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HHS PREVENTION LUNCHEON HONORS ARKANSAS SCHOOL BMI ASSESSMENT PROJECT FOR HELPING CREATE A HEALTHIER U.S.

Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt announced today that the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) is one of ten nationwide winners of the Third Annual Innovation in Prevention Awards for its Arkansas School BMI Assessment Project, which is dedicated to providing comprehensive, multifaceted approaches that bring families, schools and communities together to combat the obesity epidemic. Secretary Leavitt will present the awards on October 24th at a luncheon in Washington, DC.

The award was created as part of President Bush's *HealthierUS* initiative and HHS's continuing focus on preventing chronic disease and improving Americans' lives. The awards highlight businesses and organizations that are leading efforts to promote healthier lifestyles in seven different areas. The BMI Assessment Project was honored in the Public Sector category.

"The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement's Arkansas School BMI Assessment Project recognized the importance of raising awareness in parents to combat child obesity," said Secretary Leavitt. "This project is a model for other communities across the country as we strive to improve the health of our nation's youth."

In 2003, ACHI oversaw the uniform and confidential BMI assessment of the state's public school children, distributing individual Child Health Reports to parents detailing BMI classifications and health risks associated with children being overweight. Schools and school districts were also given reports broken down by percentage of students' BMI classifications. Additionally, a comprehensive statewide report was publicly released to community leaders and elected officials detailing the depth and breadth of the childhood obesity epidemic among Arkansas children.

"The Arkansas BMI Assessment Project has not only helped raise parental awareness about their children's risks related to obesity, but it has also stimulated changes in school nutrition, physical activity, and health education programs," said Dr. Joe Thompson, Director of the ACHI. "Through this successful major initiative that stimulates dialogue, discussion, and community action, we look forward to learning with other states what works in addressing the obesity crisis among our youth."

Arkansas was the first state to undertake such a comprehensive assessment of children's health. As of June 1, 2005 ACHI had collected a second round of data on 442,940 students—97% of the students in the state—as the first steps to track long-term changes and focus state resources to develop programs to positively change the health of Arkansas children.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>. To request an interview or additional information, contact Jessica Badger at 202-690-6343, Jessica.Badger@hhs.gov or Brian Wesolowski at 202-414-0779, brian@susandavis.com.