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For Immediate Release

Artists, Entrepreneurs, Government & Healthcare Collaborate to STOP COVID-19

November 17, 2020 — MILWAUKEE — Heading into the winter, and in the face of another surge of COVID-19 cases, the Creative Health Collective a Milwaukee-based collective, composed of The City of Milwaukee Health Department, Milwaukee County Office on African American Affairs (OAAA), and Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW), is continuing its work to establish culturally responsive crisis communications to under-served communities to address health disparities magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborating with Milwaukee-based artists, entrepreneurs and community organizers, The Creative Health Collective has worked since April of this year on a public health project to mobilize artists, health professionals, and others to help stop the spread of COVID-19. The Creative Health Collective uses music, street art, comics, and videos, to communicate public health messages to the African-American, Latino, Southeast Asian, and American-Indian communities to communities in Milwaukee.

The project, led by Dr. Zeno Franco, Dr. Katinka Hooyer and Project Director Que El-Amin, confronted COVID-19 through 3 strategies: 1 – Repurposing existing COVID-19 messaging making it more culturally competent; 2 – Working with Artists and influencers to develop and disseminate creative messaging and; 3 – Building a team of Community Health Workers for on the ground support of Communities of Color during this time.

Dr. Zeno Franco at MCW notes “Changing health behaviors in this pandemic has been a critical element of slowing the spread of COVID-19. Much of the early public health messaging around infection control was not culturally tailored enough to meet the informational needs of our communities of color. We’ve taken those messages and either translated them into other languages or used images and cultural icons that help connect ideas of wearing a mask and being socially distant to core values in these communities. We’ve also activated minority owned advertising firms to help us get the word out in less traditional media markets.”

Funding for The Creative Health Collective was provided through a \$500,000 grant from the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Advancing A Healthier Wisconsin Endowment. In the face of the uncertainty brought by the pandemic, the collective was able to distribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to artists, community health workers, and entrepreneurs of color at a time when they needed it the most. The Creative Health Collective worked with firms Athena Communications, Abrazo Marketing and InPower to create “STOP COVID” messaging for television, radio,

billboard, and print advertisements. It is estimated the “STOP COVID” campaign achieved 190 million impressions.

“It gives me hope for the future to see partnerships like this one using a community-focused and culturally competent approach to informing historically underserved residents about the dangers of COVID-19 and the things they can do to stay safe and help us get the virus under control,” said Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley. “This year has been challenging for us all and it is hard for some people to feel as hopeful and optimistic for the future, but our community coming together to bridge the gap and address health disparities created by COVID-19 should give everyone in Milwaukee County some piece of mind that we’re doing all we can to keep them safe and bring an end to the current public health crisis.”

In addition to distributing economic aid, the collective enlisted visual artists and musicians. Grammy award-winning artist, Wade Fernandez produced a music video, “We Wear Because We Care” highlighting members of Wisconsin’s tribal nations wearing masks printed with care phrases in each tribe’s language. “Mask On It”, a hip-hop song co-produced by Grammy nominated producer Bizness Boi includes lyrics from a collaboration of 15 Milwaukee based artists.

“Art plays a critical role during a crisis through translating information in ways that are more accessible but also emotionally engaging. Using relatable and trusted cultural symbols and practices, artists can convey health messages in ways that rally people and promote cultural pride,” said anthropologist and curator Dr. Katinka Hooyer. “Most of the artists centered cultural pride in their work, confronting a history of undignified and unjust medical treatment in communities of color.”

Artist Tou Fong Lee, designed a collection of culturally relevant masks using traditional Hmong textile patterns, with messaging displayed at Milwaukee bus shelters. According to Mr. Lee, “Having the city recognize your culture is powerful to communities that are often not heard or left out. This recognition makes us feel seen and makes us feel like we belong, especially if it is done in a way that speaks directly to us.”

Along with sharing artwork from Milwaukee area artists on the collective’s social media platforms, public art pieces are installed throughout Milwaukee, with a focus on the neighborhoods that are hardest hit by the pandemic. Murals and banners by African American, Latinx and Native American artists are currently installed at McGovern Park, Reiske Park and along the Lakefront.

City of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett added, ““Our diversity should not be an obstacle in our public health efforts. Engaging, effective and culturally competent messaging is key to reducing COVID-19 infections,” Mayor Tom Barrett said. “By working together, our community is making progress in this pandemic, and the Creative Health Collective is a significant part of that.”

For more information about the *Creative Health Collective* and to see all the artwork created please visit us on the [LifeTagger App](#), or visiting us on Instagram ([@c_health_c](#)), [Facebook](#) or our website chealthc.info.

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About The Creative Health Collective

The Creative Health Collective is a collaboration of health professionals, community-engaged researchers and artists working to stop the spread of COVID-19 in communities of color. At its core, this public health project highlights the critical role creatives and culture workers play in challenging social injustices and igniting change. Our artists and community health workers have synthesized cultural research, community voices and public health messages to respond rapidly with and for African American, Native American, Southeast Asian and Hispanic/Latinx peoples in Milwaukee.