BUFFALO, N.Y. – More than 20 local community leaders have joined forces to launch the Community Leaders Response Fund, pledging their personal financial support in response to the COVID-19 crisis we are facing together. The community leader support effort is being led by Michael W. Cropp, M.D., President & CEO of Independent Health.

The new Community Leaders Response Fund will support the Western New York COVID-19 Community Response Fund, which was established in late March. The Fund is coordinated by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York, The John R. Oishei Foundation, and the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County. To date more than 30 local philanthropic organizations and corporations, along with more than 1,000 individuals, have raised $6.5 million to address the community’s most immediate needs in response to COVID-19.

The following community leaders have pledged their personal financial support to the Community Leaders Response Fund, raising more than $400,000 to date:

- Stuart and Joyce Angert
- David Bauer
- Don Boswell
- Warren Colville
- John and Nicole Connelly
- Michael W. Cropp, M.D.
- Adrian F. & Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker
- John Mineo and Vicki Feine
- Bill and Mary Gisel
- Carl Montante, Sr.
- Carl Montante, Jr.
- Michael Montante
- Laura Montante-Zaepfel
- Ann Pentkowski
- John and Maria Pieroni
- Roberta and Noah Rifkin
- Dr. Zvi Sharf
- Patricia Smith
- Anthony Spada, Jr.
- Paul Tesluk
- Ted and Ginna Walsh
- Mary Wilson
- Larry and Leslie Zielinski

“This pandemic is an unprecedented crisis that is having a far-reaching impact on our country and region, the full effect of which is still unknown,” said Dr. Cropp. “At times like these, we are inspired by the selfless and heroic acts of so many, from our dedicated health care workers, and the front-line food service and grocery professionals keeping the shelves stocked, to the staff who clean and disinfect buildings to keep them safe and secure. It is also a time when leaders are called to action, stepping up and supporting others, especially the less fortunate and those most at-risk.”

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“Individuals and families in underserved communities here in Western New York face unparalleled struggles every day. The crisis we are living through now has an even more profound and devastating impact on these communities. That is why the Community Leaders Response Fund is an opportunity to provide support and raise up the entire Western New York community. It is our responsibility as leaders to step forward,” Dr. Cropp added.

Dr. Cropp invites other community leaders who would like to contribute to this community-wide effort to visit www.WNYResponds.org.

Two weeks after the COVID-19 Community Response Fund was established, $4.5 million was granted to 74 organizations serving Western New York in the areas of food, housing, healthcare, childcare, mental health, transportation, and other emergency services. Additional funds raised will be distributed to those organizations addressing critical needs and those supporting essential workers during the COVID-19 crisis. To see a full list of contributors to the Fund and the grantees, please visit www.WNYResponds.org.

“Time and time again our community has demonstrated its generosity and resilience when facing a crisis. We applaud Dr. Cropp’s leadership in raising funds to support nonprofits that are on the frontlines of addressing our community’s immediate needs related to COVID-19. We are truly grateful for this community’s collective response to create solutions together,” said Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, President/CEO of Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

“Response and recovery to the COVID crisis is going to take all hands on deck and we commend Dr. Cropp for taking the lead and encouraging others to contribute. These funds are already helping nonprofit organizations across Western New York address the critical needs that have arisen from the crisis and will surely continue for some time. We are encouraged by our community’s generosity and hope that that those who can, consider contributing as well to help so many who have been impacted,” said Robert D. Gioia, President of The John R. Oishei Foundation.

“It is inspiring to see our community come together to support front-line workers and critical needs in response to COVID-19,” said Nora OBrien-Suric, PhD, President, the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York. “Thank you to Dr. Cropp for demonstrating compassionate leadership by inspiring and encouraging your fellow community leaders to join this important effort.”

"The time is now for the Western New York community to come together as we navigate the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful to Dr. Cropp for joining the effort and using his platform to support the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund," said Michael Weiner, President & CEO United Way of Buffalo & Erie County.

For more information on the grants given out or to join the effort, please visit www.WNYResponds.org.

For anyone in need of assistance with information related to services available in our community, please call 211. It is a referral hotline that is staffed 24/7 and serves all eight counties of Western New York.

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