

**Remarks for Poonam Alaigh
Ocean County HealthEase Event
October 13, 2010**

Thank you everyone for inviting me here this morning to help celebrate six great years of work improving the health of older adults in Ocean County by the HealthEASE Wellness Coalition and HealthEASE program.

I want to thank Pat Polansky and Geraldine MacKenzie from my staff who have been intimately involved in coordinating this program at the State level; Jane Maloney Director of the Ocean County Office of Senior Service and Executive Director of the HealthEASE Wellness Coalition; and HealthEASE coordinator Lois Yuhas who, in her part time position, has done tremendous work on behalf of the county and coalition.

And I especially want to thank and recognize Freeholder Joe Vicari for his leadership and commitment in supporting the 160,000 older adults living in Ocean County. Freeholder congratulations - your work supporting HealthEASE has turned it into a model program that is making a positive impact on the health of seniors throughout Ocean County.

It was Betty Friedan, the famous writer and feminist who said, "Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength."

And isn't that absolutely true.

Six years ago, many people in this room today saw the opportunity to build a program, to work together with a collaborative spirit and expand needed health services that would make a difference in the lives of many older adults in Ocean County.

Six years ago, many people in this room saw the opportunity to improve the physical fitness, health, well being and quality of life for older adults through the implementation of HealthEASE.

Six years ago many people in this room saw the opportunity to create a program that has not only exceeded everyone's expectation but one that has been so successful is was selected by the United States Administration on Aging as a Program Champion.

And around me today, I see a room full of champions - people who are either responsible for, or have benefited directly from the comprehensive health screenings, exercise classes, or education courses offered through HealthEASE.

As a result of the great work you did as a HealthEASE pilot county, the programs developed for HealthEASE have been replicated throughout the state and many more people are experiencing the benefits of the programs.

In addition, HealthEASE set the stage for the implementation of the "Take Control of Your Health" chronic disease self-management program. "Take Control of Your Health"

uses trained peer leaders to help individuals better manage the impact that chronic conditions have on their lives, including strategies for managing pain and fatigue, communicating with their health care provider, and taking medications.

Since Take Control of Your Health was introduced in NJ in 2007, it has grown steadily and is now available in every county. In addition to English, it is offered in 5 different languages, making it accessible to many diverse populations. Currently more than 60 agencies are partnering with us to make Take Control of Your Health available in local sites across New Jersey. More than 2,000 people have participated in a workshop.

Documented outcomes from the Take Control of Your Health program include a reduction of health distress, increased confidence in managing chronic conditions and less fatigue. Analysis has shown there is a \$390-\$750 savings per participant.

But more than cost savings and improved health, programs like HealthEASE and Take Control of Your Health empower participants with the skills needed to live life independently and with dignity. And that is perhaps the most profound benefit of these programs.

As everyone here knows, 2010 was an extremely difficult budget year for the State. However, like all of you, we at the Department of Health and Senior Services are always looking for an opportunity to do more and improve our services.

And when I first met with Governor Chris Christie, he pledged to me, that despite the very difficult budget, he would do everything within his power to help those most in need in our State.

I am pleased to tell you that the Governor has lived up to that promise. In fact, the State was able to not only retain the benefits of our prescription program for low income seniors - we were able to enhance it, by reducing co-pays for life saving prescriptions.

The Department also invested over \$100 million in this year's budget to ensure that community based programs for seniors would remain intact, and then we added an additional \$14 million to ensure that our seniors will be able to live with dignity and independence in the community based settings which they prefer.

So opportunities abound, even in the toughest of times.

And speaking of opportunities, I would like to use this one, to present to the HealthEase Wellness Coalition, this proclamation, signed by Governor Chris Christie, congratulating all you on the success of the HealthEase program.

Thank you for inviting me to join with you today.

And congratulations again on your 6th anniversary.