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Local Houston Organizations Selected to Participate in National BUILD Health Challenge

Partnership with Avenue, Memorial Hermann & Houston Health Department Focuses on Improving Health and Safety in Historic Near Northside Community

HOUSTON – (March 26, 2018) – Three Houston organizations – [Avenue](#), [Houston Health Department](#) (HHD) and [Memorial Hermann Community Benefit Corp.](#), have teamed up to reduce health disparities and address health and safety conditions impacting Houston's Near Northside neighborhood in an effort to create a healthier community.

The partnership, called [Bridging Health and Safety \(BHAS\) in Near Northside](#), was one of 19 projects selected nationwide to participate in the [BUILD Health Challenge](#), a national program that puts multi-sector, community-driven partnerships at the foundation of improving public health.

The aim is to mobilize resources, attention and action upstream to prevent health issues, lower costs and promote health equity in the historic Near Northside. Working together, with guidance from BUILD advisors, BHAS will identify and implement innovative solutions to address the community's unique challenges. Matching funds from Memorial Hermann, combined with BUILD's \$250,000 two-year grant, will further extend the partnership's capacity to bridge health and safety gaps in the Near Northside. This partnership is also leveraging Mayor Turner's Complete Communities initiative, by aligning with common goals and partners to improve health and safety.

"Research shows that a person's zip code is a stronger predictor than genes for their individual health, which is why it is increasingly important to implement cross-sector collaborations like BUILD that are focused on addressing and improving community and city-wide health outcomes," Mary Lawler, executive director at Avenue and spokesperson for BHAS. "This partnership between three local institutions with a history and commitment to caring for the community brings together a dynamic wealth of expertise and knowledge capable of addressing health disparities at every level."

Situated in Houston's urban core, the Near Northside is home to approximately 25,000 people – more than one-third of whom live below the poverty line. As a result, health disparities in the community are significant. Residents face health challenges including lead exposure, uncontrolled asthma, unhealthy weight and risk for cardiovascular disease, which are further exacerbated by environmental safety hazards and limited and unsafe greenspace and public spaces.

BHAS' initiatives are focused on addressing factors that influence health, including safe and affordable housing, access to healthy food, a safe environment to encourage physical fitness, reduction of air pollution and resources that address the social determinants of health. The partnership has engaged community residents to refer families to [HHD's lead abatement program](#) and is focused on improving and activating neighborhood parks to encourage and promote physical activity. BHAS is also working with the Wesley

Community Center to create a client choice pantry with expanded hours and will employ crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles to reduce loitering and improve safety. All projects are geared towards building an environment where working families can live healthy lifestyles.

“Every community faces its own set of challenges and opportunities when it comes to improving the health of its residents,” said Emily Yu, executive director of the BUILD Health Challenge. “With this award, we hope to catalyze the work of Bridging Health and Safety (BHAS) in the Near Northside and bring together residents and organizations from across sectors to address the root causes of chronic health issues in Houston—and ultimately transform how we think about health in America.”

BUILD awards funding, capacity building support and access to a national peer learning network to address health issues impacted by where people live, work and play. The program supports cross-sector collaboration among local non-profit organizations, hospitals and public health departments to look beyond direct medical services and address the social and environmental factors that affect health, also known as the social determinants of health. BUILD, which stands for Bold, Upstream, Integrated, Local, and Data-driven (BUILD), selected BHAS because of its adherence to these principles to improve the health of Near Northside residents.

For more information, visit buildhealthchallenge.org or follow at [@BUILD_Health](https://twitter.com/BUILD_Health).

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Quotes from BUILD Participants

Avenue

“Over the course of the last decade, Avenue’s affordable housing and community development efforts have focused on improving the quality of life for working families in the Near Northside. Bridging health and safety gaps in the neighborhood has been at the forefront of these efforts, and we have worked alongside resident leaders to create and implement a comprehensive Quality of Life Agreement (QLA) aimed at addressing community health challenges,” said Jenifer Wagley, deputy director at Avenue. “We are proud to partner with Memorial Hermann and the Houston Health Department to continue our work to influence the social determinants of health and address health disparities in the Near Northside. Together, we are committed to creating a stronger, healthier and safer community where families can grow and thrive.”

Memorial Hermann

“We are thrilled to partner with Avenue and HHD in an entirely new level of collaboration to help move the needle on health disparities in the Near Northside,” said Carol Paret, senior vice president and chief community health officer at Memorial Hermann. “Our aim is to leave this community a healthier place than when we arrived, with safer spaces for families to exercise, more nutritious food for everyone to eat, and healthier homes for children to live in. Our hope is by demonstrating success here, we can create a model for community change that can be expanded and broadened throughout the region.”

Houston Health Department

“We came together with our partners to break silos and improve the health and safety of the residents of the Near Northside,” said Loren Raun, chief environmental science officer at the Houston Health Department. “We have already seen early successes in one of our initiatives directed at creating healthy housing through making houses lead-safe. Childhood lead poisoning is a major health inequity that poses an increased threat to socioeconomically disadvantaged families living in older homes in disrepair.”

About Avenue

Avenue’s mission is to build affordable homes and strengthen communities. The organization enhances the quality of life of working families and works to promote healthy, vibrant and economically diverse neighborhoods that are essential to Houston’s future as a world-class city. Avenue develops homes for purchase and rent as well as provides homebuyer education and counseling to help working families buy and maintain their own homes. They promote economic development and offer supportive services such as computer labs, after-school programs, and nutrition, fitness, and financial literacy classes that enrich the lives of the individuals and families they serve. Avenue is a member of the nationwide NeighborWorks® Network of more than 245 community development organizations working in nearly 4,358 urban, suburban and rural

communities across America. Connect with Avenue on Facebook: <http://bit.ly/FBAvenueCDC> and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AvenueCDC>.

Memorial Hermann

A fully integrated health system with more than 250 care delivery sites throughout the greater Houston area, including a nationally acclaimed [Accountable Care Organization](#), Memorial Hermann is committed to delivering safe, high-quality, patient-centered care and offers world-class clinical expertise, innovation and cutting-edge technology to all patients, including its [Health Plan](#) members. The system, with its exceptional affiliated medical staff and more than 25,000 employees, provides compassionate, superior service while advancing health in Southeast Texas. Learn more about [Memorial Hermann Health System](#).

Houston Health Department

The mission of the Houston Health Department (HHD) is to work in partnership with the community to promote and protect the health and social well-being of all Houstonians. HHD is now the first health department in Texas and the second in a large U.S. city to earn national accreditation. The department provides local disease surveillance, preventive health care for the residents of Houston, treatment for selected diseases, a wide range of environmental services and enforcement of certain city and state laws.

About BUILD

BUILD seeks to create a new norm in the U.S. by addressing upstream factors affecting health. It is supported by a unique collaborative of local and national funders, which includes the Advisory Board, The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, the Colorado Health Foundation, the de Beaumont Foundation, The Episcopal Health Foundation, Interact for Health, The Kresge Foundation, Mid-Iowa Health Foundation, New Jersey Health Initiatives, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Telligen Community Initiative, and The W.K. Kellogg Foundation.