

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TOGETHER WE CAN RAISE ARKANSAS'S HEALTH CARE SCORE

Stakeholders in the future of Arkansas's health care system meet in reaction to the Commonwealth Fund's State Scorecard in which Arkansas ranked 48th in key health system indicators.

Little Rock, Ark. (July 10, 2007) – Thousands of lives and millions of dollars could be saved by improving Arkansas's health care system. This was the message delivered today to a group representing a wide variety of Arkansas stakeholders including employer and consumer advocates, policy makers, association representatives and medical professionals.

The meeting was convened to address issues brought forth in the State Scorecard released June 13 by the Commonwealth Fund (www.cmwf.org). The scorecard ranked Arkansas near the bottom nationally on several key health system indicators.

“The Commonwealth Fund's scorecard reinforces the need for Arkansas to continue - and expand - efforts for improving the health of Arkansans,” said Joe Thompson, MD, MPH, who is the director of the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement and Arkansas's Surgeon General. “The health and productivity of our citizens is a shared responsibility of many organizations and interests. We wanted to bring everyone together to take a look at what is already being done and generate ideas for new initiatives.”

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Representatives from the Commonwealth Fund provided the Arkansas audience with an overview of findings and methodology used to develop the scorecard and a review of successful programs in place in states with the best scores.

Following the Commonwealth Fund presentation a panel of Arkansas experts, led by Dr. Thompson, focused on Arkansas-specific issues and solutions. The panel included: William Golden, MD – VP for Clinical Quality Improvement, Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care; Paul Halverson, DrPH – Director of the Arkansas Department of Health; Caryol Hendricks – Executive Director, Employers' Health Coalition; Wynona Bryant-Williams, PhD – Executive Director, Arkansas Minority Health Commission; and I. Dodd Wilson, MD – Chancellor, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

Three key issues affecting health care in Arkansas were highlighted:

- Health care coverage – while Arkansas has made significant progress, especially in covering children, there are still nearly half-a-million Arkansans without health insurance, including 25 percent of working Arkansans age 19 to 64.
- Access to health care – eliminating financial barriers to health care for those who do not have insurance and improving access to health care in rural areas, especially where there are not enough doctors.
- Quality of care – assuring that Arkansans receive at least minimal standards of care to avoid preventable hospital admissions, readmissions and premature death.