

# NORTHWEST HEALTH FOUNDATION

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*The Community's Partner for Better Health*

## **Thomas Aschenbrener, Founding President of Northwest Health Foundation, Announces Retirement**

Civic and Visionary Leader Leaves a Legacy of Important Social Change

For Release: September 28, 2011

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Thomas Aschenbrener, founding president of the Northwest Health Foundation (NWHF), announced today that he will retire from the Foundation in June 2012. Aschenbrener, 68, has served as the chief executive since the foundation was formed as a result of the sale of PACC Health Plans in 1997. Its mission is to advance, support and promote the health of the people of Oregon and Southwest Washington.

"I am leaving at a time when Northwest Health Foundation has never been stronger," Aschenbrener said. "The staff is extremely capable and the board is well-poised to succeed with its individual skills, diversity of background and experience in working collaboratively. I am very proud of where the foundation is today and look forward to seeing how future leadership helps our communities frame their own vision advancing the health of all people."

During Aschenbrener's tenure as president, the Northwest Health Foundation has provided more than \$65 million in grants and technical assistance support to communities in Oregon and SW Washington.

Aschenbrener's retirement will be effective June 25, 2012. A transition team composed of NWHF board members has been established, and a recruitment process for a new leader will begin in early 2012.

"From the earliest years of its operation, Northwest Health Foundation has made tremendous investments into the health of this state," said Mel Kohn, M.D., Oregon's public health director and the current chair of the NWHF board. "Thomas deserves credit for pushing the boundaries of what can be done to truly impact the health of the population."

Over the past 14 years, Aschenbrener encouraged the foundation to explore new ways to create positive change in the community. He supported work in building community capacity for advocacy, strategic policy development and lobbying when necessary to improve health. He

promoted civic engagement as a tool for monitoring community health and has advanced community conversations about equity and social justice. He has also been intentional about creating the Foundation's style of promoting partnerships with community organizations and other funders.

Among these is a partnership with Kaiser Permanente Northwest, which invests in efforts to address the social and root causes of health (i.e., social determinants of health) in Kaiser's service area in Oregon and SW Washington. The fund, called the Kaiser Permanente Community Fund, has awarded more than 100 grants since it was started in 2005.

Another collaboration, with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, supports the leadership of local foundations to advance the nursing profession in communities throughout the United States. The program, Partners Investing in Nursing's Future (PIN), has established partnerships in 37 states.

"Thomas is a visionary who has long understood that even small foundations can undertake advocacy and education efforts to influence decision makers toward social justice and a greater commitment to the common good," said Tina Castanares, M.D., vice chair of the Foundation board and a physician in Hood River. "He consistently encourages his staff and those of us on the board to think outside the box, and he models that beautifully for all of us."

Liz Baxter, executive director of We Can Do Better, a nonprofit that creates opportunities for nonpartisan civic engagement in health reform, said part of Aschenbrener's legacy is helping advance a movement to redefine health. "Thomas and the Foundation have helped many of our policymakers and leaders to realize that health is much more than medical care. The Foundation has pushed relentlessly for a more robust public health system and for policies that improve everyone's health, not just the health of those with access to medical care," she said.

"I am particularly excited about making room for the next generation of leaders," Aschenbrener said. "They are more than capable, and we need to give them the space, resources and trust to enable them to succeed in developing their own future."

More information throughout the transition will be available on the NWHF website. Updates on the search process will also be available through the foundation's e-news, which can be subscribed to on the site.

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**About Northwest Health Foundation:**

*The mission of the Northwest Health Foundation is to advance, support, and promote the health of the people in Oregon and Southwest Washington. The Foundation invests in efforts that address the root causes of health through community-driven solutions and seeks to ensure that the voices of all people are represented in health policy discussions. More information can be found at [www.nwhf.org](http://www.nwhf.org).*