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**RI Medical Reserve Corps Receives a \$20,000 MRC Challenge Award for Public Health Initiatives to Benefit All Rhode Islanders**

*Funds to be used to decrease deaths from opioid overdose and increase access to life-saving medications.*

**Providence, RI (January 16, 2014)**— The Rhode Island Medical Reserve Corps has been awarded a \$20,000 Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Challenge Award from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) in partnership with the Office of the Surgeon General. The award will be used to provide opioid overdose prevention, recognition, and treatment education to Rhode Islanders most at risk. It will also help expand access to naloxone, a life-saving medication that is used to treat opioid overdose.

The MRC Challenge Award funds MRC units to carry out innovative projects in their communities that can be replicated on a national level and align with one of four focus areas: community resilience; chronic disease prevention; partners for empowered communities; and mental and emotional well-being.

“RI MRC is part of the national network of dedicated volunteers and leaders engaged in local communities across the nation whose missions are to strengthen public health, improve the response to emergencies, and build resiliency,” said CAPT Rob Tosatto, Director of the Division of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps. “With the challenges we face today, we must constantly look for sustainable and cost effective ways to improve health and safety while reducing disaster and health risks. The Challenge Awards help the recipient MRC units tackle unique issues in their communities with innovative approaches, and the ideas generated can then be translated and disseminated to other units to benefit our nation as a whole.”

Rhode Island has the seventh highest fatal overdose rate in the nation and drug overdose has been the leading cause of accidental death in the state since 2008. This award will serve as the initial funding for RI MRC's Naloxone and Overdose Prevention Education Program (NOPE-RI). Drawing from the same robust volunteer base that fueled the successful H1N1 vaccination clinics in 2009-2010, NOPE-RI will work collaboratively with community groups and social service organizations that are in contact with the at-risk population to deliver the curriculum. The program educates opioid users, their families and friends on overdose prevention, overdose recognition, and overdose treatment, including the administration of naloxone (Narcan), a

medication that temporarily reverses the effects of opioids. NOPE-RI works with the Drug Overdose Prevention and Rescue Coalition to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have the tools they need to prevent, recognize, and treat opioid overdose. For more information, please visit [www.nopeRI.org](http://www.nopeRI.org).

Nearly 200 MRC units from across the United States completed the application, and the top 29 most promising applicants received awards totaling nearly \$600,000 to implement the proposed initiatives.

“We are proud that the RI MRC received a Challenge Award from the National Association of County and City Health Officials,” said Tom Lawrence, Team Leader. “This award will allow us to continue our mission of Rhode Islanders serving the public health needs of Rhode Island. I believe that NOPE will save lives and build stronger communities.”

NACCHO has worked with the Division of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps within the Office of the Surgeon General, a federal government agency that oversees the national MRC network, through a cooperative agreement since 2006. For more information on the Medical Reserve Corps, please visit [www.medicalreservecorps.gov](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov) or [www.riresponds.org](http://www.riresponds.org).

The RI Medical Reserve Corps identifies, trains, and organizes local healthcare volunteers able to assist in both large-scale state emergencies and/or smaller community based public health initiatives. With over 1200 registered volunteer health professionals and non-medical volunteers, the RI MRC is an active participant in preparedness and response activities within the State of Rhode Island. Sponsored by the Rhode Island Disaster Medical Assistance Team (RI DMAT), the 501c3 organization provides training opportunities to its volunteers in the form of field hospital operations at mass gathering events across the State. The goal of these events is aimed at training medical health professional volunteers to prepare for and respond to public health and emergency response disasters by providing hospital level care to participants and spectators. RIDMAT/MRC’s participation at these events alleviates surge on local EMS services and area hospitals. RI MRC aims to provide support to public health initiatives across the State in order to improve the health and wellness of Rhode Island, ultimately reducing the vulnerability of the population to disaster risk and improving our overall response efforts.

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's 2,800 local governmental health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. For more information about NACCHO, please visit [www.naccho.org](http://www.naccho.org).

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