learn more visit: [www.accesshealth.org](http://www.accesshealth.org)

The ComPASS program is funded by the NIH Common Fund and managed collaboratively by NIH staff from the Common Fund; National Cancer Institute; National Institute of Mental Health; National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities; National Institute of Nursing Research; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; and NIH Office of Research on Women's Health, with many of the NIH Institutes Centers and Offices providing input and participating in program development and management. The ComPASS program provides an unprecedented opportunity for community organizations to lead health-related research within their communities and is dedicated to fostering more meaningful collaboration among community organizations and researchers, enabling them to work as equal partners. For more information about the NIH ComPASS program, please visit <https://commonfund.nih.gov/compass>

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