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## **Transgender Health Conference Outlines Health Risks for Underserved Population, Provides Health Professionals with Information to Improve Care**

### **Community Healthcare Network Calls for Care Parity**

(Bronx, New York) – A full-day, first-of-its-kind health care conference focusing on improving health care services to the transgender community, sponsored by Community Healthcare Network (CHN), was held on Friday, May 13, 2011 at Lincoln Hospital. The discussion focused on understanding the distinct care needs of the transgender community and providing information to overcome barriers to care. Approximately 150 medical providers and advocates were in attendance.

CHN started seeing an increase in transgender patients in 2004 and launched its [Transgender Program](#) in 2006. They currently serve about 165 clients of transgender experience. About 40% of the clients are living with HIV/AIDS.

CHN developed the Transgender Health Conference in an effort to help other providers better understand the transgender community and their health care needs. “The time has come for the entire health care community to ensure access to care and social services for the transgender community. We must increase awareness of their health needs and guarantee they get the same quality of care as everyone else,” said Catherine Abate, President and CEO of CHN.

Health care challenges faced by the transgender population include:

- Inconsistent access to health care
- Use of street hormones and silicon -27% inject hormones and 25% inject silicon
- Self medication
- Lack of health insurance
- Significantly higher rates of HIV/AIDS infection – 28% of male-to-female transgender are infected and the rate jumps to 5x% among African-American people of transgender experience. Those living in the Bronx are at even greater risk: HIV diagnosis in the Bronx is twice the rate of the city average and the Bronx lead New York City in new cases of HIV infection from needle-sharing.

People of transgender experience also face other social challenges that further complicate their access to quality and ongoing health services. The transgender population is more likely to face discrimination, including from medical providers, engage in commercial sex, be victims of domestic violence, be homeless, and have lower level of education.

Dr. Monica Sweeney, Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control, welcomed attendees, saying, “This is a historic conference. The city has a transgender population of significant size and they need someone to advocate for them.”

In addition to accepting transgender patients as they do all other patients, the following recommendations were made to providers to improve health care services for transgender patients:

- Do not assume gender identity and sexual orientation of patients
- Do not begin by asking a transgender patients if they had surgery
- Make sure to use the correct pronoun is used when referring to patients
- Create trans-friendly policies and –when possible- gender neutral bathrooms

Additional speakers included Ashley Love, founder of MAGNET, Samuel Lurie, Director of Transgender Training and Advocacy, Elizabeth Lopez, outreach worker, and Marlow White, case manager, of Citywide Hard Reduction, Paul Kobrak, Director of Risk Reduction in Vulnerable Populations, Bureau of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control, New York City Department of Health, Robert Beil, Medical Director, Montefiore Medical Group, Noah Lewis, Staff Attorney, Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, Pauline Park, Chair of the New York Association for Transgender Rights Advocacy.

The conference was co-sponsored by the Bronx Community Pride Center. According to Dirk McCall, the center’s Executive Director, “The Bronx Community Pride Center (BCPC) was honored to co-convene this Transgender Health Conference with the Community Healthcare Network. Bringing together over 150 service providers and consumers has put transgender health on the health agenda for the Borough. We look forward to taking the next steps towards full equality for the transgender community.”

Local Councilmember Maria del Carmen Arroyo made opening remarks.

The conference was supported by the New York State AIDS Institute, the Paul Rapoport Foundation, Citiwide Harm Reduction, Gilead, Merck, and Tibotec.

CHN’s Transgender program services include primary care, hormone therapy, screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, mental health services, HIV testing and counseling, workshops, interventions, support groups, and more. For more information on services, please call 718-320-6765. Services are located in the Bronx Health Center, 975 Westchester Avenue.

About CHN:

Community Healthcare Network (CHN) is a not-for-profit organization providing access to affordable, culturally-competent and comprehensive community-based primary care, mental health and social services for diverse populations in underserved communities throughout New

York City. CHN serves more than 60,000 individuals a year who would otherwise have little or no access to critical health care. CHN is composed of nine health centers and one mobile health units. To learn more about CHN visit our website at [www.chnny.org](http://www.chnny.org).