



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 20, 2021**

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### **Whatcom County Health Department, Whatcom Unified Command Recognize Local Volunteers' Monumental Contribution to Pandemic Response**

**BELLINGHAM, WA** -- It's National Volunteer Week, and volunteers have played an important role in our nation, state and county. Volunteers have been central to the county's pandemic response since the beginning of the pandemic.

"COVID-19 presented a huge challenge for our state, nation and county," said Cindy Hollinsworth, communicable disease and epidemiology manager for the Whatcom County Health Department. "Thankfully, Whatcom County volunteers helped us rise to the occasion."

Last year's National Volunteer Week began April 19, in the middle of lockdown, and since then 298 Whatcom County Health Department and Whatcom Unified Command volunteers have logged more than 21,855 hours. This number rises every day. Needs have varied greatly over the last year and county volunteers have remained nimble and responsive, serving in a variety of roles.

"Over the past year, hundreds of residents of Whatcom County have made invaluable and extraordinary contributions to our community's response to the COVID crisis, selflessly sharing their time, know-how and resources," said County Executive Satpal Sidhu. "I want to let you know these efforts are recognized and deeply appreciated."

Early in the pandemic, when essential protective equipment was sorely needed, volunteers sewed hand-made masks for the public, so N-95 masks could be preserved for frontline workers. For county residents living on the margins, food security, already an issue, became even more dire. Volunteers swelled local food bank ranks, assembling and delivering thousands of food boxes all over the county. Later, when COVID-19 tests became available and mobile testing sites needed personnel, volunteers filled intake forms, directed traffic, and even administered tests. When tests came back positive, volunteers helped the Health Department with contact tracing operations.

"It's incredible how many people have offered up their evenings, weekends, or even weekdays to help with the pandemic response effort," said Hollinsworth. "And they still do. We couldn't do what we do without volunteers."

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