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Advisory board guides Georgia public health campaign

Atlanta – August 31, 2010 – A 31-member advisory board, which includes representatives of many of Georgia's best-known community, education and health organizations, is guiding a campaign aimed at educating policy makers and the public about the need to reinvest in and rebuild the state's public health system.

The campaign – “Partner Up! For Public Health” (www.togetherwecandobetter.com) – was initiated and funded by [Healthcare Georgia Foundation](#) in reaction to nearly a decade of funding and staffing cuts that have decimated the state's public health system. The organizations and individuals participating on the advisory board support the vision of rebuilding Georgia's public health system. They include:

- **AARP Georgia** (Kathy Floyd, Associate State Director for Advocacy, Atlanta)
- **American Cancer Society** (Eric L. Bailey, Georgia Grassroots Advocacy Manager, Atlanta)
- **American Diabetes Association** (Randi Greene-Chapman, Southeast Advocacy Director, Atlanta)
- **American Heart Association**, Greater Southeast Affiliate (Sarah Balog, Government Relations Director, Marietta)
- **American Lung Association** (June Deen, State Director, Smyrna)
- **Armstrong Atlantic State University** (James A. “Sandy” Streater, Jr., Department Chair and Professor, Department of Health Sciences, Savannah)
- **Association County Commissioners of Georgia** (Ross King, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Community Health Works of Georgia** (Greg Dent, CEO, Macon)
- **Dougherty County Board of Health** (Bernard Scoggins, Chair, Albany)
- **Echols County Board of Health** (Lamar Raulerson, Chair, Lake Park)
- **Emory University** (James W. Curran, Dean, Rollins School of Public Health, Atlanta)
- **Fort Valley State University** (Melanie Ragin, Director MPH Program, Warner Robins)
- **Georgia Breast Cancer Coalition Fund** (Ruth Eldredge, President, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Budget & Policy Institute** (Timothy Sweeney, Senior Healthcare Analyst, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics** (Rick Ward, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Free Clinic Network** (Donna Looper, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Municipal Association** (Jim Higdon, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Public Health Association** (Russell Toal, Immediate Past President, Statesboro; Bob Stolarick, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Rural Health Association** (Rita Salain, Interim Director, Sandersville)
- **Georgia Southern University** (Lynn Woodhouse, Associate Dean and Professor of Community Health and Health Behavior, Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, Statesboro)
- **Georgia State University** (Michael Eriksen, Director, Institute of Public Health, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Women for a Change** (Stephanie Davis, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Georgians for a Healthy Future** (Cynthia Zeldin, Executive Director, Atlanta)
- **Gwinnett County Board of Health** (Louise Radloff, Chair, Lawrenceville)
- **HealthSTAT** (Michelle Putnam, Executive Director, Atlanta)

- **Jasper County Board of Commissioners** (Jack Bernard, District 3 Commissioner, healthcare consultant, Monticello)
- **Medical Association of Georgia** (Craig E. Smith, M.D., Chairman, MAG Medical Practice Committee, Infectious Disease Consultants of SW Georgia, Albany)
- **Medical College of Georgia School of Medicine** (Kathryn Martin, Assistant Dean for Southeast Georgia Campus, Savannah)
- **Morehouse School of Medicine** (Daniel Blumenthal, Chair and Professor, Department of Community Health & Preventive Medicine, Atlanta)
- **Georgia Society for Public Health Education** (Rhonda Payne, Executive Director, Calhoun)
- **University of Georgia** (Phillip L. Williams, Dean & Georgia Power Professor, College of Public Health, Athens)

The advisory board members are supporting the campaign by helping plan and implement advocacy efforts and providing feedback.

Since 2000 Georgia's population has grown 20% but per capita state spending for the public health system has been cut 21%. Today, per capita state spending on public health in Georgia is about four cents a day, among the lowest in the nation. Most recently in the FY 2011 budget the Division of Public Health's (DPH) general fund budget was cut from \$158.6 million to about \$148.9 million, a reduction of about \$9.75 million.

Lost positions, low pay and high turnover hinder Georgia's public health system. More than 1,000 of approximately 7,500 public health positions across the state are vacant, according to the Division of Public Health (DPH).

Georgia did poorly in rankings such as The Commonwealth Fund's "[Aiming Higher](#)" (38th in 2009) and "[America's Health Rankings](#)" (43rd in 2009), a joint effort of United Health Foundation, the American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention. Georgia's most recent bad health grade came this summer in the 2010 "[F as in Fat](#)" report: Georgia trailed only Mississippi in the percentage of children between 10 and 17 who are obese. The report is produced by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

About the Partner Up! for Public Health Campaign: Partner Up! for Public Health is a statewide advocacy campaign funded by [Healthcare Georgia Foundation](#) and designed to advance public health in Georgia. The campaign was launched in October 2009 as part of a multifaceted effort to rebuild a public health system that has been decimated by budget cuts in recent years. For more information visit www.togetherwecandobetter.com.