



## **Media Release**

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### **Congress Approves \$1.1 Million in Federal Funding for the Harris County Hospital District *Money to benefit hospital expansion, patient care***

The Harris County Hospital District (HCHD) will receive \$1.1 million in federal funding for 2005 to support continued expansion and renovation of Ben Taub General Hospital's Emergency Center and improve care for patients with complex or chronic illnesses through the TeleHealth Program.

Congress recently approved the funds, thanks to joint efforts by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Congressmen John Culberson and Gene Green, and Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

"This money will help us accomplish our mission of improving our community's health," said Mary Spinks, HCHD Board Chair. "It will allow us to lessen overcrowding in our emergency rooms and increase our patient capacity. Everyone will benefit."

Of the money, \$860,000 will help fund Phase II of Ben Taub's emergency center (EC) renovations. This includes expanding the EC laboratory, adding technology to speed patient diagnosis and optimizing space to reduce treatment and wait times, thus increasing capacity.

Last year, Ben Taub saw more than 95,000 patient visits in its emergency room, which was built to accommodate 50,000 patients annually.

The remaining \$240,000 will fund HCHD's TeleHealth Program, which gives primary care physicians at community health centers access to medical specialists and diagnostic testing. This will improve patient care by facilitating the development of treatment plans and plan adherence, continuity of patient care and effective follow-up.

The TeleHealth Program will also help alleviate EC overcrowding by allowing patients to access specialty and diagnostic services through their primary care physician instead of going to the EC.

"This is a much-needed program in our community," said County Commissioner Sylvia R. García, whose Precinct encompasses four community health centers that will benefit from the TeleHealth Program.

"Patients who are very ill usually have to wait long periods of time before they can access specialty services or physicians because they have to be referred and appointments are scarce. This will help them receive the care they need and hopefully prevent them from becoming so ill they have to go to the hospital," García said.

HCHD comprises three major hospitals including Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital and Quentin Mease Community Hospital; 12 community health centers; 13 satellite homeless shelter clinics; six school-based clinics and four mobile health units.

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