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Riverside County health officials to honor 'Community Champions' for contributions to local residents during pandemic

Riverside University Health System—Public Health on Tuesday is honoring 11 community partner organizations with its Public Health Community Champion award for their work with health officials during the ongoing pandemic.

The winners have contributed to improving the health and well-being of Riverside County residents through their work providing COVID-19 education materials, vaccine and testing clinics, community outreach, staffing and other assistance during the pandemic. They will be recognized April 5 during the Board of Supervisors meeting in Riverside to kick off National Public Health Week (April 4-8).

“These organizations have stepped up and gone beyond what would normally be expected of them,” said Kim Saruwatari, director of Riverside University Healthcare System – Public Health, which hands out the award. “They have seen the importance of giving back to the community and their efforts have benefitted many residents. We are honored to give them this much-deserved recognition.”

The 11 recipients represent the five supervisorial districts and were selected for their dedication to improving the health status of Riverside County residents; collaboration with Public Health and/or other organizations focused on public and population health; and because of their sensitivity to the needs of special populations and reducing health disparities in care and outcomes.

In addition to the awards presentation, Dr. Geoffrey Leung, Riverside County public health officer, will give a “State of the County’s Health” address.

The County Administrative Center is located at 4080 Lemon St. in Riverside.

The following is a list of winners:

El Sol Neighborhood Education Center – Serving Inland Empire communities with emphasis on mono-lingual Spanish speakers, immigrants, and residents with limited-English proficiency. Empowering communities to lead healthier lives through Community Health Workers (CHWs) and promotores de salud. Has created songs, comic books, plays, and resources focusing on COVID-19 information as part of its role in educating the community about vaccination.

Motivating Action Leadership Opportunity: MALO – Supports the Tongan American communities in the Inland Empire area through youth mentorship, job readiness, resource literacy, and cultural gathering. Has supported the Tongan community by hosting COVID-19 vaccination and testing clinics, providing support and providing culturally and linguistically appropriate resources to the Tongan community.

Reach Out – Serving communities throughout Riverside County by providing services, resources and expanding economic opportunities communities. Reach Out has collaborated with various organizations to start, ramp up and continue COVID-19 outreach and education. It has supported and hosted vaccine clinics throughout Western Riverside.

Diocese of San Bernardino – Committed to serving more than 1.6 million Roman Catholics in Riverside & San Bernardino counties through faith, hospitality, sharing resources, and reconciliation. Has hosted COVID-19 vaccine and testing clinics at parishes in 12 cities throughout Riverside County and has held close to 100 vaccination clinics at Catholic parishes throughout the county.

Vision y Compromiso - Dedicated to improving the health and well-being of underrepresented communities in Riverside County through leadership development, capacity building, advocacy training, and support to over 4,000 Promotores and Community Health Workers. VyC has created educational resources that are linguistically and culturally appropriate and has also hosted COVID-19 webinars. Has provided on the ground vaccine, translation, testing and educational support throughout eastern Coachella Valley.

Desert Healthcare District and Foundation – Desert Healthcare District’s vision is “Equitably connecting Coachella Valley residents to health and wellness services and programs through resources and philanthropy, health facilities, information and community education, and public policy.” Has collaborated with various partners, schools, organizations, and businesses to host COVID-19 vaccination and testing clinics throughout Eastern Coachella Valley.

TODEC Legal Center – Assisting and empowering rural, Inland communities with legal services, community education, advocacy, and civic engagement. Has held weekly COVID-19 vaccination and testing clinics at its Perris and Coachella Valley locations focusing on the agricultural and rural communities. Has provided on the ground education, translation and outreach support at farms, communities, and businesses.

Building Resilient Communities – Provided trainings and resources to faith-based organizations throughout Riverside County focusing on disaster preparedness and safety during a crisis. Has supported African American communities throughout the county and provided culturally and linguistically appropriate material. Has created the Pastors Toolkit focusing on how pastors can communicate with its communities on COVID 19 resources, data, vaccination, and therapeutic options.

NAACP Riverside – Working with community leaders, NAACP has assisted with partnerships at schools to provide COVID-19 resources and education. In partnership with Building Resilient Communities, NAACP has assisted in the creation of the Pastors toolkit. Has hosted townhalls focusing on debunking COVID-19 myths and taking questions from community members.

Morongo Band of Mission Indians – Established in 1865, the tribe is dedicated to the wellbeing of its members through economic vitality, preservation of the Tribe’s reservation and culture. The tribe hosted on-site COVID-19 vaccination and testing clinics for its members and has provided culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and education.

Riverside County Office of Education: RCOE has played a vital role in the pandemic response by information sharing, protocol development and the support of our students and families. RCOE has shared its physical sites for vaccine and testing services, served as distribution hub for PPE and testing supplies, and dedicated staff time and resources to the response.