



Vecinos Farmworker Health Program receives \$2,500 grant

Posted on November 12, 2018 – Community Bulletin

Press release from the Vecinos Farmworker Health Program:

Farmworkers and their families in Western North Carolina received some relief from high prescription drug prices with a recent grant of \$2,500 from the Jackson County Community Foundation, an affiliate of the North Carolina Community Foundation. Vecinos Farmworker Health Program Executive Director Marianne Martinez accepted the grant, along with board members Alan Farmer and Jenny Lopez, at a reception hosted at the Balsam Mountain Preserve. Martinez noted that in the past, Vecinos “received a state government grant to cover prescription medication costs, but that funding source has now been depleted.”

Prescription drug prices are increasing nation-wide at an average rate of about 7 percent per year, far exceeding the rate of inflation. Experts attribute this rise in drug prices — and the increasing proportion of household income that is dedicated to paying these prices — to the consolidation of the pharmaceutical industry into a few very large corporations, and to a lack of federal oversight, which has allowed drug companies to artificially inflate drug prices as they seek to satisfy Wall Street investors.

Vecinos has been dealing with the shortfall in funding by pulling from donations and other line items in the budget to assist patients with acute medical needs. This grant will allow the organization to continue to cover medications for patients in need for the next year, but will not satisfy the long-term needs of the farmworkers upon whom we depend for our food and Christmas trees.

As is the case with many working people in Western North Carolina, most farmworkers are “self-pay,” or without insurance, so they have no safety net to help them when they are sick or have an infection. Farmworkers face additional difficulties accessing health care because of language, transportation, timing, and cost barriers and also because migrant workers move from farm to farm and are often isolated in remote locations. Many farmworkers must buy up to 6-months of medication at once to have enough to last them until they return to WNC, where they can be seen by Vecinos staff at their weekly free clinic or during site visits to their migrant camps.

Farmworkers and other working poor in Western North Carolina make up nearly one-quarter of the region's population. Lack of access to prescription drugs can be especially dangerous for poor people with chronic diseases, leading to self-modification of quantity and even medication sharing practices, which can have long-lasting implications on patient's health, and to public health generally.

The assistance offered by the Jackson County Community Foundation will mean the difference between having medication or not, and taking the correct amount or not, for farmworkers in our region this year.

For more information, contact Marianne Martinez at 828-293-2274 or mmartinez@vecinosinc.org.