



Southeast Queens in
Support of Health
Services (SQUISH)

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Coalition Commends State's Allocation of \$30M to Improve Health Services in Queens

Demands that Funds Be Used to Support Community-Based Care in Southeast Queens – a Low-Income Community of Color with High Need

New York City, August 24, 2009 – Southeast Queens United in Support of Health Services (SQUISH), a coalition of community-based organizations in Southeast Queens, commends the New York State Department of Health for its timely and important new report, *Queens County Healthcare Profile*, and the accompanying announcement that the State is making \$30 million in grants to hospitals and health centers to increase the borough's healthcare capacity.

SQUISH strongly supports the Department of Health's plan to develop new community- and hospital-based healthcare options in Queens, and it urges the Department to allocate the funds toward the development of community-based health care in Southeast Queens, a neighborhood desperately in need of additional health resources.

"Southeast Queens is a racially and ethnically diverse community that is also extremely medically under-served. It is critical that grants be awarded to providers who will develop healthcare services to meet the needs of this area – that is, health care that is culturally and linguistically appropriate and that is open and available after traditional business hours so that working families can access it," said **Jule A. Grant, Director of the Jamaica Neighborhood Center**.

"Building extensions or additions onto existing hospitals or community health centers will not help people living in Southeast Queens to access better primary or emergency care. Because of the lack of transportation options between Southeast Queens and other parts of the borough, residents currently travel long distances to see a primary care doctor or to go to the hospital," said **Eugenia Rudmann, a member of SQUISH**. "It is important for people who live in Southeast Queens to be able to receive medical attention without having to take multiple buses and trains."

Judy Wessler of the Commission on the Public's Health System notes, "We want to thank the New York State Department of Health for working with SQUISH and listening to our concerns. The need for more resources in Queens is very clear in the Healthcare

Profile, but it is not broken down by community district or neighborhood.” According to Ms. Wessler, healthcare options differ dramatically between different areas of the borough. She points out: “The number of physicians in community practice is much lower in Southeast Queens—48 for every 100,000 residents—than in Flushing, where there are 132 physicians for every 100,000 people.”

Kevin Forrestal of the SQUISH coalition states, “If the Department of Health were to assess the healthcare options available by local neighborhoods within Queens, data would show that Southeast Queens severely lacks both primary and emergency care options. Residents of the neighborhood would benefit greatly from both a community health center that provides primary and preventative care, as well as an urgent care center for medical emergencies.”

“How this funding is allocated is a critical public health matter, but it is also an important civil rights concern,” said **Nisha Agarwal of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**. “Southeast Queens, which has the highest concentration of African-American residents in Queens. Yet, it has seen a disproportionate share of hospital and clinic closures in the borough. If the Department of Health is committed to improving health care in Queens—and to reducing health disparities citywide—it will make sure that these \$30M in grants are steered toward the low-income communities of color most in need.”

About Southeast Queens United in Support of Health Services (SQUISH)

The mission of the SQUISH is to strengthen existing healthcare services in the community by raising community awareness about issues that affect the delivery of services and advocating against the reduction and removal of critical health services in Southeast Queens. SQUISH is comprised of residents and community-based organizations from Southeast Queens as well as from legal services and advocacy allies from around the city.