

## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Alberta Blue Cross® recognizes inspiring Albertans championing wellness**

For the fourth year, Alberta Blue Cross's Faces of Wellness program recognized Albertans who are everyday champions for physical, mental and social wellness in their own lives, workplaces and communities.

This year's grand prize recipient of an all-expense-paid weekend wellness experience in Banff is Zachary Weeks, a committed advocate for disability rights and social justice, who is using his platform to fight ableism and raise awareness about accessibility. Born with cerebral palsy, Zachary has worked as a consultant on significant projects such as the construction of Rogers Place and the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, ensuring the voices of the differently abled are heard and considered. His work on the City of Edmonton's Accessibility Advisory Committee further illustrates his commitment to building inclusive spaces in his community.

Zachary has earned many awards for his impactful work, including the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and membership on the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference. Zachary's inspiring efforts have contributed significantly to shaping policies that make our communities safer and more inclusive.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to enjoy such a thoughtful and generous experience in the Rocky Mountains," says Zachary. "It's not often that we take the time to pause and reflect, so this feels particularly special."

Each year, the Faces of Wellness program recognizes Albertans making positive lifestyle changes toward becoming healthier, promoting a health-related cause, making the most of life while living with a chronic condition, advocating for wellness in their workplaces, standing up for mental health or acting as a role model for others.

"In 2024 we received more than 250 nominations for Faces of Wellness from every corner of our province, sharing incredibly diverse and inspiring stories of Albertans' commitments to wellness," says Brian Geislinger, senior vice-president of Corporate Relations and Community Engagement at Alberta Blue Cross.

Of those nominations, 9 finalists were selected and received a \$500 gift card. Four of the finalists are Edmonton residents.

- Sarah Fung is an adult counsellor at the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and is dedicated to supporting individuals in overcoming trauma, guiding them toward healing. Growing up queer and raised in the Catholic church posed challenges in Sarah's youth. In 2020, she founded the social platform Queer Edmonton to amplify queer voices and share resources, while connecting members of the community.

- Marlin Ortiz Californias is co-president of the Let's Talk T1D club, a student group focused on raising awareness and funds for people living with Type 1 diabetes. Growing up in a small town in Mexico, Marlin witnessed family members with diabetes struggling to access care but didn't fully grasp the significance until much later. In later years, he was diagnosed with prediabetes. This came as a wake-up call, not just for his own personal health, but of the broader social issues surrounding diabetes.
- Jarret Esslinger dedicated himself to lifestyle changes when faced with his own family challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jarret and his wife were struggling with unexplained infertility in their efforts to grow their family. After extensive tests and treatments, they found themselves at an impasse. Together, they began a fitness journey, as the only thing they could control in this fertility journey was their own physical health. After many in vitro fertilization treatments, he and his wife welcomed the birth of their son. Jarret's first steps on his fitness journey inspired him to maintain his level of health and to create a strong foundation of wellness for both himself as a father and for his family.
- Vanessa Marshall is an Indigenous entrepreneur committed to uplifting marginalized voices in her community and caring for the environment. With a family history marked by intergenerational trauma rooted in the residential school system, Vanessa launched her own business, Jack59, from the ground up. Jack59 contributes regularly to Indigenous initiatives and environmental non-profits, fostering a culture of giving back. Vanessa also mentors women entrepreneurs through Coralus, helping them to overcome obstacles women face in business.

60 other nominees from across Alberta also received wellness-themed prizes for their heartfelt nominations and stories.

Learn more about Alberta Blue Cross's [2024 Faces of Wellness honourees](#).

As Alberta's leading benefit provider, Alberta Blue Cross provides coverage to more than 1.8 million Albertans and administers a wide range of plans for employers and individuals as well as government program sponsors. And as a champion for wellbeing, Alberta Blue Cross leads and supports a wide range of initiatives across the province to promote wellness and active living.

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