



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Special Olympics Washington Announces Groundbreaking New Health Initiative for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: The Alliance for Inclusive Health

Virginia Mason Franciscan Health Signs on As First Alliance Partner

SEATTLE, WA – June 11, 2024 – Special Olympics Washington announced today the “Alliance for Inclusive Health,” a new initiative designed to provide people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Washington State greater access to inclusive healthcare. Led by charter member Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, the Alliance for Inclusive Health will bring together a statewide coalition of health and wellness organizations who are aligned with the vision of health equity for all.

As of 2023, an estimated 170,000 people with IDD lived in Washington. However, many face elevated health risks and systemic inequities in addressing them due to stigma, exclusion, and inadequate access to qualified healthcare and support services.¹ These challenges have led to a fifteen-year difference between the expected life spans of the general population and people with IDD.²

The Alliance for Inclusive Health aims to bridge this gap with a multi-faceted strategy that focuses on education for providers and accessibility for those living with IDD as the basis for meaningful change. To that end, the Alliance will bring together a diverse set of partner organizations to foster collaboration, elevate the importance of inclusive health practices, and increase access to health programs.

As the first alliance partner, Virginia Mason Franciscan Health will kick off its support by hosting inclusive health trainings for its workforce and staffing health screenings for individuals with IDD. VMFH will also lead key efforts within the Alliance to support health equity for all, including engaging more partners to help close the significant knowledge gap in treating people with IDD.

Part of this work will also include expanding an existing referral network - a resource built to help people with IDD find healthcare professionals trained in inclusive health practices. From podiatric care to addressing hearing issues, this free statewide service will drive dignity and inclusion and provide direct access to equitable healthcare.

Ketul J. Patel, CEO of Virginia Mason Franciscan Health and President of CommonSpirit Health - Northwest Region, highlighted the collaborative aspects of the initiative: “We are proud to partner with Special Olympics Washington to promote inclusion and champion equity. We encourage other organizations to join the Alliance for Inclusive Health and help us expand our impact. Together, we can make a significant difference.”

David Wu, President and CEO of Special Olympics Washington, expressed: “We are extremely grateful for Virginia Mason Franciscan Health’s leadership and are proud to welcome them as the first partner in our

¹Health equity for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. JAMA; 328 (16) :1587–1588

²Mather, M., Scommegna, P., & Martinez, M. (2022, April 5). U.S. adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are living longer, but COVID threatens to erase recent gains. Population Reference Bureau

effort to build a world where individuals with IDD are supported by holistic health initiatives that ensure their dignity and well-being."

Organizations interested in joining the Alliance for Inclusive Health can learn more by visiting ***AllianceforInclusiveHealth.org***. The initiative invites traditional healthcare organizations such as healthcare facilities, insurers, and home health leaders as well as health-focused brands ranging from fitness tech to biotechnology are invited to join the movement to support health equity for all.

Special Olympics Washington

Special Olympics Washington provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for thousands of children and adults with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. For more information, please visit ***SpecialOlympicsWashington.org***.

Virginia Mason Franciscan Health

Virginia Mason Franciscan Health (VMFH) is an integrated health system serving the Puget Sound region, including 10 hospitals and 300 care sites. Founded in 1891, VMFH embraces its long history of caring for the most vulnerable, especially the poor and underserved, and meeting the evolving health care needs of the vibrant, diverse communities it serves. VMFH is a proud home to the Bailey-Boushay House, the first skilled nursing and outpatient chronic care management program in the United States designed specifically to meet the needs of people with HIV/AIDS, and the Benaroya Research Institute, an internationally recognized institution for autoimmune disease research. VMFH is part of CommonSpirit, one of the nation's largest health systems, dedicated to advancing health for all people.

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