



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Lisa Clough; phone: 202.464.8734; email: lclough@womenheart.org

Cheryl Monkhouse; 404-210-1362; emails: cheryl.monkhouse@bcbsga.com

“Strengthening the Heart of Georgia” Program Now Accepting Applications

First time program will empower women in Georgia to take charge of their heart health, support other women

Atlanta – October 25, 2011 – Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women, and women in Georgia die at a rate of 387/100,000 -- 9% higher than the national average (1). But a new program is coming to Georgia that hopes to curb that trend – with women heart patients themselves at the forefront of the movement. Forty Georgia women living with heart disease will be trained to become volunteer *WomenHeart Champions* who will return to their communities to educate women about heart health and lead patient support networks, thanks to a grant from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia (BCBSGa) Foundation.

Participating in the WomenHeart Science & Leadership Symposium is the first step in the training process. To be held February 17-20, 2012 at the Emory Conference Center Hotel in Atlanta, the three-day Symposium features national and local experts in cardiology, women’s health, and communications. **The application process for women heart disease survivors interested in becoming a *WomenHeart Champion* is now open and continues through December 9, 2011. Visit www.womenheart.org to access the application.**

This Symposium is modeled after the nationally renowned WomenHeart Science & Leadership Symposium held at Mayo Clinic (Rochester, MN) and sponsored by WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease, which has since 2002 trained nearly 600 *WomenHeart Champions* and established 100 WomenHeart Support Networks throughout the country. In



Georgia, WomenHeart has teamed with the BCBSGa Foundation to bring the *Strengthening the Heart of Georgia* program to the state.

“*WomenHeart Champions* are making a difference in the lives of women throughout the country,” said Lisa M. Tate, Chief Executive Officer of WomenHeart. “We are thrilled to bring this program to Georgia because nearly 45 percent of *WomenHeart Champions* have been credited with saving a life and now women in Georgia will have the opportunity to have significant impact on their heart sisters, as well. We are grateful to our sponsor, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia Foundation, for making this program possible. Their support means that the women of Georgia will be able to fight back against the leading cause of death in women, and empower them to take charge of their heart health,” Tate continued.

Currently in Georgia, 27 percent of women have high blood pressure, 47 percent have high cholesterol, 19 percent report smoking, 27 percent are obese, and 60 percent are physically inactive. (2)

“We have a serious need here in Georgia for a program like this,” said Morgan Kendrick, President, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia. “This model provides us the unique opportunity to develop a volunteer force of women with heart disease who will conduct community education and establish support groups throughout Georgia. Our mission is to improve the lives of those we serve and the health of our communities, and we feel strongly that this program will enhance our efforts in these areas.”

Forty women from 10 communities in the state will be selected through a state-wide competitive application process to participate in the training program. The 10 cities chosen based on population size and prevalence of heart disease and risk factors include:

- Atlanta
- John’s Creek



- Marietta
- Athens
- Macon
- Augusta
- Columbus
- Albany
- Savannah
- Valdosta

The program seeks participation from a diverse group of women, and encourages women of all ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, native languages, income, and education levels to apply. Many national, state and local organizations are working in partnership with WomenHeart to implement this initiative, including Grady Memorial Hospital, Cardiovascular Health Initiative of the Georgia Department of Public Health, Association of Black Cardiologists, Center for Black Women's Wellness, Georgia Association of Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation, Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association, Saint Joseph's Hospital, Saint Joseph's Heart Center for Women, and Wellstar Cardiac Wellness and Rehabilitation.

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(1) Centers for Disease Control, Heart Disease and Women Mortality Rates, 2007.

(2) Progress towards Healthy People 2010 Objectives, Georgia, 2002-2007. Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health.

WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's only patient centered organization serving the 42 million American women living with or at risk for heart disease – the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education, and the nation's only patient support networks for women living with heart disease. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier



lives. To receive a free on line heart health action kit or to donate visit www.womenheart.org/kit.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia Foundation

Through charitable grant making, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia Foundation LLC, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, promotes Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia's inherent commitment to enhance the health and well-being of individuals and families in communities that the company serves. The Foundation focuses its funding on strategic initiatives that address and provide innovative solutions to health care challenges, as well as promoting the Healthy Generations Program, a multi-generational initiative that targets specific disease states and medical conditions. These include: prenatal care in the first trimester, low birth weight babies, cardiac morbidity rates, long term activities that decrease obesity and increase physical activity, diabetes prevalence in adult populations, adult pneumococcal and influenza vaccinations and smoking cessation. The Foundation also coordinates the company's annual associate giving campaign and its parent foundation provides a 50 percent match of associates' campaign pledges. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield names and symbols are registered marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

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