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Funders Unite to Fight Chronic Disease in WNY
Population Health Collaborative Receives Grant to Support Live Well WNY

Buffalo, NY (March 22, 2021) – Two local foundations and three health insurers have combined forces and funds to support the Population Health Collaborative’s (PHC) Live Well WNY initiative, a movement aimed at decreasing chronic disease in Western New York. The John R. Oishei Foundation provided $125,000 which has been matched by a combination of donations from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York, Independent Health, Univera Healthcare and the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York. PHC will use the funds to roll out Community Impact Projects that will show how aligning existing resources in new and strategic ways can change health outcomes.

Robert D. Gioia, President of the Oishei Foundation noted that philanthropy has appropriately focused on COVID-19 relief but investing in chronic disease prevention is a forward-looking decision. “While the community slowly recovers from the devastating effects of this pandemic, we recognize that people with chronic conditions were more likely to die from COVID,” Gioia remarked. “If we take the right steps now we can, over time, decrease the prevalence of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and other chronic conditions that exact a huge toll in WNY.”

Thomas Schenk, MD, Chief Medical Officer at Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York stated that he is pleased to see the emergence

Blue Cross/Blue Shield of WNY has been thrilled of LW WNY as a community strategy to address chronic disease. He is also the Chair of the Board of Directors at Population Health Collaborative and he commented, “I am optimistic for the future health of our community. We have pulled together a plan that is evidence-based, feasible and likely to move the needle on health outcomes; funding from all of these sources will allow us to move aggressively on to the next phase of this crucial work.”

“The best time to have started this work was ten years ago,” quipped Michael Cropp, MD, President of Independent Health, “the second-best time is now.” Independent Health, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York and Univera Healthcare represent three of the founders of Population Health Collaborative and have been significant financial contributors. Art Wingerter, CEO of Univera Healthcare noted that Live Well WNY is an evidence-based framework that has been embraced by several healthcare and community leaders. “Several years ago, we started to develop the LW WNY
concept, and over time the concept has gelled into a movement and a set of initiatives. We are excited to step up our support and look forward to seeing great things happen in the community,” he concluded.

Nora OBrien-Suric, President of the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York was an early supporter of LW WNY. “PHC came to us with what looked like a good idea, and with seed support from the Health Foundation and other sources they have been able to make good progress and can turn a good idea into good outcomes for people living in WNY. We are delighted to provide financial support to help leverage the Oishei Foundation Grant and look forward to working with PHC and other community leaders.”

“Live Well WNY has evolved over time, and this level of support from several funders comes at a crucial time for us,” noted John Craik, Executive Director of Population Health Collaborative. “Live Well WNY is a new way to address disease by marshaling existing resources. We are generally program-rich, but systems-poor. Live Well WNY brings together various stakeholders from the community, healthcare professions, business world, CBOs and government to align them around a single goal: decreasing chronic disease rates in Western New York,” he continued. Despite hundreds of efforts to address chronic disease WNY continues to be one of the least healthy regions of New York State, LW WNY seeks to address that by aligning what already exists without creating new programs but getting current efforts out of their silos and deploying them with a laser focus on health disparities and underserved populations. Ample evidence suggests that this approach, which is new to Western New York, can have significant impact over time.

About Population Health Collaborative
The Population Health Collaborative (PHC) is a regional health collaborative that serves the eight-county area of Western New York. Our mission is to “improve population health in Western New York by connecting diverse groups and aligning resources and expertise.” The Population Health Collaborative was initially supported through several Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant programs and they have been recognized for their work as a leading neutral convener in the region. www.pophealthwny.org.