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**Variations in quality of health care delivery
still an issue in Puget Sound region**

*Puget Sound Health Alliance's Community Checkup report
shows progress over time, but also room for improvement*

SEATTLE, July 15, 2010—Are residents in Puget Sound getting high-quality, high-value health care? According to the fourth Community Checkup, issued today by the Puget Sound Health Alliance (Alliance), the answer is, it depends. While many patients receive care that rivals the best found nationwide, some do not receive the effective care that they should.

“Variation in care remains an issue in our region, just as it is across the country, and a challenge to the effort to improve the quality and cost of care,” said Steve Hill, chairman of the Alliance board and director of the Washington State Department of Retirement Systems. “These results underscore the collective effort required to fundamentally change our health care system. Everyone has room to improve the quality and value of care, just at the time the region prepares to carry out national health care reform.”

The *Community Checkup* reports on how well care is delivered at the medical group level on 21 measures of quality and appropriateness. The measures fall into areas of prevention, chronic disease management, generic drug substitution and appropriate use of services. The report includes data on care for 2 million patients who are covered by commercial insurance and Medicaid in the five counties in the Puget Sound region—King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish and Thurston—for the period from July 2008 to July 2009. In addition, the *Community Checkup* reports on over forty hospital measures with results being drawn from several public sources. Full results for the Community Checkup are available online at www.WACommunityCheckup.org, which was re-launched today with a new, more consumer-friendly design.

Among the highlights of the report released today:

- Diabetes management is strong. The regional average exceeds the national top ten percent of performers for three of the four diabetes care measures in the report.

- Regional results are low for Chlamydia screening, avoiding antibiotics for bronchitis and medication adherence for depression.
- Generic drug substitution results, reported publicly at the medical group level for the first time, shows wide variation. Interestingly, safety-net clinics that serve Medicaid populations are among the best performers in the region, as are those clinics with a financial incentive to prescribe generics.
- Hospital quality measures continue to show improvement over time.

For the first time, the report is able to compare data over time, by looking at results from the second *Community Checkup*, which covered the period from October 2006 to September 2007, and the current report. While future reports will confirm if changes between the two reports represent a true trend, the data appears to show an overall trend toward improvement in care in most areas.

“We believe that what gets measured, gets managed and improves,” said Mary McWilliams, executive director of the Alliance. “No medical group excels at everything, so everyone has room for improvement. The *Community Checkup* allows us to build on a strong foundation of performance measurement, public reporting and performance improvement to explore new ways to deliver high-value health care in our region.”

Data in the *Community Checkup* was supplied by 19 different organizations, including health plans, employers and labor trusts. The report was made possible by the participation of the medical groups, data suppliers and members of the Alliance board and committees who guide the process of producing the report; and by important funding and technical support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s [Aligning Forces for Quality](#) initiative.

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The Puget Sound Health Alliance (www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org), an Aligning Forces for Quality Community, is a non-profit made up of those who provide, pay for and use health care, working to improve quality of care at a price more people can afford. More than 50 individuals and 165 organizations have joined the Alliance, including The Boeing Company, Starbucks, Puget Sound Energy, REI, WA State Health Care Authority, King County and many other employers, physician groups, hospitals, consumer organizations, unions, health plans, pharmaceutical companies, associations and others. A cornerstone of the Alliance work is the Community Checkup, a regional report to the public comparing the performance of clinics and hospitals for basic measures of quality care in the Puget Sound area (www.wacomunitycheckup.org).