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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **FREE PRESCRIPTION PROGRAM NOW AVAILABLE STATEWIDE** ***Medbank Expands to All Maryland Counties***

BALTIMORE, Md. – November 20, 2001 – A program that has already helped thousands of low-income Marylanders receive free prescription medications is now available throughout the state. The Maryland Medbank Program, which acts as a liaison with more than 80 pharmaceutical companies, provides access to medications at no cost to chronically ill, underinsured and uninsured Marylanders. This month, the program began serving residents in all Maryland counties.

“Medbank’s expansion comes just in time. With the economic downturn, more people are losing their health and prescription coverage,” said Robert McEwan, administrative director of Johns Hopkins Hospital’s Transplant Center.

McEwan’s experiences and observations at the Center inspired him to found MEDBANK of Maryland, Inc., a pilot program in Baltimore City and County. “When people can’t afford their medication, they typically become sicker and often land in the emergency room. Both hospitals and tax payers ultimately shoulder the cost,” said McEwan.

MEDBANK of Maryland and another pilot, serving Washington, Garrett and Allegany Counties, began operations in the spring of 2000. Based on the pilots’ success, the Maryland State legislature appropriated funds from the Department of Mental Health and Hygiene to make the Medbank program available statewide. In June 2001, the Maryland Health Care Foundation, which administers the funds, awarded a grant to MEDBANK of Maryland, Inc. to spearhead the expansion.

To date, the program has facilitated requests for medication with a total value of nearly \$1.4 million. Now that it serves the entire state, the Maryland Medbank Program hopes to assist more than 20,000 people in obtaining \$95 million worth of prescription medications by the end of June 2002.

“Thousands of Marylanders who have to choose between paying for their meals and paying for their medicine can greatly benefit from pharmaceutical companies’ free medication programs. However, the time-consuming, tedious application process can deter those who might qualify. Medbank removes this potential barrier by prescreening applicants and handling all the legwork,” said Chris Garland, executive director of MEDBANK of Maryland, Inc.

To secure free brand name medications, Medbank collects information from the patient and his or her health care provider. Then, after tailoring materials to meet each manufacturer’s specific criteria, Medbank submits the application for review. Medications are shipped to physicians for dispensing, and Medbank will apply for renewals if authorized by the health care provider.

Those interested in more information about the Maryland Medbank Program may call (410) 821-9262 or visit the organization’s Web site at [www.medbankmd.org](http://www.medbankmd.org).

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