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**El Rio Community Health Center Awarded \$198,467
To Help Entry-level Workers and Veterans Develop Health Care Careers**

Tucson, Arizona – In a proactive move to expand the capacity of community health centers to meet the anticipated increase in demand for health care, the RCHN Community Health Foundation (RCHN CHF) has awarded \$2 million in grants to recruit, train and retain health center workers such as medical assistants, receptionists, care managers, and health system navigators. These workers are typically a patient's first and primary connection to their health care provider and essential to a health center's operations.

El Rio Community Health Center (El Rio) in Tucson, Arizona which serves over 76,000 patients at 17 sites, is one of only five federally qualified community health centers (CHCs) around the country to receive a RCHN CHF worker training grant this year. In partnership with Pima Community College, El Rio will use the nearly \$200,000 grant to develop a health care career training program geared at the entry-level workforce, veterans and at-risk unemployed individuals.

"We are thrilled to receive this award that will help us to increase the number of skilled health care workers and possibly help veterans at the same time," said Kathy Byrne, El Rio's Executive Director. "This project is a win-win for entry-level workers interested in health care careers, for our ability to hire properly trained workers, and for our community to receive quality health care."

El Rio's training program will focus on preparing new and current entry-level employees for successful careers in community health. By providing internships, mentoring, and skills development, El Rio hopes to position unemployed workers for future employment and increase the pipeline of skilled health care workers. The program will also help to retain current entry-level community health center employees by offering health information technology (HIT) certification, Medical Assistant training, and community health advisor certification.

CHCs such as El Rio are located in underserved communities where challenges to recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce often include a limited labor pool, lack of vocational training, and language and cultural barriers. Yet, our nation relies on community health centers to provide care to more than 22 million people each year, and that number is expected to increase dramatically when the Affordable Care Act takes full effect in 2014.

"Our ability to meet a greater demand for health care falls squarely on our system's ability to increase capacity," said Julio Bellber, President and CEO of RCHN CHF. "That means we must prepare our nation's 1,200 community health centers to recruit, train, and retain workers who can meet increased patient care needs."

To this end, RCHN CHF awarded \$1 million in worker training grants to five health centers in 2012, with a second million to five more centers this year. In addition to El Rio, the 2013 RCHN CHF workforce initiative grant recipients are:

- CareSouth Carolina, Hartsville, South Carolina - \$199,308
- Finger Lakes Community Health, Penn Yan, New York - \$200,000
- OneWorld Community Health Centers , Omaha, Nebraska - \$189,343
- Salud Family Health Centers, Fort Lupton, Colorado - \$200,000

El Rio Community Health Center is the largest provider of medical and dental services to uninsured and Medicaid populations in Pima County, Arizona. With 17 sites in Tucson, El Rio served the medical and dental needs of more than 76,000 patients in 2012. El Rio currently employs over 800 people with an annual budget of \$90 million dollars. A national model of health care excellence, El Rio's mission is to: "Improve the health of our community through comprehensive, accessible, affordable, quality and compassionate care." El Rio has been accredited and recognized by the Joint Commission and National Committee of Quality Assurance. www.elrio.org.

The RCHN Community Health Foundation is a not-for-profit operating foundation established to support community health centers through strategic investment, outreach, education, and cutting-edge health policy research. The only foundation in the U.S. dedicated solely to community health centers, RCHN CHF builds on a long-standing commitment to providing accessible, high-quality, community-based healthcare services for underserved and medically vulnerable populations. For more information, visit www.rchnfoundation.org.

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