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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COMMONHEALTH ACTION LAUNCHES THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH INNOVATION

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CommonHealth ACTION has launched the Institute for Public Health Innovation to serve as a regional center to improve community health throughout the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland. Providing leadership at the intersections of health, the Institute will serve as a nexus for convening public and private sectors from a wide range of disciplines to develop and implement innovative strategies to improve the health of the public. Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic has provided a generous capacity grant of \$500,000 to contribute to this launch. Additional funders include The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Network of Public Health Institutes, the Consumer Health Foundation, the Virginia Department of Health, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes remain the top killers and account for 70% of all US deaths. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 2 adults had a chronic disease in 2005; roughly 1 in 3 adults are overweight and almost one in five youth (between the ages of 6 and 19) are obese. Throughout the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia, as in most areas of the US, we know that a person's zip code is a better predictor of life expectancy than his or her genetic code. Life expectancies vary considerably, with DC ranked below all fifty states at 72.0, MD 76.3, and VA 76.8 years, respectively. The national US average is 77.7 years, which poorly ranks the US at 38 among industrialized nations. "Public health institutes play a critical role in our nation's public health system," said Michelle Larkin, JD, director of RWJF's Public Health team. "With each expansion of this network, we strengthen our public health system's ability to help all Americans have the opportunity to be as healthy as they can be."

While access to health care is vitally important, medicine alone cannot prevent chronic disease. The Institute for Public Health Innovation serves as a convener of public and private sector agencies, and community-based organizations from health, education, housing, land use planning, community development, and transportation to improve the conditions that lead to better health in the region. Research clearly shows that our environment is one of the most important building blocks of good health. And public health experts warn that today's youth may be the first generation to live shorter lives than their parents. "We know that we can reduce chronic disease effectively by ensuring good paying jobs, and increasing access to safe and affordable housing, good neighborhood grocery stores with fresh produce, recreation outlets and physical exercise, and other health producing assets. Our



environment – where we live, work, learn, and recreate – has a greater impact on chronic disease than our genetics”, said Dr. Vincent Lafronza, Institute President and CEO.

State and local governments provide public health services that ensure clean drinking water, effective sanitation measures, immunizations, restaurant inspections, and many other policies and programs that protect and promote health. “Our region has strong public health departments. But just like we produce goods and services, health is a production of society which requires coordinated efforts that bring together public and private sectors”, said Karen Dale, RN, MSN, CS, CommonHealth ACTION Board Chair and Vice President, DC Healthcare Systems, Inc.

The Institute for Public Health Innovation is one of five new members of the National Network of Public Health Institutes (www.nnphi.org). NNPHI currently has 35 members representing a range of 501(c)3 organizations and university affiliates. In collaboration with governmental public health, academia and public health partners and stakeholders, institutes collaborate to conduct public health work rapidly and efficiently. They provide value to the public health system by designing and managing programs, providing technical assistance, conducting research and evaluation, and gathering evidence to inform policy.

“Public health institutes leverage resources and partnerships to improve the population’s health. The value institutes bring is particularly vital as budget cuts are forcing local public health departments to shed jobs at an alarming rate,” said NNPHI chief executive officer Joseph Kimbrell, MA, LCSW. “Strengthening these institutes is key to strengthening our nation’s public health system.”

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CommonHealth ACTION (CHA) is a national, non-profit, public health organization working to build capacity of communities to improve health. For more information about the institute, contact Nehanda Lindsey at nlindsey@commonhealthaction.org.

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