The American Heart Association Announces $7.1 million Project to Improve Heart Attack Care in Wyoming

*Lead $5.9 million gift from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust*

Cheyenne, WYO – Every day in Wyoming, approximately 51 people are diagnosed with heart disease. This diagnosis means they are at a greater risk of experiencing a heart attack or sudden cardiac arrest. And, from the moment the first heart attack symptoms begin, the survival clock starts ticking. Every second counts in a race against time to stop the heart attack or arrest and to restore blood flow to the heart — ideally within the first hour, which can be challenging in a mostly rural state such as Wyoming. To help citizens improve their odds and beat the survival clock, the American Heart Association (AHA) will begin implementing Mission: Lifeline Wyoming. The $7.1 million statewide project is being funded in part by a $5.9 million grant from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

Mission: Lifeline Wyoming is a community-based approach to improving the system of care for heart attack patients throughout the state by closing the gaps that separate heart attack patients from timely access to care. The three-year initiative, managed by Wyoming-based AHA staff, will be a collaborative effort involving hospitals, emergency medical services (EMS) providers and first responders. Mission: Lifeline Wyoming will coordinate and streamline protocols to reduce the amount of time it takes for heart attack and sudden cardiac arrest patients to receive lifesaving treatment by ensuring equipment compatibility, consistent training and uniform protocols for both transporting and treating patients across the state. The program also will allow for comprehensive and in-depth analysis of emergency cardiovascular care and system level performance in Wyoming. Additional support has been received from First Interstate Bank and The Wyoming Community Foundation's Working for Wyoming Fund.

“This initiative represents a significant investment in Wyoming’s health care system, especially for our rural communities,” Governor Matt Mead said. “While we take pride in Wyoming’s wide, open spaces, vast geography and small towns, we also recognize that the distance to health care likely contributes to Wyoming’s heart attack survival rates being lower than the national average. This collaboration between The Helmsley Charitable Trust, the American Heart Association and private and nonprofit organizations across the state will provide important, lifesaving services to our citizens. Correspondingly heart attack survival rates in Wyoming should improve.”

The Helmsley Charitable Trust recognizes that in states like Wyoming, where fewer residents are spread out across a much wider geographic area, access to health care is challenging. In an attempt to address this need, The Helmsley Charitable Trust established the Rural Healthcare Program in 2009. To date, the program has awarded more than $133 million in grants to nonprofit organizations in the region — including more than $17.8 million to health care projects in Wyoming.

Mission: Lifeline seeks to save lives by closing the gaps that separate STEMI patients from timely access to appropriate treatments. Although Mission: Lifeline is focused on improving the system of care for patients who suffer from a STEMI each year, improving that system will ultimately improve care for all heart attack patients. Stakeholders from across the state will be involved in the implementation of
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Mission: Lifeline Wyoming, with representation from all large and small hospitals and ambulance services and other stakeholder organizations, such as the Wyoming Department of Health.

The grant will fund the critical elements of an optimal state-wide emergency cardiovascular system of care: assistance to every ambulance service in the state in acquiring 12-lead ECG equipment and comprehensive 12-lead ECG training; Automated External Defibrillators (AED) equipment and training for first responders; transmission and receiving equipment for regional hospitals; a system-wide data tool for quality measurement and improvement; ongoing medical provider training and education; development of treatment protocols for EMS and hospital personnel; regional plans for rapid transport and transfer of patients; and an aggressive public education campaign on heart attack signs and symptoms and the need to call 9-1-1 to activate the system of care.

“While I am proud of the significant improvements in STEMI care we have made within the last year, the launch of Mission: Lifeline Wyoming will help take us to the next level by making it possible to provide faster access to modern treatment,” said Adrian Fluture, M.D., incoming Director of Regional Myocardial Infarction Care at Wyoming Medical Center in Casper. “This grant and the partnerships it brings will be of great importance as we continue to work toward improving treatment and patient outcomes across the state.”

“Heart disease is already the number one killer in Wyoming. With an aging population and increased health risks contributing to possible cardiac events, this project could not have come at a better time,” said Gerrie Gardner, M.D., a cardiologist practicing at Cheyenne Regional Medical Center, Chair of the Wyoming Heart and Vascular Institute and 2011 American College of Cardiology Governor of Wyoming. “The success of Mission: Lifeline will translate into dramatically improved heart attack patient care all across Wyoming — improved patient care means lives saved.”

“This gift demonstrates how collaboration between nonprofit organizations can transform community health,” said Midge LaPorte Epstein, Executive Vice President of the AHA’s SouthWest Affiliate, which includes Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. “Mission: Lifeline Wyoming will enable the American Heart Association to leverage our neutral position in the community, as well as our outcome-oriented and science-based approach to convene others and effect long-lasting change. We are grateful to The Helmsley Charitable Trust for its support of our mission to build healthier lives free of cardiovascular disease and stroke.”

Each year, hundreds of thousands of Americans have a type of heart attack known as a ST-elevation myocardial infarction, or STEMI, in which blood flow is completely blocked to a portion of the heart. Unless the blockage is eliminated quickly, the patient’s health and life are at serious risk. Currently, around two-thirds of STEMI patients fail to receive the best available treatments to restore blood flow. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Wyoming is in the Class 5 category for STEMI death rates, which means Wyoming has one of the highest STEMI death rates in the nation.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) occurs when electrical impulses in the heart become rapid or chaotic, which causes the heart to suddenly stop beating. Nearly 383,000 out-of-hospital sudden cardiac arrests occur annually across the country. Survival depends upon rapid defibrillation — a process in which an electronic device gives a shock to the heart to help reestablish normal rhythms. In fact, for every minute that passes without defibrillation, survival rates decrease by as much as 10 percent. Studies of lay-rescuer AED programs in airports and casinos and of first-responder programs with police officers have shown survival rates are greatly increased when bystander CPR is provided immediately and when defibrillation occurs within three to five minutes of collapse.

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Mission: Lifeline Wyoming is the third such program funded entirely or in part through grants from The Helmsley Charitable Trust Rural Healthcare Program. In mid-2010, Mission: Lifeline South Dakota launched with a fully-funded $8.4 million grant. The project was followed by Mission: Lifeline North Dakota, which launched last September. Two-thirds of the $7.1 million project ($4.4 million) was funded by The Helmsley Charitable Trust, with supporting gifts from the state, health care systems and additional foundations and stakeholders.

About The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, established in 1999, supports a diverse range of organizations with a major focus on health and medical research, human services, education and conservation. The Trust has announced more than $623 million in grants to charitable organizations since 2008. For more information, please visit www.helmsleytrust.org.

About the American Heart Association

The American Heart Association is devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – America’s No. 1 and No. 4 killers. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The AHA is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit www.heart.org.

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