

SAN BENITO HEALTH FOUNDATION
Community Health Center

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 1, 2021

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The San Benito Health Foundation Community Health Center Responds to Allegations of Inappropriate Vaccine Distribution

Campaign to vaccinate 10,000 Farm Workers Marches On!

Hollister, CA - The San Benito Health Foundation (SBHF), a Federally Qualified Health Center and recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance as Patient-Centered Medical Home, provides a broad range of comprehensive medical, dental, vision, and Women, Infant, & Children's (WIC) health care services to the community since 1975. Many of the patients are front line workers who serve the public in grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, construction work and the backbone of San Benito County, the farm labor community.

The San Benito Health Foundation is governed by an active Board of Directors and led by CEO, Rosa Vivian Fernandez, MPH, FACHE, with clinical leadership from Dr. Edwin Acosta and Dr. Glen Cooperman. The San Benito Health Foundation has earned a solid reputation for consistent, bilingual/bicultural, high-quality health care services as well as providing advocacy for residents living in the local community.

On Thursday, January 28, the SBHF Community Health Foundation became the victim of a vicious and negative public media campaign from the San Benito County Public Health Department and their Board Chair, Mark Medina. Mr. Medina has gone on record falsely accusing the organization of inappropriate vaccine distribution during the first three weeks of January.

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These negative allegations were made public via the Federal Communications Reverse-911 site, BenitoLink and picked-up by local media and the County public relations manager. In addition, disturbing and hateful messages have been posted on Facebook. The results have been swift and without any warning or conversation with the San Benito Health Foundation Community Health Center and this resulted in their unfair suspension from the weekly Covid-19 vaccine distributions.

Fernandez defended her Foundations role stating, “The allegations are nothing more than an attempt to discriminate against farm workers and other vulnerable populations in the community. Our staff worked closely with our community partners to successfully vaccinate 789 people in the first three weeks of January during our vaccination distribution. This represents 30% of total vaccinations by all providers in San Benito County since November 2020. As trained health professionals, we followed all protocols required for the safe administration of the vaccines. All vaccinations per statewide mandate were recorded in the California State Immunization Registry and administered to eligible community members. We are confident with the transparency that we’ve maintained will vindicate us as we continue our efforts to keep our community safe.”

Since January 25, 2021, the San Benito County Public Health Department has not released the much needed vaccinations for distribution to front line workers. The SBHF Community Health Center has the capacity to vaccinate 600-800 people per week and is now placed on hold until the spurious allegations can be reviewed. With over 10,000 farmworkers and related employers in the San Benito County region, the mission is critical that we vaccinate as many residents as possible, especially our farmworkers who are responsible for supplying our local agricultural produce.

Fernandez knows that denying vaccinations to farmworkers, who are braving the most challenging work conditions and rely upon SBHF Community Health Center as their health-care home, will have devastating ripple effects on their lives and the economy of our local community. Furthermore she ads, “Vaccinations literally save lives. People are dying. We take our role very seriously. This pandemic has ravaged lives in immeasurable ways in the San Benito County. To us, it’s more than a job, it’s a commitment to protect the health and well-being of our community.”

Lastly, Fernandez has one simple request: release the steady supply of vaccines and re-start any formal discussions and begin to heal this rift between the County Public Health Department and the Foundation. For the sake of all residents in San Benito County.

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