



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH HERTEL  
DIRECTOR

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 1, 2021

**CONTACT:** Chelsea Wuth  
517-241-2112  
[WuthC@michigan.gov](mailto:WuthC@michigan.gov)

## **Hometown Health Heroes and Jean Chabut Policy Champions honored by Michigan Public Health Week partnership**

**LANSING, Mich.** – As part of National Public Health Week, nine individuals and organizations will be presented with the 2021 Hometown Health Hero and Jean Chabut Health Policy Champion awards for their contributions to protecting and improving the health of Michigan. 2020 recipients are also included below.

Hometown Health Hero awards are presented every spring as part of Michigan Public Health Week. By building connections, our communities become healthier, safer, and better for all.

“It’s an honor to award these selfless individuals and organizations whose efforts make Michigan a better place for many segments of our population,” said MDHHS director Elizabeth Hertel. “The Hometown Health Hero awards are a way we can recognize how both small and large efforts make a positive impact on our state.”

2021 Hometown Health Hero Recipients:

### **2021 Hometown Health Hero Award**

- **Ghada Abdallah, Southfield**  
Ghada Abdallah is a pharmacist who was semi-retired before the COVID-19 pandemic. She came out of retirement to take on the responsibility of running the COVID-19 vaccination clinics at the TCF Center for the City of Detroit Health Department. Her leadership and knowledge allowed for a very successful operation and many people received their COVID vaccination(s).
- **Rev. Heather Boone, Monroe**  
Pastor Heather Boone is a volunteer pastor at Oaks of Righteousness. Through her leadership, along with partnerships formed with ProMedica and Meijer, Inc., a new grocery store opened in the food desert of East Monroe on March 26. In addition to the grocery store, Boone also started and runs a free health care clinic, food bank, clothing closet, daycare and 70 bed homeless shelter.
- **Deerhaven Family Dentistry, Traverse City**  
In 1998, Deerhaven Family Dentistry began “Doctors with a Heart Day” to provide free dental care for those who could not afford or did not have access to dental care on one day every year and have continued to offer this annually since. In 2015, they added

Veterans Day services. All employees who work these free clinics are volunteers; they are not paid.

- **Dow Bay Area YMCA, Bay City**

The Dow Bay Area Family YMCA was classified as a 'gym', which meant it was to remain closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than sending everyone home, this organization found other ways of fulfilling its mission. Staff started filling emergency food boxes and safely delivering them to porches of those in need, handing out meals to youth in their parking lot and facilitating outdoor exercise classes. In addition, when most school districts closed for in-person classes, the YMCA created a program to support students with remote learning all day while their parents worked.

- **Laura Gatny, Auburn Hills**

Laura Gatny is a licensed psychologist who retired from private practice. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and schools moved to remote learning, she was determined to help reach children and adolescents in a ways beyond remote connections. Using her own resources, she established environments that were COVID-safe so sessions could be held in-person to help heal the unprecedented distress the youth in Oakland County had been feeling.

- **Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg, Southfield**

Rabbi Goldberg began a program in the Oak Park School District called Heroes Circle. The Heroes Circle empowers students to utilize skills they develop while participating in the program to be themselves. Through a process of self-discovery and using their own skill sets, students learned to exhibit more empathy, achieved better mental health and wellness, and improved emotional and behavioral self-regulation.

- **Health Net of West Michigan, Grand Rapids**

Ordinarily, Health Net provides navigation services to individuals who are uninsured, have Priority Health Medicaid, or Molina Medicaid. Early in 2020, Health Net expanded their services eligibility to anyone living in Kent County. Over the past year, they received 272 self-referrals from community members, completed 221 food- and resource-related transportation trips between April 2020 and January 2021, and assisted the 2-1-1 helpline by answering calls. Health Net Team members donated their time for three food distribution events and translated materials into Spanish and other languages for the community. Health Net also provided resources for the behavioral health needs of its staff.

- **Lowell Wellness Camp, Grand Rapids**

Lowell Wellness Camp is an after-school program focused on health education lessons for children in grades 3 through 5 covering nutrition, physical education, and mental health. The program has since expanded to children in grades 6 through 8. The program began in 2018 and has demonstrated its success in exhibiting a change in behaviors with food choices, as well as coping tools and mindfulness practice. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Lowell Wellness Camp went virtual and continued its program.

- **Gina Spehn, Rochester Hills**

Gina Spehn is the president and co-founder of New Day Foundation. During the pandemic, she developed an all-volunteer grocery delivery program for cancer patients and others who are immuno-compromised within the foundation's service area to protect them from the COVID-19 virus and ensure they had the groceries they needed.

## **2021 Jean Chabut Health Policy Champion Award**

- **Robert (Bob) Swanson, Dewitt**

Bob Swanson recently retired as the director of the Division of Immunizations at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services after 30 year of service. Swanson was on the initial team that developed the Michigan Immunization Information System (MCIR) which now contains more than 10 million individuals and over 136 million vaccine records. Michigan was a pilot site for implementing vaccine ordering using the MCIR with an interface to the federal vaccine ordering system. This successful pilot is now the standard being used across the country. Swanson has been actively involved in several national initiatives related to immunizations. He has served as the chair of the Association of Immunization Manager's (AIM) IIS Committee since 2003 and was re-elected to the Executive Committee of AIM for three terms.

###