



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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## **Alabama Strategic Alliance for Health Program will work to create a healthier Black Belt/West Alabama**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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The state's Black Belt and West Alabama counties will receive federal funding of up to \$3.9 million over the next five years through the Alabama Strategic Alliance for Health Program to help reduce chronic diseases and health disparities. U.S. Rep. Artur Davis will be present for a news conference at the Perry County Health Department to kick off the program at 10 a.m. Monday.

West Alabama and the Black Belt Region were identified for this program because its residents include predominantly African American, economically disadvantaged populations which have significant evidence of health disparities.

This is a geographic region in which 75 percent of the population is either overweight or obese, 40 percent have hypertension, and 14 percent have diabetes. Thanks to this new funding, initiatives will target the creation of healthier communities through the AL Strategic Alliance Program.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "This funding opportunity will help local communities launch health promotion and chronic disease prevention initiatives which are sustainable, evidence-based and practice-based. Many chronic health conditions are not distributed equally across racial and ethnic groups."

An overarching goal of the AL Strategic Alliance Program will be to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health. Chronic diseases represent a major public health challenge in Alabama, so initiatives will target obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease and the risk factors of nutrition, physical activity and tobacco. As a result, the incidence and complications from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity will be reduced.

To assure efficient use of program resources and sustainable long-term outcomes, interventions will focus on policy, systems, and environmental changes in communities. Program initiatives will also target access to quality healthcare and use of preventive health care in rural Black Belt and West Alabama communities.

Initially, the AL Strategic Alliance Program will focus on Dallas, Perry and Sumter counties. Community partners who will be integral to program planning and implementation include Sowing Seeds of Hope in Perry County, Vaughan Community Health Services in Dallas County, and the Health and Wellness Education Center in Sumter County.

The Alabama Department of Public Health will provide leadership, training and technical assistance to these three counties. Staff will conduct comprehensive community assessments, develop consortiums, and write community action plans that address chronic diseases and their risk factors and implement initiatives to address them.

In the latter part of the program period, successful policies, systems and environmental changes implemented in these three counties will be used to mentor additional Alabama counties in chronic disease prevention.

By 2014, 21 counties in the region will be Strategic Alliance communities. These counties are Bibb, Butler, Chilton, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Covington, Dallas, Escambia, Geneva, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Marengo, Monroe, Perry, Pickens, Sumter, South Tuscaloosa, Washington and Wilcox.

The Alabama Department of Public Health is the lead fiduciary agency for the AL Strategic Alliance Program. Successful experience with the Steps to a HealthierUS Initiative demonstrates the department's capacity to provide this leadership.

In addition, ADPH chronic disease programs will provide training, technical assistance and links to evidence-based initiatives and resources. These programs include the Diabetes, Tobacco, Nutrition and Physical Activity, Cardiovascular Health, Comprehensive Cancer, Rural and Minority Health Programs.