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**Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and Allegheny County Medical Society Foundation
lead growth of chronic disease self-management program,
*Better Choices, Better Health***

Expansion to include new online offerings, more in-person workshops

Pittsburgh, Pa. (September 30, 2014) – United Way of Allegheny County, alongside lead partner, Vintage, Inc., is pleased to announce the expansion of the chronic disease self-management program, *Better Choices, Better Health*. Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield (Highmark) and The Allegheny County Medical Society Foundation (ACMSF) are both committing funding and resources to expand the program’s availability and delivery model to help more adults improve and manage chronic health conditions.

Highmark committed \$200,000 over two years, and ACMSF committed \$120,000 over three years. Additionally, ACMSF and Highmark will both provide professional resources dedicated to evolving the program in the coming months. With the support of ACMSF and Highmark, *Better Choices, Better Health* will be able to provide 10 additional in-person workshops this fall, increasing the number of program graduates by 42 percent. This expansion will be coordinated through a new program partnership with the Community College of Allegheny County. Additionally, the delivery model will expand to include online workshops through the National Council on Aging.

“We’re committed to working with our partners to evolve *Better Choices, Better Health* into an effective and efficient education and health management program that will potentially be the solution to some of the region’s most pressing health concerns,” said Kevin O. Garrett MD, Chair, Allegheny County Medical Society Foundation.

The *Better Choices, Better Health* chronic disease self-management program is a six-week workshop that educates and empowers adults to proactively and regularly manage their chronic illnesses. It has been offered to Allegheny County residents at no charge for the past six years through a partnership between United Way and Vintage Senior Services. The program is an evidence-based model that originated at Stanford University and was subsequently replicated both nationally and internationally.

Since its inception, more than 1,000 Allegheny County residents have attended the workshops. An external evaluation conducted by the University of Pittsburgh found that program participants had an improved general health assessment; reduced levels of discouragement, fearfulness, worry and frustration; reduced pain and fatigue; increased

levels of exercise; increased confidence to manage their condition; and reductions in interference of their health in life activities. The results are based on the six-month follow up evaluations of more than 700 program participants over three years.

“The results of this program are incredibly promising,” said Ann Truxell, executive director, Vintage Senior Services. “*Better Choices, Better Health* has helped hundreds of seniors to stay active and independent, while improving their overall health. We are looking forward to expanding the program to reach even more adults who need help managing their chronic conditions.”

Chronic disease management has a significant impact on collective and individual wellbeing, the economy and the healthcare system. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that chronic diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, depression, arthritis, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cancer and stroke are among the most costly and preventable health problems in the country. The CDC estimates that 80 percent of older adults have one chronic condition and 50 percent have two or more; seven out of 10 Americans will die from a chronic disease. Treatment of chronic conditions accounts for 75 percent of total health care costs.

“Patients with chronic conditions have needs that are both varied and complex, and meeting those needs continues to be a challenge,” said Dr. Judith Black, senior medical director of senior markets, Highmark Inc. “Evidence-based programs like *Better Choices, Better Health* can help us improve care, overall well-being and life expectancy, while reducing medical costs.”

The National Council on Aging reports that the self-management approach to dealing with chronic diseases has a potential savings of \$6.6 billion by reaching just 10 percent of the population.

“Our goal is to empower adults to take the necessary steps they need to live healthy, enjoy full, active lives in their own homes and communities, and save money on healthcare costs,” said Heather Sedlacko, director of programs for seniors and people with disabilities, United Way of Allegheny County. “The support of ACMSF and Highmark is invaluable to expanding this important program.”

For more information about the program, including the schedule of workshops, visit www.alleghenybetterhealth.org.

About ACMSF – The Allegheny County Medical Society Foundation (ACMSF) provides charitable support for health and medical programs in Allegheny County on behalf of its 3,000 physician members who provide medical care in our community. ACMSF will help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their physical and behavioral health, and their quality of life.

About Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield – Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield serves approximately 3.2 million members through the company’s health care benefits

business and employs more than 4,000 people in western Pennsylvania. Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies. For more information, visit www.highmark.com.

About Vintage, Inc. – The mission of Vintage Senior Services is to improve and influence the experience of aging in our community. Because, whether you are 60 or approaching 90 years of age, the goals remain the same: staying active and healthy; maintaining independence; pursuing interests; and making new friends.

About Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) -- CCAC annually educates more than 30,000 credit students through 152 degree, certificate, transfer and diploma programs and offers thousands of students access to noncredit and workforce development courses. The learning-centered institution's mission is to provide affordable access to quality education and offer a dynamic, diverse and supportive learning environment that prepares the region's residents for academic, professional and personal success in our changing global society. CCAC's quality programs enable students to transfer credits to 520 colleges and universities and support regional workforce needs with accessible instruction available day, evening, weekend and online in Allegheny County and beyond. Visit www.ccac.edu to learn more.

About United Way of Allegheny County – United Way of Allegheny County is a change agent and efficient community fundraiser that improves lives by addressing critical community needs. By convening diverse partners and investing in programs and people to advance solutions, United Way creates long-lasting change and helps children and youth succeed, strengthens and supports families by promoting financial stability, ensures the safety and well-being of vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities, and provides county-wide access to information and referral sources meeting basic needs.

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