

NEWS RELEASE

April 2, 2025

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, the 9 finalists who were selected and received a \$500 gift card include the following:

- Bailey Doucette is a peace officer with Alberta Health Services's Protective Services and an advocate for gender diversity. Assigned female at birth, Bailey grew up feeling different and has lived with chronic pain and an anxiety disorder. and in Seeing many young clients exploring their identity while working as a security guard at the Alberta Children's Hospital inspired Bailey to research and learn more about gender diversity.

These stories resonated with Bailey, inspiring him to finally say, "I am transgender." Now, while going through his own journey of transition, he volunteers as a peer mentor with the Skipping Stone Foundation and helps connect gender-diverse individuals with resources and foster affirming experiences.

- Kristofor O'Brien Mahler is a professional athlete who suffered a broken neck injury in 2023 and who, throughout his rehabilitation, maintained social connections and gave back to his community through volunteer coaching hours. He is now looking forward to representing Canada as a National ski cross athlete, with his sights set on the 2026 Olympics.
- 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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