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PA Physician General Rachel Levine Underscores Importance of Linkage Between Behavioral and Sexual & Reproductive Health Care at AccessMatters Leading the Way Conference

Three National Experts Speak to Value of Collaboration Across Disciplines

PHILADELPHIA – (December 1, 2016) – Nearly two hundred regional healthcare professionals gathered yesterday at AccessMatters’ third annual Leading the Way Conference at Temple University to share best practices for serving teens and adults in need of sexual and reproductive health services. Headlining the conference were: Pennsylvania Physician General Rachel Levine, MD; Atlanta-based Nzinga Harrison, MD, chief medical officer of Anka Behavioral Health; and Al Killen-Harvey, LCSW, clinical coordinator of The Chadwick Center for Children & Families at Rady Children’s Hospital in San Diego, CA.

The conference focused on building bridges between sexual, reproductive, and behavioral health care to improve access to patient-centered care for adults and teens.

“This year’s theme addressed a critical healthcare issue I saw as a member of Philadelphia’s Maternal Mortality Review Team,” explains Melissa Weiler Gerber, president & CEO of AccessMatters. “People dealing with complex behavioral health needs may have their sexual and reproductive health needs overlooked at a time when they are particularly vulnerable to the possible outcomes of unprotected sex.”

Key takeaways from the conference include:

- Practitioners can help clients who have experienced trauma release shame by normalizing their experience;
- Any program directed at teens must align with the specific developmental stage of the adolescents being served;
- The patient/practitioner relationship depends upon providers leaving assumptions about sexuality at the door;
- Providers must be open to the hidden needs of their patients by opening the door to deeper conversations.

Conference sessions on such topics as trauma, intimate partner violence, and substance abuse trends, all related to linkages between sexual and reproductive health and behavioral health. Weiler Gerber noted in her opening remarks that while both are intrinsic to our overall health, happiness, and well-being, both are often stigmatized and marginalized.

“Our goals were to build understanding that every patient is a sexual being, to support professionals in opening dialogue about sexual and reproductive health, and to help



professionals provide the necessary referrals for this care,” said Weiler Gerber. “We consciously included time into the day for participants to network and build their referral networks.”

AccessMatters is the catalyst for providing access to sexual and reproductive health care for teens and adults in need, and reaches more than 200,000 individuals annually. AccessMatters works with a network of more than 60 sexual and reproductive healthcare centers and partners, including academic hospitals, specialty and primary care clinics, community-based providers, and federally qualified health centers, to provide training and education, quality improvement, grant administration, community-based programming, and case management. They also provide professional training, program evaluation, and other capacity-building services on a consulting basis to community-based organizations, health centers, and corporations throughout the nation.

AccessMatters builds strategic coalitions and advocates for expanded access to sexual and reproductive health services. Most recently, AccessMatters was part of a statewide effort which successfully advocated for Medicaid coverage for long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) placed immediately post-partum.

“The current political landscape threatens the future of the Affordable Care Act, which provides access to healthcare for many of the clients we serve, as well as the funding that AccessMatters and our network of partners rely upon.” said Weiler Gerber. “This uncertain climate makes our work to build relationships to improve efficient and effective access to care even more critical.”

The Leading the Way 2016 Conference was supported in part through program funding by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Office of Population Affairs, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. In addition, the conference had the following corporate and nonprofit sponsors: Afaxys, Diva Cup, Drexel University College of Nursing & Health Professions, M.D. Science Lab/Swiss Navy Lubricant, R&S Pharmaceutical Wholesaler, and WOMEN’S WAY.

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