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## **\$1 MILLION GRANT WILL HELP WEST VENTURA TACKLE OBESITY**

### ***Kaiser Permanente investment funds 3-year effort to help residents live healthier***

**[Ventura, CA ] January 25, 2012**– *A LEAN West Ventura*, an alliance of community groups focused on improving health, has received a \$1 million grant from Kaiser Permanente to promote healthy eating and active living in west Ventura. The investment is part of Kaiser Permanente's new three-year, \$7 million-plus HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) Zones initiative across Southern California.

The HEAL Zones are designed to help make healthy choices accessible to more people in underserved communities — and in turn to prevent diseases such as diabetes and hypertension that often result from obesity. In addition to West Ventura, Kaiser Permanente selected five southern California communities which will also receive \$1 million HEAL Zones grants: Anaheim (Orange County,) Long Beach (Los Angeles County, ) Ontario (San Bernardino County,) Lemon Grove (San Diego County,) and east Riverside (Riverside County.) In addition to the six HEAL Zones, Kaiser Permanente will dedicate additional funding for technical and evaluation support as well as other Southern California place-based community investments over the next three years.

“We are excited to receive this funding from Kaiser Permanente because it will allow us to make changes that reflect the specific needs of our community,” said Rigo Vargas, division manager with Ventura County Public Health. “The partnership with Kaiser Permanente is invaluable in the campaign to fight obesity here in west Ventura. We appreciate not only the funding from Kaiser Permanente, but also the expertise and technical support they will provide as part of this initiative.”

The A LEAN West Ventura HEAL Zone project brings together a robust coalition of partners which includes local public agencies, schools, community-based organizations, employers, local businesses, faith-based organizations and health care providers. Among the initiatives they will to establish a kids farmer’s market, establish school policy requiring healthy fundraising rewards, implement healthy fundraising and reward system, increase access to healthy foods through CalFresh, implement a walking school bus and develop well-lit, safe pathways to school.

Obesity is a national epidemic, and in California, the statistics are stark. Half of all adults, one in every nine children, and one in three teens is obese or overweight. In Ventura County, the percentage of overweight and obese ranges from 25.5% to 30.4% in grades 5, 7, and 9. Percentages vary by city, but there are significant racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities contributing to the prevalence of childhood obesity in those neighborhoods where overweight and obesity are the highest.

### **Neighborhoods matter**

A person's neighborhood greatly affects their likelihood of obesity because it determines how easy it is to buy affordable healthy food and have a safe place to be active. Low-income communities tend to have some of the highest obesity rates, which is why the HEAL Zones are focused there.

The vision of the HEAL Zones is that at the end of the three-year initiative, communities will be measurably transformed so that opportunities for engaging in healthy behaviors – walking and biking on safe routes, buying affordable fresh fruits and vegetables close to home, exercising in parks and participating in active after-school programs — are part of daily life. The HEAL Zones are a continuation of Kaiser Permanente's Healthy Eating Active Living program that began in 2004, to address obesity and other health-related conditions.

"Since the inception of our HEAL program we have seen increased physical activity, greater availability of healthy food in corner stores, improvement of our local parks and creation of safe walkways. We also learned that going forward, we could make a greater impact by concentrating our efforts in smaller, more targeted areas," said Benjamin Chu, MD, MPH, MACP, group president for Kaiser Permanente Southern California and Kaiser Permanente Hawaii. "For Kaiser Permanente, the HEAL Zones are much more than just funding. They are an extension of the work in our medical centers, and our commitment to helping create healthy individuals and healthy communities."

Each HEAL Zone will focus on three specific goals over the next three years:

- Decrease calorie consumption, especially sugar-sweetened beverages
- Increase consumption of healthy food and beverages such as fresh fruits and vegetables and drinking water
- Increase physical activity

"As we address obesity, especially childhood obesity, it's imperative to make changes at the local level — where people live, work and play — to make it easier for people to eat more healthfully and move more as part of daily life," said Robert Levin, M.D, Ventura County Public Health Officer. "Otherwise, we will continue to see a rise in obesity-related diseases like type 2 diabetes."

### ***About A Lean West Ventura***

*A LEAN West Ventura- Advocates for a Lifestyle of Exercise and Nutrition in West Ventura. A LEAN West Ventura is a coalition which grew out of the A LEAN VC Partnership (Advocates for a Lifestyle of Exercise and Nutrition in Ventura County) A LEAN VC promotes community activities, policies and environmental changes that foster healthy eating and regular physical activity to counter obesity and its related chronic diseases.*

*To learn more about the A LEAN West Ventura, HEAL Zone please visit our website at [www.healthyventuracounty.org](http://www.healthyventuracounty.org)*

### ***About Kaiser Permanente***

*Kaiser Permanente is committed to helping shape the future of health care. Founded in 1945 and recognized as one of America's leading health care providers and not-for-profit health plan., their mission is to provide high-quality, affordable health care services and to improve the health of members and the communities they serve. Currently serving 8.9 million members in nine states and the District of Columbia. Care for members and patients is focused on their total health and guided by their personal physicians, specialists and team of caregivers. The expert and caring medical teams are empowered and supported by industry-leading technology advances and tools for health promotion, disease prevention, state-of-the art care delivery and world-class chronic disease management. Kaiser Permanente is dedicated to care innovations, clinical research, health education and the support of community health. For more information, go to [www.kp.org/newscenter](http://www.kp.org/newscenter).*

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