

COLORADO MEDICAID CONTAINING HEALTH CARE COSTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DENVER – April 6, 2010 – The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing announced today that efforts to decrease non-emergent emergency room visits have resulted in more appropriate, less expensive visits to primary care providers.

In Fiscal Year 2007-08, Colorado Medicaid reimbursed hospital providers for over 306,000 emergency room visits at a cost of \$49.4 million. Evaluation of visits according to principal diagnosis showed that 20 percent of all visits were for potentially non-emergent reasons, while an additional 25 percent of visits could have been treated by a primary care provider. Over 40 percent of Medicaid clients who use the emergency room do so more than once per year.

A survey of 1700 emergency room clients by nine participating hospitals that accept Medicaid payments found that principal reasons Medicaid clients use the emergency room include convenience of location and hours of business. A distinct difference between Medicaid clients and clients with other payment resources was that Medicaid clients did not have a relationship with a primary care provider.

In 2008, the department sub-granted federal funds – totaling \$1.8 million over two years – to Valley-Wide Health Systems and to Peak Vista Community Health Centers – serving southern Colorado.

Valley-Wide Health Systems opened a Convenient Care Community Clinic near the San Luis Valley Regional Medical Center. The clinic offers evening and weekend hours and the availability of walk-in visits. Community acceptance of the clinic has been immediate and sustained, averaging over 1,000 visits per month since it opened. Many of the visits are for conditions which would otherwise have been presented in the emergency room less than a mile away. The Medical Center refers clients who do not need emergent care to the clinic.

Peak Vista collaborated with Memorial Hospital to station staff in the hospital's emergency room during the busiest hours of the week. The staff educate the clients about

how primary care improves overall health and reduces the need for emergent care. They also assist clients in making primary care appointments.

In one year, over 5,000 individuals scheduled primary care appointments as a result of phone calls from Peak Vista staff and over 300 children have received immunizations on follow-up visits: most of them returning for additional immunizations required by standards of care. Over 100 people with diabetes have come to the clinic for blood testing in order to improve management of their disease.

About the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing: The department administers the Medicaid and Child Health Plan *Plus* programs as well as a variety of other programs for Colorado's low-income, elderly and people with disabilities. The mission of the department is to improve access to cost-effective, quality health care services for Coloradans. For more information about the department, please visit Colorado.gov/hcpf.

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