BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE TO HOST REGIONAL RURAL POVERTY AND HEALTH EQUITY SUMMIT
WITH A GOAL TO ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY AND WELL-BEING FOR THE CENTRAL VALLEY’S RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural Poverty and Health Equity Summit: Advancing Health Equity and Well-being
Friday, November 22, 2019 | Bakersfield College Delano Campus, 1450 Timmons Ave

DELANO, CA - Bakersfield College on behalf of the Rural Health Equity and Learning Collaborative (HEAL), will host the statewide Rural Poverty and Health Equity Summit, featuring Congressman TJ Cox, to discuss how social determinants of health, equity, and economic mobility impact rural communities. The summit is in partnership with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to identify evidence-based policies to reduce the rate of child poverty and improve economic mobility for rural communities.

According to the U.S Census Bureau, 1 in 5 Americans live in rural America and 10 percent of the country’s gross domestic product is generated in nonmetropolitan counties. Despite the importance of rural communities to the health of the nation overall, federal policy has left many rural communities behind. The 26,000-square miles from Merced to Kern counties constitute a significant population of low-income rural residents with the nation's lowest educational attainment. The lack of education translates to reduced employment opportunities, increased poverty, and limited access to healthcare.

In California's Central Valley, like rural communities across America, residents encounter few resources to improve workforce and economic development. Likewise, they experience few opportunities to carry out research and evaluate failing systems or leverage social and political power to eliminate health inequities. In rural regions, where populations are dispersed and far from major job centers, the workforce faces different challenges than in metro areas, where people are closer to education, training, and employment options.

“Central Valley communities can thrive, but they need support to reach their full potential,” said Congressman TJ Cox. “Opioid use disorder is one of the biggest challenges facing communities today, so I’m honored that HEAL has asked me to moderate a conversation with the top experts on substance abuse in the Central Valley. I think this discussion and others will answer key questions and start new conversations on building healthy and sustainable communities.”

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To lift the voices of rural communities of the Central Valley, Bakersfield College launched the Rural HEAL collaborative, partnering with regional and statewide rural healthcare leaders to bring about policy changes needed to improve rural health. The Rural HEAL collaborative represents over 20 collaborative partners working to improve the lives of rural residents. Partners include UC Merced, UC San Francisco at Fresno, Central Valley Health Policy Institute, Central Valley medical professionals, and Bakersfield College Health and Workforce training programs.

“For years, Bakersfield College has been responding to local health needs by bolstering educational programs such as Nursing and Radiologic Technology, and by offering students the support necessary to overcome personal hardship and barriers. More recently, BC launched a new program in Public Health to address chronic illnesses in our communities by promoting behaviors that improve health and wellbeing. BC’s Renegade Pantry helps eliminate food insecurity for students, and offering education and support services at various rural community locations brings college closer to home, reducing travel expenses and stresses.” said BC President, Sonya Christian. “This new HEAL collaborative will align research and resources from across agencies, developing a roadmap that will lead us towards healthier communities for generations to come.”

The Rural Poverty and Health Equity Summit featured speakers include Dr. Sonya Christian President of Bakersfield College, Congressmember TJ Cox (CD 21), Dr. Rais Vohra, Professor of Family Medicine at UCSF Fresno and Central Valley Regional Director, Sharlet Briggs, CEO, Adventist Health, Dr. Kathleen Murphy, Pediatrician, Valley Children’s Hospital and other Public Health leaders from across the state.’

Congressmember TJ Cox and BC President, Dr. Sonya Christian will be available for interviews between 8:00AM and 8:30AM.

Details and agenda are available on the Bakersfield College webpage for the event at: [https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/president/heal/rural-poverty-and-health-equity-summit](https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/president/heal/rural-poverty-and-health-equity-summit)

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