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**NATIONAL PROGRAM WILL STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY-BASED ADVOCACY  
TO REDUCE HEALTH INEQUITIES AND CREATE HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS**

*\$15 million investment engages residents in communities of color and indigenous nations  
In local efforts to improve food and recreation environments*

Washington, D.C., Jan. 18, 2010 – Ten local advocacy organizations have been awarded grants by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to plan and implement community-based strategies to build and sustain healthy neighborhoods from East Los Angeles to Harlem.

Selected for their strong track record on social, economic and environmental justice issues, the groups are the first to be funded through *Communities Creating Healthy Environments* (CCHE), a new RWJF national program supporting the Foundation's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic in the United States by 2015. Up to 10 more organizations will be funded through the program later this year.

The local organizations, which will receive up to \$250,000 over three years, will engage and organize community residents to become more involved in the policy-making process and build public support for changes to help families lead healthier lives. CCHE will help them develop effective interventions to address root causes of childhood obesity in their communities.

The organizations receiving funding will use a variety of strategies to improve the health of their communities. For example, in Madison, Wis., Freedom, Inc. will engage youth within the Hmong, African-American and Latino populations to reclaim control of local neighborhoods dominated by fast food outlets and liquor stores. In New Orleans, Safe Streets/Strong Communities will push for equity in the public allocation of recreational resources for African-American residents of the city's low-income wards. The group will aim to redistribute resources to community playgrounds and recreation centers.

CCHE's approach is supported by recent research revealing how significantly community environments shape community health, as well as individual behavior. This research shows that when communities have access to fresh, affordable foods, residents eat more nutritiously. And when children have access to safe places to play, they are more active.

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The absence of these essential building blocks for a healthy life is a leading cause of health inequities. CCHE's focus on community organizing and policy advocacy is drawn from more than 30 years of research that shows that neighborhood organization is a critical protective factor in community health.

"The research is clear. Our communities have higher prevalence of childhood obesity, but we also have higher concentration of the factors that lead to these problems in the first place," said Makani Themba-Nixon, CCHE project director. "More fast food outlets and fewer food markets are given permits in our communities. Our schools do not receive adequate funding for recreation and play, and too often our children are harassed or face unsafe conditions when they do play outdoors.

"CCHE builds on what we have learned from more than 30 years of community-based work," Themba-Nixon added. "The answers are right in our own neighborhoods with our community leaders, with young organizers, and in our local organizations. The work on the ground is truly amazing. It was extremely difficult to choose only 10 groups."

"CCHE's work is critical," said Dwayne C. Proctor, director of RWJF's Childhood Obesity Team. "It will help organizations build healthy, sustainable communities through policies that reflect those communities' individual needs. The program starts with 10 sites today, but another 10 will be announced soon. And then the challenge will be replicating successful strategies in all communities."

Currently, more than 23 million youths in this country—nearly one in three young people—are obese or overweight.

The first 10 organizations to be funded through CCHE are:

- Inner City Struggle, East Los Angeles, Calif.
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Oakland, Calif.
- People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER), San Francisco, Calif.
- Padres Unidos, Denver, Colo.
- Safe Streets, Strong Communities, New Orleans, La.
- Indigenous Educational Network of Turtle Island, Bemidji, Minn.
- Rocky Boy Health Board, Rocky Boy Indian Reservation, Mont.
- Southwest Organizing Project, Albuquerque, N.M.
- WE ACT for Environmental Justice, New York City, N.Y.
- Freedom, Inc., Madison, Wis.

For additional information about Communities Creating Healthy Environments and the selected organizations, please visit [www.ccheonline.org](http://www.ccheonline.org)

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**About Communities Creating Healthy Environments**

Communities Creating Healthy Environments is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that sets out to prevent childhood obesity by increasing access to healthy foods and safe places to play in communities of color. The program will advance RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015 by supporting diverse, community-based organizations and federally chartered tribal nations in the development and implementation of effective, culturally competent policy initiatives to address the root causes of childhood obesity locally.

**About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org).