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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 - January 29, 2021

The San Benito Health Foundation (SBHF) Community Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center and an NCQA recognized Patient-Centered Medical Home, has been providing a large range of medical, dental, vision, WIC and other health services to the community since 1975. Many of our patients are the front line workers who serve the public in grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations and other businesses, including providing the backbone of the farm labor resource in San Benito County.

Lead by an esteemed Board of Directors and CEO Ms. Rosa Vivian Fernandez, MPH,FACHE as well as clinical leadership Dr. Edwin Acosta SBHF has earned a reputation for both high quality care and advocacy for the people living in the local community including participation in numerous public health programs over many years.

It is thus with both shock and dismay that we see that the Foundation has been maligned in a vicious negative public media campaign from the San Benito County Public Health Department and their Board Chair, Mark Medina. Mr. Medina has accused the organization of inappropriate vaccine distribution during the first two weeks of January. San Benito Health Foundation has been following the Executive Order 1.27.21 issued by Governor Newsom, which Mr. Medina and the local Public Health Department felt inappropriate as it did not align with their plan for county distribution. This week, the allegations were made public via the Federal Communications Reverse-911 site, BenitoLink and local media reports released by the County public relations manager. In addition, disturbing and hateful messages have been posted on Facebook. The result has been swift and without any warning or conversation with the San Benito Health Foundation Community Health Center, as they have been unfairly suspended from the weekly Covid 19 vaccine distribution.

Let us be clear: Rather than discuss the matter, the Public Health Department has withheld vaccines from the Foundation and prevented their use for the benefit of thousands of farmworkers and other laborers in the businesses that are operating in San Benito County. This poses a health hazard to EVERYONE living in San Benito County.

Rosa Vivian Fernandez, CEO of San Benito Health Foundation, maintains her clinics role in contacting, registering and distributing the long-awaited vaccinations. Citing the fact that we are in a pandemic and this is a public health emergency. Fernandez states, "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 members to successfully vaccinate 789 people in the first two weeks of our vaccination distribution, representing 30% of total vaccinations by all providers in San

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Benito County since November 2020. As extensively trained health professionals we followed all protocols required for the safe administration of the vaccines. All vaccinations per statewide mandate were recorded in the state registry and administered to eligible community members. We are confident with the transparency we've maintained that we will be vindicated and continue with our efforts to keep our community safe."

We are particularly dismayed because the San Benito Health Foundation Community Health Center was a designated and approved site that successfully distributed vaccines to health care workers, clinic staff and farm workers.

But over the past two weeks, these front line workers have not received vaccinations from San Benito Public Health Department. 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.

Fernandez knows that these actions are in effect denying vaccinations to farmworkers, who are braving the most challenging work conditions and recognize San Benito Health Foundation Community Health Center as their health care home. "Vaccinations literally save lives. People are dying. We take this 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 helping those we love in our community. In particular, our public facing front line workers."

We insist that the steady supply of vaccines be re-started and formal discussions, mediated if necessary, be undertaken to heal this rift between the Local Health Department and the Foundation..... for the sake of our residents in San Benito County.

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About

The San Benito Health Foundation is an integrated health home where all of your primary medical care, dental and wellness needs are taken care of. Our clinics coordinates comprehensive care for all of our patients regardless of their ability to pay. Since 1975, we have served San Benito and the surrounding counties in two location; Hollister and San Juan Bautista. We were designated as a Federally Funded Community Health Center in July 2007. The Centers provide Medical, Dental, Vision and Ophthalmology services provided by Board Certified Ophthalmologist, Women Infant and Children (WIC Program) and other multi-disciplinary services. San Benito Health Foundation offers preventative services meant to keep you and your whole family healthy.

sanbenitohealth.org

Rosa Vivian Fernandez, MPH, FACHE
CEO and Executive Director