

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

Alberta Blue Cross® Faces of Wellness program recognizes Albertans' exceptional commitments to wellness

As many of us set New Year's resolutions related to improving our health and wellness, Alberta Blue Cross is sharing inspiring stories of the wellness journeys of the grand prize winner and finalists through its annual Faces of Wellness program.

"The Faces of Wellness program recognizes Albertans who are everyday champions for wellness in their own lives, workplaces and communities," says Brian Geislinger, vice-president of Corporate Relations with Alberta Blue Cross. "When we introduced this program in 2021, we were thrilled to receive 140 nominations, so we were amazed to receive over 350 nominations and applications from across the province this year."

This year's grand prize recipient is **Lauren Kennedy West**, an Edmonton mother of 3 who embodies what it means to live well with schizophrenia. Lauren not only works hard to practice wellness in her own life and the lives of her family but is inspiring others around the world through her YouTube channel called '[Living Well with Schizophrenia](#)' where she shares her experiences living with and navigating her illness. The channel has over 175,000 subscribers and her videos have over 16 million views. She provides a safe space for countless people who would otherwise feel alone in their experience of schizophrenia and exemplifies what it means to live well with her illness. Lauren also runs an online peer support community for those living with schizophrenia spectrum illnesses, is a fierce advocate for mental health care reform and has become a prominent voice in the mental health advocacy community.

Beyond her advocacy work, Lauren works hard every day on her own wellness, managing her schizoaffective disorder largely through medication, but also therapy, sleep, nutrition and exercise. She is an avid runner and has run multiple ultra marathons as a component of her wellness journey. Lauren was awarded an all-expense-paid weekend wellness experience in Banff for her inspiring testament to perseverance through time of extreme hardship.

With interest in the program having nearly tripled compared to last year, 10 exceptional finalists were also selected, including:

- **Irene Crowchild**, the first Indigenous woman to compete and win the national long drive title and a two-time national long drive golf champion whose journey has been marked by adversity, triumph and determination;
- **Tyson Yanchycki**, who was diagnosed with cancer at 19 and went on to run across Alberta, raising over \$20,000 for the Terry Fox foundation, and, as a cancer survivor, has continued to fundraise in support of cancer research;
- **Dr. Marie Holowaychuk**, who after recognizing the prevalence of compassion fatigue, burnout, suicide, mental health stigma and other issues within veterinary medicine was not being spoken about enough, decided to use her voice to share the lessons she had learned in mindfulness, self-care and mental health with other veterinarians; and
- **Sydney Hampshire**, a childhood stroke survivor who co-founded Click&Push Accessibility Inc. and launched an app called *The Atlas*, which people with mobility limitations can use to ensure they do not encounter barriers that impede access, increase the risk of injury and deplete energy reserves.

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60 other individuals were also recognized. Finalists and runners-up all received wellness-themed prizes for their heartfelt nominations and sharing their wellness stories.

"The experiences and journeys of these individuals really reflect the diverse nature of wellness whether that be striving to live a healthier life, overcoming a health challenge, or inspiring others to take on healthier behaviours through their own actions," says Geislinger.

For more information about the program and this year's finalists, visit www.facesofwellness.ca.

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