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AHNS Cancer Prevention Service - Community Service Award Application

**HPV Education Initiative for Young Adults**

Infection by human papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the leading causes of oropharyngeal cancer, alongside alcohol and tobacco usage. Sexually-active adolescents and young adults are at high risk of becoming infected with HPV. The Center for Disease Control currently recommends vaccination against HPV as early as age 9 up through age 26. Vaccination against HPV can reduce the risk of oropharyngeal cancer as well as prevent sexually transmitted genital warts, condylomas, cervical and penile cancer.

In Texas, only 54.9% of children get vaccinated against HPV according to the American Cancer Society. This ranks 31<sup>st</sup> out of 50 states. Due to the population size, Texas is home to the largest population of HPV-vulnerable teenagers in the country. It has been hypothesized that these vaccination rates could drop even further due recent years of social distancing in schools and vaccine hesitancy among parents. Large cohorts of unvaccinated sexually active young adults in the community could lead to an increase in HPV infections, and long-term effects could see a rise in oropharyngeal cancer prevalence as a result.

I propose for the launching of an educational initiative to deliver information about HPV vaccination to at-risk populations. The presentation will be targeted towards high school and college-aged students and non-students 15 to 25 years of age. A brief questionnaire will initially be presented to participants to gauge their current knowledge of HPV and vaccination. This will be followed by an interactive presentation in which I present the dangers of the human papillomavirus manifestation, and emphasize the importance of the vaccine for protecting themselves as well as potential partners. The presentation will focus on the common misconceptions about vaccinations by using factual data presented in understandable terms. Before concluding, I will include locations of local distributors of the HPV vaccine and directions on how to schedule an appointment (if needed). Following the presentation, a concluding questionnaire will collect the responses from participants on what they learned from the presentation. I intend on presenting this initiative to local Austin high schools, universities (specifically the University of Texas with an enrollment of over 60,000), and community/youth centers in the city.

One goal of this project will be to reach young people from low-income backgrounds. Individuals who lack access to regular healthcare maintenance due to socioeconomic barriers are likely at increased risk of HPV infection. Therefore an emphasis will be placed on making this initiative accessible to adolescents and adults of all backgrounds in order to reduce disparities.

The project funding will contribute to travel (gas, lodging if an overnight stay is required), materials (posters, flyers, pamphlets), and potentially transportation for participants to vaccination appointments (bus vouchers).

Increasing HPV vaccination rates in a community can directly lead to reduced risk of infection and subsequent disease development. The HPV Education Initiative for Young Adults has the potential to contribute to community-wide oropharyngeal cancer prevention.