



LA MAESTRA  
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS  
City Heights • El Cajon • National City

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
March 30, 2009

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**Local healthy lifestyles program for non-English speakers unveiled**  
*New state law requiring health plans to provide interpreters for limited-English speaking Californians also highlighted*

(San Diego) – California Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) Director Cindy Ehnes and leaders from La Maestra Community Health Centers and the California Office of the Patient Advocate gathered today on the eve of Caesar Chavez day to announce a \$164,123 grant to implement a culturally and linguistically-sensitive lifestyle modification program targeting low-income, immigrant and minority residents in San Diego.

“We communicate with our patients in 19 different languages and know they are more likely to seek help and to return if we provide a comforting environment where they feel at home,” states Zara Marselian, CEO, La Maestra Community Health Centers. “We have learned that our patients are more receptive to positive information delivered in their own language and their beliefs and customs are respected, which is what this program is about.”

In 1990, La Maestra developed the Medically Trained Cultural Liaison model (M.T.C.L.) which is a highly trained group of core staff members that are recruited from the diverse populations they serve. Approximately 90 percent of La Maestra’s patients are first-generation refugees and immigrants. The M.T.C.L.’s are cross-trained in the areas of eligibility, health education and outreach. This ensures that there is a high level of cultural competency within the medical home. The grant funding will be used to support the M.T.C.L.’s work in the areas of health education, training on nutrition and exercise.

The funding for the grant comes from a \$50 million charitable investment required by the DMHC and the California Department of Insurance from PacifiCare Health Systems when it merged with UnitedHealth Group in 2005. As part of the \$50 million in charitable grants, \$25 million is dedicated to grants to be distributed to community organizations.

Director Ehnes also highlighted a new state law, put into effect by the DMHC, making California the first state in the nation to require that medical services, materials, and information are provided to commercial health plan members in their spoken languages. This law also requires that interpretation services be offered to those of no or limited English proficiency (LEP) at each point of service, such as the doctor’s office, a laboratory, or a therapy facility. This landmark law is expected to make a profound, positive change in the way millions of LEP Californians communicate with their doctors.

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“In today’s complex medical world, it is crucial that patients understand the instructions given by their doctors, and perhaps more importantly, that doctors understand their patients -- which can be nearly impossible when a language barrier prevents them from communicating with each other,” said Ehnes. “This landmark language assistance law will end the unnecessary distress and confusion many health plan members with LEP have when attempting to access care. It will ensure that California health plan members receive their health care services in a language that they can speak and understand.”

According to census data, 43 percent of Californians speak a language other than English at home, a proportion far higher than in any other state in the country. In San Diego County, at least one in three residents speak a language other than English at home. Since 1990, the total number of county residents who speak a language other than English has gone up 66 percent.

“I commend all the people and organizations that have worked for years to make these regulations possible. Finally, more consumers can receive medical services in their language,” said Sandra Perez, Director of the Office of the Patient Advocate. “I encourage patients and consumers to contact us if they have questions or problems.”

Health plan members should tell their plans, doctors, or other providers that they need language assistance when they make an appointment. If consumers have a problem getting an interpreter or translated materials, they should call the DMHC Help Center at 1-888-466-2219, or file a complaint at [www.healthhelp.ca.gov](http://www.healthhelp.ca.gov).

La Maestra Community Health Centers is dedicated to transforming the health and well-being of low-income and immigrant residents through compassionate care, self-sufficiency and community participation and has grown into an award-winning health organization that has treated an estimated 68,000 patients since 1990. In 2008, La Maestra reported 85,000 patient visits. As a member of Southern California's Council of Community Clinics, it is the only health center of its kind in the communities it serves - City Heights, El Cajon, Lemon Grove, National City and a school based clinic in San Diego. Low-income and immigrant residents rely heavily on La Maestra to be the "safety net" for their health and non-medical needs.

The California Department of Managed Health Care is the only stand-alone HMO watchdog agency in the nation, touching the lives of more than 21 million enrollees. The DMHC has assisted more than 800,000 Californians resolve their HMO problems through its 24-hour Help Center, educates consumers on health care rights and responsibilities, and works closely with HMO plans to ensure a solvent and stable managed health care system.

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