BOSTON—September 14, 2016— A new $10 million initiative, funded by the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation, will help shape the future of pediatric mental health care by delivering accessible, high-quality services to Massachusetts’ most vulnerable children, right in their pediatricians’ offices. TEAM UP for Children (Transforming and Expanding Access to Mental Health in Urban Pediatrics) is designed to introduce, evaluate, and sustain access to effective mental health treatment by embedding that care within trusted primary care settings.

When left untreated, childhood mental illness poses a major public health crisis, here in Massachusetts and across the country. Yet barriers to prevention, diagnosis and treatment are so severe that 4 out of 5 American children struggling with these health issues do not receive adequate care. It can take as long as 10 years until mental health conditions in children are properly diagnosed; a delay which can have a lasting impact on development, behavior and academic achievement. In addition, national estimates suggest that mental illness is the single most expensive childhood disease as well as a major driver of health costs well into adulthood.

Progress in treatments over the past few decades, however, mean that common childhood mental disorders now can be treated safely and effectively within lower-cost, accessible primary care locations, such as community health centers. TEAM UP for Children will help address the need for integration between primary and behavioral health care for children by awarding grants over a four-year period to three highly regarded community health centers in the Greater Boston area: The Dimock Center in Roxbury, Codman Square Health Center in Dorchester and Lowell Community Health Center, serving a combined 20,000 children. Boston Medical Center (BMC) will lead the implementation of the project and provide clinical consultation, training for the health centers and care for the most acutely ill patients.

The initiative will support increased access to mental health care by expanding the ability of community health centers to prevent, identify and treat mild to moderate mental illnesses and behavioral disorders including anxiety, depression and ADHD. Through this effort, the community health centers will expand existing primary care teams to include nine behavioral health providers and eight pediatric community health workers across the three health centers. Equally important, 60 members of the health centers’ clinical teams will receive enhanced training in mental health diagnosis, management and support. All pediatric patients will have access to behavioral health care and be screened as a result of the program.

“TEAM UP for Children aims to change the lives of at-risk children and families in ways that are real and measurable,” said Richard Smith, Chair of the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation. Smith added, “What we learn from this initiative is intended to provide a detailed roadmap for providers,
policymakers, and payers on how to optimize scarce health resources for the benefit of children and our society.”

A comprehensive evaluation assessing implementation strategies, child and family outcomes and costs is a key component of this initiative. In recognition of the significant potential of TEAM UP for Children to improve pediatric care, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the nation’s largest health-focused philanthropic organization, has awarded $500,000 to BMC. This grant will supplement evaluation funding provided by the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation to evaluate how pediatric health settings can transform systems to focus on prevention and family health. RWJF will work to promote TEAM UP for Children findings nationally.

According to Lisa Fortuna, Medical Director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Boston Medical Center, “This vital initiative will reduce waiting times and increase access to proven treatments by addressing mild to moderate mental health concerns right in the primary care setting and offering stepped up care and child psychiatry consultations for children with more significant needs,” said Fortuna.

BMC will work closely with each health center’s primary care teams, providing consultation and training so that patients can be treated effectively and locally. “The transformative approach made possible through TEAM UP will enable our integrated teams to eliminate barriers to access and continuity of care and offer an unprecedented level of coordination,” said Dr. Kumble Rajesh, Chief Medical Officer at Lowell Community Health Center.

“We can’t deny that today’s pediatric mental health system is facing serious challenges. In most cases, early intervention can have a life-changing effect. Yet, not nearly enough children have access to care at all, let alone exceptional care,” said Dr. Nandini Sengupta, Medical Director of Health Services at The Dimock Center. “This grant will allow for early intervention and provide the behavioral health treatment and services these children and their families desperately need.”

Genevieve Daftary, MD, MPH, Pediatric Medical Director at Codman Square Health Center, said the funding also will enable the health centers to add staff members to their pediatric care teams to work directly with families to help address challenges such as lack of housing or community violence that can exacerbate a child’s mental illness. “This critical support will help us treat our patients and families well beyond the confines of an exam room,” said Daftary.

According to the Smith Family Foundation, TEAM UP for Children has the potential for broad national impact. All participating health centers will regularly report on quality and cost measures to demonstrate the benefits of this comprehensive approach, with the goal of duplicating best practices here in Massachusetts and across the country.

About Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation
The Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation is committed to effecting permanent positive change in the lives of the residents of Greater Boston, particularly individuals and families in economically disadvantaged communities. Today, three generations of the Smith family oversee the Foundation, stewarding approximately $15 million annually in grants aimed at promoting greater health, educational attainment, and economic mobility.
About The Dimock Center
Recognized nationally as a model for the delivery of comprehensive health and human services in an urban community, The Dimock Center provides the residents of Boston with convenient access to high quality, low cost health care and human services that might not otherwise be available to its surrounding communities. Situated on a nine-acre campus in Roxbury’s Egleston Square, The Dimock Center handles more than 76,000 visits annually with 17,000 unique patients and clients representing a wide range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Services provided at The Dimock Center include Health and Community Care, Behavioral Health and Child and Family Services. For more information, visit www.dimock.org.

About Codman Square Health Center
Codman Square Health Center was founded in 1979 by a group of community visionaries seeking to restore their neighborhood on the brink of disaster. Today, with a staff of over 290 employees and an astounding depth and breadth of community programs and partnerships, the Health Center serves as a resource for improving the physical, mental and social well-being of the community. Our comprehensive, wraparound services are built upon our Patient-Centered Medical Home model and include primary care, urgent care, dental care, eye care, behavioral health, and nutrition. For more information, visit www.codman.org.

About Lowell Community Health Center
Founded in 1970, Lowell Community Health Center serves as the “family doctor” for nearly half of the Lowell, MA population, providing “caring, quality, and culturally appropriate health services to the people of Greater Lowell, regardless of their financial status.” Lowell is home to many immigrants and refugees from all parts of the globe; 88% of those served by Lowell CHC live below the federal poverty level, and close to half are best served in a language other than English. Lowell CHC is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organization and recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance as a top-level Patient Centered Medical Home. It was designated by the federal Office of Minority Health as one of the top 5 health centers for delivering culturally competent care, including through its unique, West-meets-East Metta Health Center. With a staff of over 400, Lowell CHC is the city’s 10th largest employer. For information, visit www.lchealth.org or call 978.746.7891.

About Boston Medical Center
Boston Medical Center is a private, not-for-profit, 496-bed, academic medical center that is the primary teaching affiliate of Boston University School of Medicine. It is the largest and busiest provider of trauma and emergency services in New England. It offers specialized care for complex health problems and is a leading research institution, receiving more than $119 million in sponsored research funding in fiscal year 2015. In 1997, BMC founded Boston Medical Center Health Plan, Inc., now one of the top ranked Medicaid MCOs in the country, as a non-profit managed care organization serving Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Boston Medical Center and Boston University School of Medicine are partners in the Boston HealthNet – 13 community health centers focused on providing exceptional health care to residents of Boston. For more information, please visit http://www.bmc.org.

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