



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 15, 2008

39 Green Street
Post Office Box 2490
Augusta, ME 04338-2490

Contact: Cherilee Budrick
207-622-7083 X 211
cbudrick@mainecahc.org

Tel: 207 / 622 – 7045
Fax: 207 / 622 – 7077
E: consumerhealth@mainecahc.org
Web: www.mainecahc.org

Maine Consumer Group Celebrates Monumental Anniversary Consumers for Affordable Health Care: Helping Mainers Get Quality, Affordable Health Care for 20 years

Founded by “health care for all” pioneer, Joe Ditré in 1988, Consumers for Affordable Health Care (CAHC) is thrilled to be celebrating its 20th Anniversary. “Back in 1988 you’d talk about the importance of health coverage for everyone to economic growth and most business leaders didn’t see the need for it. Many people didn’t even want to hear what you had to say. But that’s when a lot more people had employer coverage and when coverage was more affordable. Now, as the insurance companies reap record profits at the expense of the sick, more people are seeing why we need to make changes in our health care system. A lot more people are listening to what we have to say about the ways we can better our health coverage system,” says CAHC Executive Director Joe Ditré. With health care and insurance issues being a major concern for most Mainers and Americans, CAHC’s job is more important than ever! Ditré saw the need for change more than two decades ago and has been helping thousands of Mainers get the health coverage and care they need since. CAHC helps Mainers through its statewide, toll-free Health Care HelpLine, and its Education and Outreach program to the public and health care and other professionals, and through its Consumer Health Law Program and Policy work.

Did you know...?

- From 1990-2008 CAHC has been the lead organization advancing every major insurance reform in Maine.
- In 2007 CAHC’s Outreach Educator presented on health care issues to more than 33,000 people at 61 separate events in every county of the state.
- In 2008 CAHC’s Health Care HelpLine assisted its 10,000th Mainer in getting the health care and coverage they needed.

Consumers for Affordable Health Care started off with just one man, but has grown to ten employees today. We are still a non-profit, non-partisan organization. Over the years we have brought millions of dollars into Maine from national philanthropies, which helped to employ dozens of workers. Today, we are now the state’s largest health care coalition. We have about 50 member groups representing at least 200,000 Mainers.

(Continued on Page Two)

CAHC was the lead organization to help design and/or support legislative passage of the following health reforms over the past 20 years:

- **1988 Maine Health Program**, a pilot program to cover income-eligible single adults who don't get coverage through employers.
- **1990 Maine's first-in-the nation Continuity of Coverage law.** This protects consumers from being denied renewal of the same insurance coverage that they currently have when their policy is up for renewal (as long as the consumer has not missed payment for the policy).
- **1992 Maine's Community Rating System.** This keeps insurance companies from raising their premium prices too much for "higher risk" groups like elderly or those with illnesses like diabetes or cancer.
- **1994 Guaranteed Access to Coverage.** This protects consumers from being denied insurance coverage for reasons such as age, health status, or other characteristics.
- **1997 Health Plan Improvement Act.**
- **1999 Patient's Bill of Rights.**
- **2000 CAHC's Board President, Dr. John Marvin, helped design and led efforts to enact Maine RX Discount Drug Program**
- **2000 First raised issue of "charitable trust" in litigation that required Maine Blue Cross Blue Shield to set aside more than \$80 million** into a Maine-based health foundation since they were switching from a non-profit to a for-profit company (Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield). That "charitable trust" money was used to start the Maine Health Access Foundation.
- **2003 Supported Dirigo Health Program**, Maine's first-in-the-nation Universal Access to Health Coverage Plan.

As always, CAHC has worked tirelessly to protect and preserve all of these things we have helped Maine accomplish, traveling to six states and the District of Columbia to educate the rest of the nation on how they can follow our footsteps.

As we approach an historic presidential election, with health care being a top platform issue for candidates, history is also being made in Maine on the topic. As we approach our 20th anniversary some of the top minds in health care reform are coming together to help us celebrate.

We will recognize Kate and Philippe Villers. The Villers put up the seed money that started CAHC 20 years ago through their foundation, the Villers Foundation. The Villers are innovators in developing high social impact organizations. They co-founded Families USA in 1989 and Kate founded Community Catalyst in 1997-- two national organizations that provide leadership and support for consumer advocacy groups and allied organizations working to make quality, affordable health care available to all Americans. Kate is a trained urban planner who previously worked in urban housing

(Continued on Page Three)

and pioneered community capacity-building in the management of affordable housing. Philippe is an engineer who founded Computervision Corporation (a former Fortune 500 company), Automatix, Inc., and Cognition, Inc. and has guided innovative, successful high-tech corporations for more than 35 years. Kate and Philippe serve on boards of many nonprofit and social enterprise organizations and have been members of numerous advisory councils.

We will also honor Charlene Rydell. Charlene was a tireless advocate for the less fortunate and for universal health care. CAHC's first encounters with Charlene occurred in 1988 when she served as House Chair of the Banking and Insurance Committee. Almost every statute in Maine that protects insurance consumers was authored by Charlene. She also served on the Special Select Commission on Access to Health Care, which created the Maine Health Program, a project to provide low income individuals who were otherwise ineligible for Medicaid with Medicaid coverage. It served almost 22,000 Mainers at its peak. Charlene and her husband Lars also assisted in developing and drafting important sections of the Dirigo Health Act. Charlene served on CAHC Foundation's Board of Directors from 1998 - 2002. Charlene lost her battle with cancer in 2006, but her memory and legacy live on.

Guest Speaker, Karen Pollitz will come up from Washington to talk about the state of health care nationally and in Maine. Ms. Pollitz is a Research Professor at the Health Policy Institute at Georgetown University. She directs research that focuses on consumer issues like regulation of private health insurance plans and markets, managed care consumer protections, and access to affordable health insurance. She is also an adjunct professor in Georgetown's Graduate Public Policy School. Her projects include the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Consumer Guides Project and the Consumer Healthcare Education Project. Ms. Pollitz served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health Legislation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 1993 to 1997. She was the Secretary's legislative liaison on all federal health care issues, including national health care reform, Medicare, Medicaid, and U.S. Public Health Service agencies and programs. From 1984 to 1991, Ms. Pollitz worked as a health policy advisor to Members of Congress. Ms. Pollitz holds an M.P.P. from the University of California at Berkeley, and a B.A. with Honors from Oberlin College. CAHC is honored to have Ms. Pollitz recently join our Board of Directors.

The 20th Anniversary Dinner celebration is September 19th starting at 5:00 pm at the Senator Inn and Spa in Augusta.

###

For more information or to schedule interviews contact:

Cherilee Budrick
Communications Coordinator- C.A.H.C.
207-622-7083
cbudrick@mainecahc.org

"Health care should be a right, not a privilege."