ODH and OPEA Partnership help keeps communities healthy

An estimated 25 percent of existing home sewage systems in Ohio are reported as failing and during difficult economic times funding to replace these systems has not been readily available. Understanding the immense importance of replacing these systems, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) were able to develop a program, using $3.4 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding to repair or replace these failing systems.

Funding was awarded to local health departments, who worked with local residents, to finance 75 percent of the cost to repair a failing home septic system. The funds helped to save homes, in communities across the state, which would likely have been vacated because of deteriorating public health conditions. In fact, at the conclusion of this project more than 460 new septic systems will have been installed, ensuring that drinking water in many Ohio communities is safe, for years to come.

This innovative use of ARRA funds has been recognized by federal officials. During a February visit to Ohio, federal EPA administrator Lisa Jackson said, "There is something here in what Ohio has done today that U.S. EPA can try to spread to other communities, to parts of rural America."

This project has also been featured on the federal stimulus site, you can read about it by following this link: http://www.recovery.gov/News/featured/Pages/FixingHomeSewageSystemsinOhio.aspx

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Ohio program provides communities with much needed primary care professionals

As the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act prepares to insure 94% of Americans, 1.4 million Ohioans will soon be seeking health care services from medical providers already in short supply. The existing shortage of primary care physicians includes family practitioners, internists, pediatricians, obstetricians/gynecologists and psychiatrists. In addition, mid-level providers such as nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and physician assistants will be in great demand. Dental hygienists and mental health professionals will also be necessary to meet the oral and behavioral health needs of Ohio's children and adults. The existing shortage of healthcare providers is even more evident in the urban and rural areas of the State designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA). Ohio's HPSAs indicate a need for over 300 healthcare professionals to serve as safety net providers in Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) and other community-based practice sites often not considered by new graduates.

The **S**tudent/Resident **E**xperiences **a**nd **R**otations in **C**ommunity **H**ealth (SEARCH) Program provides health profession students and residents with community-oriented rotations in Health Professional Shortage Areas. SEARCH is long-term recruitment program operated by the Ohio Department of Health, Primary Care and Rural Health Program.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding is helping to grow this vital program. The SEARCH Program engages students and residents in clinical and community experiences of 4 – 12 weeks at 40 hours per week, or, a minimum of 160 hours spread across a semester or quarter.

ODH has a seven-year track record of operating the SEARCH Program in Ohio during which time 300 students and residents participated in clinical and community experiences in underserved areas. The PCO also had five prior years of experience administering SEARCH's predecessor, the National Health Service Corps Fellowship Program, which placed over 200 students state-wide.

Through the use of ARRA dollars, the SEARCH Program plans to place 240 students during the three-year program. The Ohio SEARCH Program will create a pipeline of primary care, oral health, and mental health providers to enhance the recruitment and retention of a community-oriented workforce to ultimately practice in Ohio's most needy areas.

To learn more about the SEARCH program visit:
http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/chss/pcrh_programs/recruitment/nhsc.aspx