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For Immediate Release

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COVID Vaccine Clinics Bring Hope to Calhoun County Seniors

BATTLE CREEK, MI (February 9, 2020)—COVID vaccinations are being administered to seniors throughout Calhoun County thanks to large-scale participation and support from various organizations and volunteers in the community. As of February 12, over 8,000 people have received the vaccine at clinics organized by the Calhoun County Public Health Department (CCPHD) with the help of partners like CareWell Services, the Battle Creek YMCA, and others.

“We really pulled together because it was on really short notice that we were going to be doing [vaccines for] the 65+ [population],” said Brigitte Reichenbaugh, CCPHD Deputy Health Officer. “We pulled it together with our senior partners to really put together a call tree and call center, and to have all the partners assisting with scheduling and developing the waitlist. We couldn’t have done it without them.”

CareWell Services Southwest, the Region 3B Area Agency on Aging was quick to step up to help communicate to the more than 25,000 seniors in Calhoun county. CareWell opened a call center for scheduling seniors for vaccines and created a waitlist for additional clinics.

“Working with seniors and other populations is the core part of our mission. Due to that, we knew that utilizing an online-only scheduling option was not the way to go. Online signups are a useful tool but can create barriers for seniors, and we pride ourselves on the human touch,” said CareWell Kiosk Outreach Coordinator Karen Courtney. “Seniors are not always thought of as a marginalized population, but when a system requires technology as an exclusive tool, many seniors may be excluded.”

Not only did CareWell create a system accessible to seniors in the community, but in order to ensure all seniors had the opportunity to receive the vaccine, Karla Fales, CEO of CareWell Services reached out to other organizations to get the word out. This effort resulted in a



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partnership with Voces to spread awareness of vaccine availability to seniors from the Latino community within Calhoun county.

“If we would have prioritized a certain sector of the community and not kept an eye on some of these marginalized communities that don’t have access to these opportunities, it might have been an unfruitful effort because you wouldn’t have had the mass vaccination that we’re striving to get,” said Jose Luis Orozco Jr., Executive Director of Voces. “I think by Karla reaching out to Voces, we’re in line for this vaccine. We’re not at the back of the line, we’re in line for this vaccine. I’ve heard it from some of the community members: thank you for considering us. Thank you for not forgetting about us.”

The vaccine has offered hope to seniors all over Calhoun county. Volunteers at the clinic saw many overwhelmed with emotion. “This probably means they can see their grandkids, they can see their friends, they can get out. It’s a healthy step we’re all taking,” said volunteer Linda Tsoumas.

The pandemic has increased concern around isolation and depression for seniors, lack of access to food, and other areas of vulnerability. CareWell and other community organizations have worked to provide assistance to seniors and others who need it during the last 12 months.

“Calhoun County has been a leader in our response to the pandemic. From the Joint Operation Center work to ensure vulnerable populations are cared for during lock down, to the current efforts around food distribution and mass clinics. We have touched the life of more than 20,000 seniors through these combined efforts since March, with more than 4,000 just in the last three weeks through these clinics,” said Fales.

CareWell Services is continually working through the waitlist to ensure all seniors receive their vaccines. Clinics continue to be scheduled to allow those on the waitlist to receive the vaccine.

“I couldn’t be prouder of my staff, of our county, of our leaders and the many volunteers who are making this possible. It’s an amazing accomplishment. We will continue until we reach our goal of 70% of eligible persons vaccinated. That is our goal, and we will reach it and knowing Calhoun County, we will surpass it.”

Seniors can call (269) 441-0912 to add their name to the waitlist.

REGION 3B AREA AGENCY ON AGING



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CareWell Services Southwest/Region 3B Area Agency on Aging has a mission of promoting health, independence and choice for seniors, persons with disabilities and caregivers, serving as the focal point in Barry and Calhoun counties since 1996. www.carewellservices.org or follow us on Facebook.