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\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\*

### **Second Phase of Wyoming Health Care Professional Loan Repayment Program Accepting Applications Through Nov. 23; Over \$500,000 Awarded Earlier this Year**

CHEYENNE - Wyoming physicians, dentists, and other allied health care professionals interested in the state-sponsored loan repayment program are invited to apply for the second phase of funding, Wyoming Department of Health officials announced today. The deadline for applications is Nov. 23 and approximately \$500,000 is available.

The first phase concluded this month with the program awarding \$450,000 to three physicians with specialties in family practice and internal medicine and two dentists practicing general dentistry. Allied health care professionals funded by the program included an advanced practice nurse, two licensed professional counselors, a physical therapist and a youth and family therapist, with those awards totaling an additional \$144,000.

These ten providers are located in communities throughout Wyoming including Douglas, Cheyenne, Newcastle, Lander, Rock Springs, Laramie, Sheridan, Cody, and Worland. The total amount of the awards includes a 25 percent local community contribution that is required in addition to the state funds.

The intent of the program is to help medically underserved Wyoming communities recruit and retain health care professionals, said Lynne Weidel, who administers the program through the Rural Health Office of the Wyoming Department of Health. Program funds are awarded for the repayment of educational loans and are distributed proportionately, beginning with the most critical need, and taking into account the applicant pool.

"We're very happy with the success in the first phase and look forward to providing support to other providers," said Wyoming Department of Health director, Dr. Brent Sherard. "This is all about increasing access to healthcare in our Wyoming communities."

The Wyoming Health Care Professional Loan Repayment Program is a state-funded initiative to provide grants to eligible health care providers for repayment of educational loans. In the 2004 session, the Legislature allocated \$990,000 to fund this program for three years.

The loan program provides grants for loan repayment of up to \$30,000 per year to ten physicians or dentists for three years. Ten allied health care professionals will also be funded at a maximum of \$10,000 per year for three years. Allied health care professionals are defined as other health care providers licensed or certified to provide health care services in Wyoming. This includes pharmacists, nurse practitioners, laboratory technicians, x-ray technicians, speech pathologists, mental health and substance abuse counselors, and many other health care professionals. In order to qualify for consideration, applicants must agree to practice their profession in a medically under-served area of Wyoming for a minimum of three years. The applicants must also agree to accept Medicare, Medicaid and KidCare clients.

Since grant funds are limited, not all eligible applicants are assured of participation in the program. Weidel said that funding priority will be given to those applicants serving in the most under-served areas of the state and to those applicants with the greatest repayment need. Applicants will be required to have made a commitment with a practice site or community prior to making the application. Each site or community must also provide 25 percent in matching funds to participate in the program.

Similar state-funded loan repayment programs have been established in all of Wyoming's neighboring states, as well as in many other states across the nation, Weidel said. These programs have proven to be successful recruitment and retention tools and offer health care providers incentives to consider practice opportunities in these states over states that do not offer such programs.

Applications or further information on the Wyoming Health Care Professional Loan Repayment Program can be obtained from the Office of Rural Health by calling 307-777-8940. Applications can also be downloaded from the Office of Rural Health's web site <http://wdh.state.wy.us/rural/loan.asp>.

Applications for loan repayment will be accepted through Nov. 23, 2005.

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