March 1, 2012 (Williamson County) –

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has awarded $6.1 million dollars to eighteen communities across Texas to improve the health and quality of life for individuals, families and organizations. Williamson County and Cities Health District (WCCHD), on behalf of the Wilco Wellness Alliance, was awarded $500,000.

The Transforming Texas: Healthy People in Healthy Communities grant is intended to improve the health and safety of communities by increasing access to care, integrating community prevention services and clinical services, and eliminating health disparities. Communities awarded the grant are required to address three strategic directions, which are aligned with Healthy People 2020: 1) tobacco free living, 2) active living and healthy eating, and 3) high impact, evidence-based clinical and other preventive services, specifically prevention and control of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

In Williamson County, Transforming Texas will be spearheaded by the WilCo Wellness Alliance. The Alliance was formed in 2009 when the County was designated as an Action Community for Health, Innovation, and Environmental Change (ACHIEVE) by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. The County has received other positive distinctions for its health including: Healthiest county in Texas in 2010 and 2011 by the County Health Rankings, as well as Silver recognition for Georgetown from the 2011 Heart and Stroke Healthy City Recognition Program.

The WilCo Wellness Alliance is comprised of representatives from healthcare, schools, worksites, community organizations and nonprofits, governmental agencies, and local residents. Although it is a countywide coalition, the Alliance focuses on needs at the community level. The Alliance is already piloting or developing initiatives in Georgetown and East Williamson County related to chronic disease, nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco use. With Transforming Texas, the Alliance’s work will expand to Cedar Park/Leander and Round Rock. The first grant year permits the Wilco Wellness Alliance to continue assessments, develop a community action plan at a countywide level, and begin to develop additional community initiatives. The strategies that Williamson County will address are: reduce the danger of secondhand smoke through worksites; increase opportunities for physical activity in communities and workplaces; increase the number of designated baby friendly hospitals or clinics; increase accessibility, availability, affordability, and identification of healthful foods; increase use of high impact, quality preventive services through patient-focused efforts; and increase use of high impact, quality
clinical preventive services through system-focused interventions. Dr. Chip Riggins, WCCHD Executive Director, said “We are pleased that the goals of this grant lined up so well with our community’s goals and it is well deserved recognition for the WilCo Wellness Alliance. It’s not often that your grant award is larger than what you requested so that was surprising but I think the suggestion that we support the Burnet County coalition is a win-win…a great opportunity for some additional economies of scale and another nice compliment.”

Lone Star Circle of Care (LSCC), a local federally qualified health center and active member of the Alliance, is being subcontracted for the clinical preventive services elements of the plan. LSCC will develop chronic disease self-management programs for its patients who have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes and will also make enhancements to its electronic health records (EHR) system to assist with tracking these clinical populations. The EHR enhancements will allow the system to produce reminders and prompts for follow up appointments and chronic disease self-management programs, while also facilitating Continuous Quality Improvement efforts.

“Lone Star Circle of Care serves thousands of patients with chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes,” said Dr. Tamarah Duperval-Brownlee, chief medical officer for LSCC. “We are constantly working to enhance the level of patient-centered service and care coordination that we offer these patients, and our involvement in the Transforming Texas grant project will provide an opportunity for us to do that in a collaborative and measurable way. We look forward to working with the Wilco Wellness Alliance on this project.”

In addition to the expansion of capacity building and chronic disease initiatives in Williamson County, Transforming Texas will allow WCCHD and regional members of the WilCo Wellness Alliance to assist with similar collaborative efforts in Burnet County. Highland Lakes Health Partnership was formed in 2002 to improve the health of Burnet County residents. Through community assessments and the development of a community action plan, WCCHD will assist the Highland Lakes Health Partnership in prioritizing community needs and developing initiatives tailored to specific communities or populations. Preliminary strategies that Burnet County has selected are: reduce the danger of secondhand smoke through worksites; increase accessibility, availability, affordability, and identification of healthful foods in communities; and increase use of high impact, quality preventive services through patient-focused interventions.

For information on the local Transforming Texas project or WilCo Wellness Alliance contact Melissa Cammack at 512-943-3667 or mcammack@wcchd.org. For more details about Lone Star Circle of Care visit www.lscctx.org or contact Rebekah Haynes at rhaynes@lscctx.org.

For more information about your public health department please visit www.wcchd.org.