

MEDIA RELEASE

September 25, 2016

Carol Yakiwchuk wins Golisano Health Leadership Award

Global award goes to B.C. dental hygienist and educator recognizing dedicated volunteer work with the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program

Today North Vancouver's Carol Yakiwchuk became Canada's first-ever winner of a Golisano Health Leadership Award, recognizing her dedicated volunteer work with Special Olympics British Columbia to help address the significant health disparities facing individuals with intellectual disabilities.

A dental hygienist and educator with more than 20 years' experience, Yakiwchuk volunteers with Special Olympics BC's [Healthy Athletes program](#), serving as one of two provincial Special Smiles Clinical Directors alongside Kelly Blundell. Yakiwchuk received her Golisano Health Leadership Award at SOBC's [Healthy Athletes Screening Day in Burnaby](#) on September 25, where she and fellow volunteer health care professionals were giving their time to offer free health screenings for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Currently the Oral Health Manager for the First Nations Health Authority, Yakiwchuk has practiced as a clinician, educator, researcher, administrator, and community health dental hygienist. She has worked as the Dental Hygiene Practice Consultant for the British Columbia Dental Hygienists' Association, and has served as an Educator at Vancouver Community College and a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia. Yakiwchuk holds a diploma and a bachelor of science degree in dental hygiene from the University of Manitoba and a master's degree in health studies and leadership from Athabasca University.

Yakiwchuk has been a Special Olympics Healthy Athletes volunteer for five years, during which time she has provided significant help to improve B.C.'s health programming, particularly the Special Smiles dental screenings.

Significant health disparities exist because many individuals with intellectual disabilities have trouble realizing or expressing their health concerns, and many health professionals have not had the opportunity to receive specific training to work with intellectual disabilities, or are not familiar enough with this population, to know the best questions to ask to draw out the issues. At Special Olympics Healthy Athletes screenings, individuals with intellectual disabilities get important health information from volunteer health professionals trained to help draw out issues, and their interactions lead to referrals back into the health care system that ensure the individuals will get the treatment they need.

Yakiwchuk is one of approximately 32 global recipients of the Golisano Health Leadership Award in 2016. The worldwide recipients have been selected based on their work related to year-round efforts to increase access to quality health care, programming and resources for people with intellectual disabilities including expanding [Healthy Athletes](#), impacting followup care and/or wellness

programming, increasing the financial sustainability of Special Olympics health programs, and advancing the health rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

In her previous role as a dental hygiene instructor at Vancouver Community College, and in her involvement with the British Columbia Dental Hygienists' Association, Yakiwchuk raises awareness among dentists, dental professionals, and students about the health issues facing individuals with intellectual disabilities, and she recruits others to volunteer at SOBC's Healthy Athletes events. These efforts have a wide-reaching impact as they return to regular practice better trained to work with individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Yakiwchuk has also developed an important relationship with Patterson Dental Canada, leading to vital support with resources to give individuals with intellectual disabilities and equipment for screenings.

Thanks to Yakiwchuk's advocacy, Vancouver Community College selected the Special Olympics population as an upcoming recipient in their "Gift from the Heart" program. Through an event in April 2017, a number of Special Olympics BC athletes will receive a full dental exam free of charge at a clinic run by VCC dental hygiene students under the supervision of instructors and dentists.

"Working with the [Special Olympics] athletes is wonderful," Yakiwchuk said [in a 2013 British Columbia Dental Hygienists' Association interview](#). "We get a chance to talk to them, to teach them about proper oral self-care and, in some cases, provide them with dental treatment that they would not ordinarily be able to receive. From a more global perspective, we are also able to assess this population's oral health status, and evaluate the need for further advocacy based on results of the statistical analysis of information collected. I love being there to support these athletes as they strive for their personal best and their smiles make it all worth the work."

[Launched in 2016](#), the Golisano Health Leadership Awards recognize the extensive work of individuals and organizations around the world who are improving the health of people with intellectual disabilities and advancing the year-round health work of Special Olympics.

The awards also raise awareness of the significant health disparities that continue to be experienced by people with intellectual disabilities, one of the largest and most medically underserved disability groups in the world. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry, millions of individuals with intellectual disabilities lack access to quality health care and experience dramatically higher rates of preventable disease, chronic pain and suffering, and premature death in every country around the world.

"The Golisano Health Leadership Award is the Special Olympics Movement's highest honour for health partners and individuals," Special Olympics CEO Mary Davis said. "It is important to recognize the growing number of health champions at the community, regional, and global levels who are working so tirelessly to promote inclusive health for people with intellectual disabilities. We also hope to encourage others who are in a position to do the same and help us raise global understanding of the health disparities experienced by people with intellectual disabilities. Through the growth and success of

Healthy Communities, the Golisano name is becoming synonymous with improving health disparities and increasing access to quality care – from remote towns to major cities in all corners of the world.”

The 2016 Golisano Health Leadership Awards honour approximately 32 individuals or organizations around the world where Healthy Communities has been launched – from Paraguay to Romania, South Africa to Thailand, and right here in British Columbia. Of those honourees, seven recipients from the seven Special Olympics regions around the world will be selected to receive the global award, which will be announced at the [Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria in March 2017](#).

“Having activated year-round health programming in more than 50 locations since our launch, we are on our way to reaching our target of 100 Healthy Communities within five years. While progress is steady and significant, the evidence still points to the need for more work,” said Ann Costello, executive director of the Golisano Foundation. “Too few people know the glaring and oftentimes preventable and treatable health problems experienced by people with intellectual disabilities. In communities around the world, people with intellectual disabilities are not receiving equitable health care. We hope one day the Golisano Health Leadership Awards are no longer needed and that the barriers to health care and education no longer exist. The Golisano Foundation and our founder, Tom Golisano, remain committed to working with Special Olympics toward inclusive health for all people with intellectual disabilities.”

The vision for the Special Olympics Health program, made possible by the Golisano Foundation, is to create a world where people with intellectual disabilities have the same opportunities and access to health care as people without intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics has 19 years of experience in identifying and addressing the unmet health needs of people with intellectual disabilities has revealed the myriad of complex barriers to health faced by this population. Barriers to this vision include lack of access to quality health care, education, and resources.

About Special Olympics BC

Special Olympics BC is dedicated to providing individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to enrich their lives and celebrate personal achievement through positive sport experiences. In 57 communities around the province, we provide year-round training and competitive opportunities in 18 different sports to more than 4,600 athletes of all ages and abilities, thanks to the dedicated efforts of over 3,900 volunteers. For more information, please visit www.specialolympics.bc.ca. Find us on Facebook and Twitter: www.facebook.com/specialolympicsbc / @sobcsociety.

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