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Local Health Activist Receives Nation's Highest Award for Community Health Leadership

Prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leadership Program Award Goes to Champaign County Health Care Consumers' Director for Health Care Access Work

Champaign County Health Care Consumers' (CCHCC) Executive Director, Claudia Lennhoff, has been selected to receive the nation's most prestigious health leadership award for her work with the Health Care Consumers.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leadership Program award is given to 10 outstanding community health leaders who overcome daunting odds to expand access to health care and social services to underserved populations and communities. Lennhoff and nine others will be honored in a September 24th ceremony at the National Press Club in Washington, DC.

"This is a real honor and tribute to the work of the Health Care Consumers," said Lennhoff. "There is a significant financial award that comes with this recognition. With this award, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leadership Program is making a real investment in the Champaign County Health Care Consumers so that we can continue our work. We are very honored and pleased."

Lennhoff was selected from a field of 463 nominees for this year's honor. "This year's leaders have ingeniously created health care programs that are successfully addressing the most

complicated and formidable health issues facing people in our country today," says Catherine Dunham, director of the RWJ Community Health Leadership Program. CHLP is a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the largest private philanthropy dedicated to improving health and health care for Americans.

Lennhoff is being recognized for her leadership in grassroots community organizing efforts which have led to the creation of the Champaign County Public Health Department, the new Child Dental Access Program, the creation of the Champaign County Community Health Partnership, new efforts to address problems of medical debt affecting low-income Champaign County residents, and the other activities of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers under her leadership.

Lennhoff often works one-on-one with consumers to fill gaps within the health care system. "Everyone deserves quality health care," Lennhoff says. "Money shouldn't get in the way of someone getting the health care they need, when they need it. I know that sounds naive, but I think it is wrong to put a price on someone's life, which is what we do as a society when we allow the health care system to deny access to health care for financial reasons."

A Jewish-Finnish immigrant from Mexico, Lennhoff learned firsthand what it is like to be sick and uninsured when she was diagnosed with cancer while in college. Her treatment was delayed and her health jeopardized while she searched for a doctor willing to treat her. Of this experience Lennhoff says, "It was frightening and humiliating. It was wrong. No one should be treated that way, but it happens all too frequently."

Award recipients are nominated by community leaders, consumers, health professionals, government officials and others personally inspired by the leaders who provide essential community health services. Award nominees undergo an intensive screening and background check; community members are interviewed about the nominee; and the Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Program staff members conduct a site visit and evaluation of the nominee and her organization. Over 50 consumers, community members, leaders, and CCHCC Board and Staff members participated in the site visit of CCHCC in July, which led to the award.

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