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**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Awards Grants to 41 Communities in
Major Expansion of Landmark Program to Reverse Childhood Obesity**

*\$33 Million Investment is Foundation's Largest Investment
in Community-Based Solutions to Prevent Childhood Obesity*

Princeton, NJ, Jan. 12, 2010 – The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has awarded multi-year grants to 41 communities across the country as part of a landmark national program to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015.

The 41 sites are funded through *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities*, an RWJF program that supports local efforts to improve access to affordable healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity for children and families. With nine communities named as leading sites in 2008, the program now encompasses 50 sites in more than half of the states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. And with a total commitment of \$33 million over five years, it is the Foundation's single largest investment in community-based solutions to childhood obesity.

"These sites can help move the country toward a place where good health is built right into the environment," said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., president and CEO of the Foundation. "All children, no matter where they live, should be able to jump on a bike and ride safely in their neighborhood or to school. They should be able to play in a well-maintained and crime-free park. And they and their families should be able to easily find—and afford—fresh, healthy foods."

More than 23 million children and adolescents in the United States—nearly a third of youth ages 2 to 19—are now overweight or obese. Even among ages 2 to 5, the rate of overweight and obesity is 24 percent. Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities is a cornerstone of RWJF's \$500 million commitment to reverse the epidemic.

The program will work in communities as diverse as Houghton County in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Desoto, Marshall and Tate counties in the Mississippi Delta. Some are big cities like Houston and Philadelphia, others small, isolated locations like Cuba, N.M. But all of the targeted neighborhoods have a significant obesity problem exacerbated by such issues as high unemployment and poverty, crime, dangerous traffic, too few grocery stores and aging, broken or insufficient infrastructure.

The new sites and the program as a whole will target the barriers that make it difficult for children to get daily physical activity or eat healthy foods. They'll then determine what new policies and environmental changes would work best to overcome those barriers and reduce the prevalence of obesity.

Project leaders in all 50 communities have recruited an impressive array of local partners, including academic and health institutions, faith-based groups and nonprofit organizations, even chambers of commerce and a bicycling association. Many also are involving urban planners, local parks departments or school districts.

“Where people live has a huge impact on their health and quality of life,” said Sarah Strunk, M.H. A., director of Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities. “The Foundation’s investment in 50 communities across the nation—and collaboration among passionate, committed leaders and advocates—means that children who are at greatest risk for obesity will find that the healthy choice becomes the easier choice.”

Each of the 41 new communities will receive a four-year grant of up to \$360,000 to craft innovative solutions aimed at helping children and families lead healthier lives. Among the varied approaches they will pursue:

- **Nash and Edgecombe Counties, North Carolina** will tackle obesity among very young children by working with pre-school providers to make sure they support active play and serve nutritious foods. The project also will forge ties with medical providers to help them educate parents.
- **Portland, Oregon** will use GIS (geographic information system) mapping to identify disparities such as a lack of parks, grocery stores or safe walking paths. The project will then build such features into lower-income areas of the city.
- **Kansas City** plans to expand access to healthy foods through a sustainable food program servicing the metropolitan area on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri state line.
- **Kingston, New York** aims to transform a decaying urban core of empty storefronts and a hazardous main street into a midtown with parks, trails and community gardens.

As successes are replicated, more and more communities will be transformed. “Who wouldn’t want to leave this kind of legacy for our kids?” Strunk said.

The 41 cities and regions announced today as Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities sites are:

Alabama: Jefferson County	Michigan: Flint
Arkansas: Boone and Newton Counties	Michigan: Houghton County
Arizona: Phoenix	Mississippi: Desoto, Marshall and Tate Counties
California: Rancho Cucamonga	Mississippi: Jackson
California: Watsonville and Pajaro Valley	Missouri: Kansas City
Colorado: Denver	Nebraska: Omaha
Florida: Jacksonville	New Mexico: Cuba
Florida: Lake Worth, Greenacres and Palm Springs	New Mexico: Grant County
Georgia: Cook County	New Mexico: San Felipe Pueblo
Georgia: Milledgeville	New York: Buffalo
Illinois: Kane County	New York: Kingston
Louisiana: New Orleans	New York: Rochester
Massachusetts: Fitchburg	North Carolina: Moore and Montgomery Counties

North Carolina: Nash and Edgecombe Counties
Ohio: Hamilton County
Oregon: Benton County
Oregon: Multnomah County/Portland
Pennsylvania: Philadelphia
Puerto Rico: Caguas
South Carolina: Greenville
South Carolina: Spartanburg County

Tennessee: Chattanooga
Tennessee: Knox County
Texas: El Paso
Texas: Houston
Texas: San Antonio
West Virginia: Charleston
Wisconsin: Milwaukee

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About Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities

Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), advances community-based solutions that will help reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. It focuses on changing policies and environments to support active living and healthy eating among children and families, placing special emphasis on reaching children who are at highest risk based on race or ethnicity, income or geographic location. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities national program office is housed at Active Living By Design, part of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Established in 2001 as an RWJF national program, Active Living By Design now serves funders and partnerships across the country that are fostering community-led change to build a culture of active living and healthy eating. To find out more about the sites or the project visit

www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org.

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.