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**Puget Sound Health Alliance to get Medicare data,
HHS Secretary Leavitt announces**

*Information from Medicare key to expanding use of health care performance reports to
promote quality*

SEATTLE, March 21, 2008 – The Puget Sound Health Alliance will be given access to key Medicare information as part of a broad federal government initiative to encourage health care performance reporting to spur improvement in patient care, Secretary Mike Leavitt of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced yesterday.

Leavitt was in Seattle to recognize the three-year-old Health Alliance for its regional success in convening local consumers, employers, doctors, hospitals, health plans and others to work together to improve quality health care and address rising costs.

The Secretary laid the groundwork for today's announcement more than a year ago when he was in Seattle to announce that the Health Alliance had been designated the nation's first Community Leader for Value-Driven Health Care, a prerequisite to gaining access to information from Medicare for use in the public reporting on regional health care performance.

Since then, the Health Alliance publicly released the Puget Sound region's first "Community Checkup," a health care performance report based on a vast draw of data reflecting care provided to more than 1.6 million patients in King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap and Thurston counties. The Community Checkup showed results for 14 clinic systems that volunteered to have their results shown in the first report. The data reflected care provided to about 70 percent of the insured, non-Medicare population in the five-county region, between January 2004 and December 2006.

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David Fleming, M.D., chair of the Health Alliance board and director of Public Health - Seattle and King County, said the Health Alliance appreciates the willingness of Secretary Leavitt and the federal government to make information from Medicare available for use in local performance reporting.

"When we are able to incorporate analyzed data from Medicare into the 'Community Checkup', the report will be more comprehensive than ever, which will enrich its usefulness for clinics, hospitals and individual patients. People living around Puget Sound will benefit from having the most complete view possible of the quality and efficiency of local health care."

Margaret Stanley, executive director of the Health Alliance, said the organization is also excited about being included as a participant in Secretary Leavitt's initiative which will offer expert assistance to local communities for improved reporting, aligned incentives and promotion of the use of health information technology.

"Adding Medicare to the Community Checkup will make it one of the most robust reports in the country," said King County Executive Ron Sims. "The value to consumers, providers and employers will increase and the region will ultimately benefit."

The Health Alliance said today they will continue to work to advance the four cornerstones of Secretary Leavitt's value-driven health-care initiative:

- Measure and publish quality information so that consumers can make better-informed decisions about their own health, health care and treatment options;
- Measure and publish information about health care cost or efficiency;
- Promote quality and efficiency of care by rewarding those who provide, pay for and consume high-quality, competitive-priced health care; and
- Encourage doctors and hospitals to adopt interoperable health information technology.

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Health Alliance officials say they anticipate releasing a second Community Checkup later in 2008. The first report measured 21 types of care provided to patients in the area of diabetes, heart disease, depression, low back pain, use of generic drugs, use of antibiotics and prevention. The data used to create the report did not include patients' personally identifiable information, such as name or birthplace, nor does it include cost, charges or payment amounts.

The Puget Sound Health Alliance 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 160 organizations have joined the Alliance, including The Boeing Company, Starbucks, Puget Sound Energy, REI, Washington Mutual, WA State Health Care Authority, King County and many other employers, physician clinics, hospitals, consumer groups, unions and trusts, health plans, pharmaceutical companies, and other health organizations.

For a full list of Health Alliance members, go to www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org.

For the full 'Community Checkup' report, go to www.W ACommunityCheckup.org

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