

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

Sheila Dixon, Mayor



**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

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**Baltimore City Health Department Honored for Excellence in Public Health**

*Literacy Effort is One of 25 Programs Nationwide to Receive “Model Practice Award” in 2008*

**Baltimore, MD (September 16, 2008)** – The Baltimore City Health Department has been honored by The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) for implementing a program that demonstrates exemplary and replicable qualities in response to a local public health need. ***Reach Out and Read Public Health Challenge*** is one of 25 local public health programs selected from across the nation to receive NACCHO’s Model Practice Award. This is the third year in a row that a Baltimore City Health Department program has received this honor.

The effort began in Baltimore in June 2006 when the City’s Health Commissioner set the goal of having Baltimore become the first city in the country to adopt the Reach Out and Read model for all of its at-risk children. Under this model, pediatric practices serving low-income families give all young children books at their check-ups, along with advice to parents on the importance of reading.

Research indicates that Reach Out and Read improves receptive and expressive language skills, increases the number of books at home, and substantially increases time spent reading to children. The Public Health Challenge led to a near doubling of the number of pediatric providers implementing the program, and increasing the number of books distributed by 23,000 per year.

“Our goal is for all of Baltimore’s children to start school ready to learn,” said Mayor Sheila Dixon. “I thank the Health Department and the many doctors and nurses implementing this important literacy program for their efforts.”

“We appreciate the partnership of the medical community in Baltimore in promoting the love of books by young children and their parents,” said Dr. Andres Alonso, CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System. “This effective program involves families in books and education from their first visits to the doctor.”

“The dedicated efforts of Baltimore’s terrific medical community made this achievement happen,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner of Health. “It also would not have been

possible without the support of the national office of Reach Out and Read and our legislative leaders in Congress.”

A committee of peers selected the Health Department’s Reach Out and Read Public Health Challenge from a group of 118 local health department applications. The Model Practice Awards program honors initiatives – including programs, resources, and tools – that demonstrate how local health departments and their community partners can effectively collaborate to address local public health concerns. The Reach Out and Read Public Health Challenge will become part of an online, searchable database of successful public health practices in areas ranging from immunization and maternal and child health to infectious diseases and emergency preparedness.

The database will allow NACCHO to share information about what is working across the county in local public health.

This is the third consecutive year that Baltimore City Health Department has won a Model Practice Award. In 2006, the Department received the honor for its Medicare Part D Surveillance and Response Initiative. In 2007, the Department and Baltimore Healthcare Access, Inc. were recognized for implementing Project Health.

For more information about the Baltimore City Health Department and Reach Out and Read, go to <http://www.baltimorehealth.org>

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