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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NORTH CENTRAL IOWA ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES FIRST-IN-THE-NATION
ENTREPRENEUR HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM**

“HELP @ NCI to Assist Startup Businesses with Health Insurance Costs”

MASON CITY, Iowa—A visionary, first-in-the-nation program created by the North Central Iowa Alliance (NCIA) will help startup businesses decrease health insurance costs, removing a major roadblock for people who want to start their own business.

The Helping Entrepreneurs Launch Program at North Central Iowa (HELP @ NCI) provides money for health insurance to qualified entrepreneurs in the region for up to their first three years in business.

Qualification for entry into the program will be through the North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center and North Iowa Business Accelerator. In addition, the NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center’s planned “Regional Incubator System” will provide a regional feeder system for this initiative. Through these entry points, JPEC staff will work with the entrepreneur to determine the viability of the business plan and, if appropriate, direct the entrepreneur client to participate in HELP @ NCI.

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HELP @ NCI 2-2-2-2

“This initiative is very important for three reasons,” says Dr. Michael Morrison, president of NIACC. First, it reduces a significant barrier for entrepreneurship, the most important engine for economic growth in our region. Second, it represents the region coming together for a regional economic development initiative. Third, it can be a prototype for other partnership initiatives to promote progressive economic growth for all North Iowa.”

While funding for insurance is provided at no cost to the entrepreneur, he or she will be aware of the true cost so that it can be reflected in their business plan. Participating entrepreneurs will be required to reside in Iowa as well as maintain the principal headquarters and operations of their company in the contributing counties in Iowa for the duration of their participation in the program.

“What NCIA has done with this project, with its out-of-the box and collaborative thinking, is exactly what we want to encourage,” says Cali Beals, Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDED) community development division coordinator. “This program is on the cutting-edge and we expect it to be a model for economic development groups around the nation.”

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, one of the country’s leading entrepreneurial foundations is supportive of the program’s mission.

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HELP @ NCI 3-3-3-3

“The Kauffman Foundation understands the continued escalation of healthcare costs, coupled with the uncertainties about future trends in these costs, rank high on entrepreneurs’ lists of concerns,” said Robert E. Litan, vice president of research and policy at the Kauffman Foundation. “In addition, the fear of losing healthcare insurance compounds workers’ anxieties about job loss itself, and most likely deters some employees from leaving their current jobs to launch new enterprises.”

The idea for the HELP @ NCI started small. It came up during conversation among several promoters of economic development in North Central Iowa. A small group began to discuss how they might help more potential entrepreneurs in the area make the leap to going into business for themselves.

One of the members found an article about how health insurance costs were preventing many potential business owners from getting started because they couldn’t leave their employer’s healthcare plan. The group was also aware of the need through the experiences of area entrepreneurs and the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (JPEC) at NIACC. They wondered, “What if we could do something to help remove this roadblock?”

The group subsequently submitted an application to the IDED Community Development Fund, a fund that provides financial and technical assistance to Iowa communities for creative and innovative economic development projects.

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HELP @ NCI 4-4-4-4

NCIA received a \$50,000 Community Development Fund grant from IDED and raised more than \$15,000 in matching funds to qualify. With the available funding, HELP @ NCI is ready to provide an affordable and reliable health insurance option to entrepreneurs in North Central Iowa.

“This new HELP initiative will provide a capstone to the myriad of other support programs for entrepreneurs located in North Iowa that differentiate us from other parts of the country and removes one more impediment to the launching of new businesses and growth in North Iowa,” says Jamie T. Zaniros, director of the NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center. “We are happy to play a leadership and business support role in the evolving entrepreneurial system in North Iowa, but most importantly we are thrilled by the collaboration and entrepreneurial spirit shown by these organizations to establish a means for startup business owners to have health coverage.”

NCIA’s goal is to increase entrepreneurial activity in the region by providing a safety net of health insurance for entrepreneurs and is part of its plan to make North Central Iowa the preferred destination for entrepreneurs.

“In North Central Iowa we realize the critical importance of entrepreneurship to the economic health of this area,” says Curtis Brown, NCIA director and executive director of the Mason City Economic Development Corporation. “When we encourage entrepreneurs, we help to create jobs and stabilize or increase our population.”

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HELP @ NCI 5-5-5-5

HELP @ NCI collaborators include: Iowa Department of Economic Development, North Central Iowa Alliance, North Iowa Area Council of Governments, North Central Iowa Growth Partnership, North Iowa Area Community College-John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center, Alliant Energy, Aquila, Mason City Chamber of Commerce, Mercy Medical Center- North Iowa, Hancock County Memorial Hospital and Health Services, Butler County Resource Development Group, Franklin County Development Association, Hancock County Economic Development Council, Mitchell County Economic Development Corporation, and Winnebago and Worth Counties Betterment Council.

North Central Iowa Alliance, a strategic marketing partnership, is united in its effort to attract and retain industry to North Central Iowa. The alliance includes the counties of Cerro Gordo, Floyd, Franklin, Hancock, Mitchell, Winnebago and Worth who have joined together to help industry expand and relocate to the region.

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