

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

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### City Pediatricians Embrace Literacy Challenge

**Baltimore, MD** (January 9, 2007) – Six months after a challenge by the Health Commissioner, 75% of pediatric practices serving low-income children in Baltimore are distributing books and encouraging reading during routine clinical care or are planning to do so in the near future. As a result of the challenge, an additional 10,000 children are expected to receive books from their doctors or nurse practitioners in 2007.

Baltimore is now a national leader in the implementation of Reach Out and Read, a program proven to increase reading at home, language skills, and the school readiness of young children.

“Baltimore is making giving books as routine as giving shots,” said Dr. Barry Zuckerman, national chair of the board of Reach Out and Read and chair of pediatrics at Boston Medical Center. “Baltimore is a model for other cities looking to make real gains in child development and learning.”

In June, Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein challenged all city pediatric practices serving low-income children to adopt Reach Out and Read. Since that time:

- The Baltimore City Health Department identified 72 practices eligible for the Reach Out and Read challenge.<sup>1</sup>
- At the time of the challenge in June, 26 of these 72 practices were already participating in Reach Out and Read.<sup>2</sup>
- Since the challenge, 26 of the remaining 46 practices have committed to Reach Out and Read or begun the application process.<sup>3</sup>

“Our goal is 100% commitment by pediatric practices serving low-income children by June 2007,” said Dr. Sharfstein. “The progress so far represents real gains for children in Baltimore.”

The Maryland chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is the lead sponsor of books for Reach Out and Read in Baltimore, and is a key partner in the public health challenge.

“Pediatricians see literacy as an essential health issue,” said Dr. Daniel J. Levy, President of the chapter. “Reading leads to knowledge, knowledge leads to better health choices. We are strongly encouraging all pediatricians to promote Reach Out and Read in their practices.”

The Baltimore City Public School System is also supporting Reach Out and Read. “Parents who read to their children every night are preparing them for school,” said Dr. Charlene Cooper-Boston, CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System. “I am pleased to be a partner with the Health Department in this effort.”

For more information about Reach Out and Read or to learn how to become a participating medical provider, please visit Reach Out and Read’s website at [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org) or email [Growth@reachoutandread.org](mailto:Growth@reachoutandread.org).

#### Notes

1. To be eligible for the Public Health Challenge, a practice (1) is located in Baltimore City; (2) participates in the Vaccines for Children program that provides vaccines for low-income children; (3) actively provides primary care to children; and (4) is not planning to close imminently.
2. In June 2006, Dr. Sharfstein stated that there were 32 practices currently participating in Reach Out and Read, and that the challenge was aimed at 26 additional practices. In fact, further investigation revealed that only 26 city practices were participating, and 46 additional practices were eligible for the challenge.
3. Of the 26 practices responding to the challenge so far, 12 have applied to participate in Reach Out and Read, and an additional 14 have committed to applying in the near future.

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