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NEW JERSEY STATEWIDE INITIATIVE LAUNCHED TO STIMULATE PUBLIC DIALOGUE OF END-OF-LIFE ISSUES

***'Conversation of a Lifetime' Community Dialogue Begins on National Healthcare
Decisions Day in Gloucester Township, Princeton and Tenafly***

***NJ Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd Joins Mayors
in Promoting Advanced Care Planning***

PRINCETON & GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP, NJ – April 16, 2015 — As part of National Healthcare Decisions Day, the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute's Mayors Wellness Campaign today launched "Conversation of a Lifetime," a new statewide initiative to promote public dialogues surrounding end-of-life issues. The program began today with kick-off events in two pilot municipalities — Princeton and Gloucester Township — and will continue with an April 23 kick off event in a third pilot municipality, Tenafly.

The Princeton event this morning at the Princeton Library included New Jersey Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd as well as Princeton Mayor Liz Lempert, Quality Institute President & CEO David Knowlton, and Quality Institute Vice President Linda Schwimmer. Later in the morning, MWC Coordinator Janan Dave joined Gloucester Township Mayor David Mayer at the Gloucester Township Municipal Garden. Dave will join Tenafly Mayor Peter Rustin at Borough Hall for the April 23 event.

Commissioner O'Dowd praised "Conversation of a Lifetime" as a creative way to engage communities in dialogue to help people's family members, friends, and healthcare providers understand and respect their end-of-life wishes. "Encouraging community dialogue around advanced care planning is a perfect way to mark National Healthcare Decisions Day," Commissioner O'Dowd said. "It is never too early for any of us – young or old, healthy or not – to plan and prepare for our future healthcare decisions. I commend the leadership of these mayors, the Quality Institute, and the Mayors Wellness Campaign on creating this new initiative."

Planned activities include book clubs, film festivals, game nights, art demonstrations, and seminars. Every town will tailor its program to meet its local community's needs. The newly launched Department of Health webpage has numerous articles and tools on the issue at: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/advancedirective/index.shtml>.

"When the Mayors Wellness Campaign approached us and asked if Princeton would agree to participate in this pilot, we saw the need and importance of this issue," Mayor Lempert said. "We believe Princeton families will embrace the 'Conversation of a Lifetime' and take advantage of the multi-generational creative initiatives we have in store to help our community express and share their wishes." Some of the activities planned in Princeton are book clubs, film festivals, and expert-led seminars to drive discussion about advanced care planning.

Gloucester Township Mayor David Mayer said, "I know from personal experience that these issues are so critical to families, yet so difficult at times to discuss. We are excited in Gloucester Township to find new and productive ways to promote that dialogue." At the event, he showcased the "Conversation Wall," an interactive mural that will act as a community bucket list and conversation starter. The board is modeled after artist Candy Chang's powerful "Before I die..." art demonstrations.

Added MWC Coordinator Dave: "The Conversation of a Lifetime is a new emphasis for the Mayors Wellness Campaign and a critically important one. Advanced care planning is an issue that deserves to be addressed by people of all ages to ensure that communities not only live well together, but age well and can more comfortably age in place together." The Mayors Wellness Campaign, in partnership with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, is now involved in more than 350 Garden State towns and encourages mayors to implement health and wellness programs in their communities.

Quality Institute President & CEO David Knowlton said: "Advanced care planning is proven to improve the quality of end-of-life experiences for all involved. We see mayors as local champions of change and work with them to put health and wellness at the forefront of community culture—not only resulting in improved health, but also in stronger, more tight-knit communities."

A 2014 "Health Matters" poll conducted jointly by the Quality Institute and the Monmouth University Polling Institute reveals that most New Jersey residents are comfortable with the ideas of aging and death and would consider discussing their wishes for end-of-life care with family members, physicians, friends, and clergy. At the same time, fewer than half of New Jerseyans have put their wishes into writing and, while more than 70% of people want to die at home, 70% actually die in hospitals.

VITAS Healthcare, the nation's leading provider of end-of-life care since 1978, awarded the Quality Institute a \$5,000 grant to support the preliminary planning phase of the initiative.

“VITAS Healthcare is pleased to support ‘Conversation of a Lifetime’ as part of our commitment to elevating awareness and increasing access to the services that patients and their loved ones need to help ensure their comfort, dignity, and choice at the end of life,” said VITAS Healthcare of New Jersey West, General Manager, Donna Nelis.

Said Quality Institute VP Linda Schwimmer: “This is an issue in which we have had a long-standing interest and we are grateful to VITAS for helping us to get started. The Mayors Wellness Campaign is an ideal platform for this effort as mayors are leaders in promoting community dialogue.”

The **Mayors Wellness Campaign** is an initiative of the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute (www.NJHCQI.org) in partnership with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. The Mayors’ Wellness Campaign’s mission is to equip mayors and other key leaders with evidence-based tools to develop and implement wellness initiatives in their communities, with the ultimate goal of improving their community’s health and quality of life. Currently, more than two thirds of New Jersey’s 565 municipalities are participating in the Campaign. The Mayors Wellness Campaign focuses on healthy lifestyles and initiatives that encourage communities to age well and age-in-place.

The **New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute** works to ensure that the highest levels of quality, safety, accountability, transparency and cost containment are integral to the delivery of health care in New Jersey. As an independent, nonpartisan organization, we offer expert analysis using the latest data to drive policy change to achieve best health outcomes for consumers. Our leadership convenes colleagues and competitors, practitioners and policymakers, innovators and industry veterans from every health care interest. Together we strive to set a national example of better ways to improve quality and reduce costs. To learn more about our current initiatives, please visit www.njhcqi.org or call us at 609-303-0373.