

THE FUTURE OF EVIDENCE-BASED COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Beginning in 2009, hospitals will start reporting their community benefit and other information related to tax-exempt status on the Internal Revenue Service's Form 990, Schedule H. The new, mandatory reporting requirement is a major step in community benefit transparency and accountability. The IRS reporting requirements will have a direct impact on the internal operations of every reporting hospital, compelling us to assess what and how we are doing community benefit.

At the same time, community benefit programs are maturing, moving from "random acts of kindness" to being grounded in evidence. The field is becoming increasingly professional and strategic. Frameworks, concepts, tools from academic work and public health can facilitate this transformation.

This special section in *Health Progress* represents the introduction of academic public health expertise as a foundation for the future of evidence-based community benefit. The articles in the following pages culminate a year of collaborative work between CHA and the Saint Louis University School of Public Health. The university's leadership and faculty have mentored CHA staff and members on the school's signature approach: evidence-based public health. The dashboard theme of the

cover reflects the measurement tools used to collect and analyze data related to community benefit. University experts have guided development of a new CHA guide on evaluating community benefit programs, participated in audio and other educational programs, surveyed the field on educational needs, and

queried interest in development of a community benefit certification program.

In addition, Saint Louis University faculty taught a two-day educational program for advanced community benefit practitioners in July titled "Making an Impact: Evidence-Based Community Benefit." The program was co-sponsored by CHA and VHA Inc. The articles in this issue represent some of the sessions from the successful conference.

Collaboration between the Saint Louis University School of

Public Health and CHA community benefit programs is a perfect fit. Together, we can forge the future toward improved, effective and scientifically based community benefit programs. ■

—Julie Trocchio, senior director, continuing care ministries, Catholic Health Association, Washington, D.C., and Connie Evashwick, Sc.D., professor in the departments of Health Management and Policy, and Community Health, School of Public Health, Saint Louis University, St. Louis.

