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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## NIHHC RECOGNIZES RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITY'S FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

**ELKHART, IN, April 2022** – This past Saturday, April 16, the Northern Indiana Hispanic Health Coalition (NIHHC) recognized the resilience of volunteers, partners, staff, and community members who have stood in the fight against COVID-19 during the last two years.

Around 100 people gathered at the Concord Event Center in Elkhart to honor the community's efforts and bear witness to their experiences.

Elkhart Mayor, Rod Roberson, opened the event with a welcome, acknowledging what the community has been through and calling for continued perseverance. He encouraged everyone to get all of their vaccine doses.

“Get your first dose, your second dose, your booster, your *second* booster if you can. I just got my second booster!” he announced, noting that the pandemic is not over yet.

NIHHC Executive Director, Liliana Quintero, discussed the coalition's COVID-19 initiatives and the impact they have had. She pointed out that the barriers Hispanics face in accessing health care, such as testing and vaccination, were only made more apparent during the pandemic, which affected the Hispanic community the most in northern Indiana.

“But with the support of our staff, volunteers, and partners,” said Quintero, “we were able to overcome those barriers, and together, we've given over 2,100 vaccines to the community since July 2021.”



*Image 1: NIHHC staff, Community Health Care Workers, and Board members recognized for commitment to COVID-19 initiatives in Elkhart County.*

Dr. Daniel Nafziger, Hospital Chief Medical Officer at Goshen Health, provided an update of the status of COVID-19 in our community. His remarks reinforced the importance of the community's work.

“If you have been vaccinated, boosted and are not immunocompromised or among the frail elderly, then you can feel a sense of peace,” he said.

“But if you have not been vaccinated and have not been previously infected,” he continued, “you should be concerned because a more transmissible variant is coming for you and you may spread it to a more vulnerable family member or friend.”

Nafziger thanked everyone who has done their part, no matter how small, to stop the spread of COVID-19 or support the health of others.

Community members, Luis Aguilar and Dara Marquez, each shared powerful testimonials of their experiences during the pandemic.

Aguilar, who lost his father to COVID-19, told of three key lessons his father taught him: resilience, gratitude, and unity makes strength.

“On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the lessons I was taught were tested,” he said. “I had to adapt to the harshness of life for my family.”

“Thank you all for practicing and teaching these three lessons in life,” he told attendees, “You have all done so in your own way. You have all shown me that greatness is all around me.”

Marquez, who also lost her father to COVID-19, said that she was proud of her father and her community. “As soon as we realized what was happening,” she said, “we came together to fill the needs of our fellow community members. I learned that we are strong.”

Gary Sieber, WNDU TV and weather anchor, served as the master of ceremonies throughout the event. He led a moment of silence in remembrance of all those who were lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recognition of every person's work, support, and partnership during the pandemic, Sieber acknowledged that everyone has been impacted by COVID-19. He called on those to stand who had taken various actions to keep the community safer and healthier. By the end of his statements, there was a standing room.

Several community members were honored with awards for going the extra mile in supporting COVID-19 efforts. Those included La Raza Radio (media partner); Concord Event Center (venue partner); Heart City Health Center (vaccination/testing partner); Big Idea Company (marketing partner); Elkhart County Health Department (public health partner); Dr. Dan



*Image 2: NIHC recognizes youth volunteers with "Outstanding Volunteer" awards at the Volunteer Celebration on Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>.*

Nafziger (medical partner); César García, Luna Avila, Gamal Hernández, Juan Manuel Romero López, and María Beato (volunteers); Dominic Bercovich, Amyrah Tovar, Nicole Díaz, Mariana Carlson, Kaley Cruz, Emiliano Hernández-Zarco, and Ana Sofia Hernández-Zarco (young volunteers); Pilar Rodríguez and Dara Márquez (influencers); and all NIHHC staff and Community Health Workers who supported COVID activities.

Children at the event enjoyed an egg hunt, and attendees took home raffle prizes related to self-care and spring or re-growth, complementing the theme of resilience.

Sponsored by Crossroads United Way and Community Foundation of Elkhart County, brunch was served by Cueramaro restaurant, whose owners also run the Concord Event Center, where NIHHC has held its last three COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

“We especially wanted support our local Hispanic businesses with this event,” said Quintero. “Their partnership has been key to the success of our indoor mobile clinics.”

Quintero closed the event with inspiration from the lotus flower, which has the ability to survive in difficult environments. “Take this flower as a reminder of your resilience. To remember what helped you thrive despite uncertainty and how you survived times of hardship. We are here today because of you, because of your resilience.”

*The Northern Indiana Hispanic Health Coalition’s mission is to provide preventative health care programs to the communities of Elkhart, Kosciusko, Noble, and Marshall counties through education, advocacy, physician referral, and research, so that they may lead healthier lifestyles.*

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