

# Supporting the Frontline Healthcare Workforce

An Interview with Deborah Marcus, Executive, CAA Foundation and #FirstRespondersFirst

**EDITORS' NOTE** Deborah Marcus is an executive in the CAA Foundation, the philanthropic arm of leading entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA), which represents many of the most successful and innovative professionals working in media and sports. Marcus joined the agency in 2019 to lead its education and youth development efforts and currently also leads many of the foundation's public health initiatives including #FirstRespondersFirst in partnership with Thrive Global and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Prior to joining CAA, Marcus served for nearly a decade as the Executive Director of Communities in Schools of Los Angeles (CISLA), the nationally recognized nonprofit leader in high school drop-out prevention. In 2014, Marcus was appointed by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to the Commission of Community and Family Services on which she serves as Vice Chairperson.



Deborah Marcus

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** #FirstRespondersFirst is an initiative created to provide first responder healthcare workers with physical and psychological resources they so desperately need as they serve on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conceived by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, America's oldest professional training program in public health, Thrive Global, the behavior change technology company founded by Arianna Huffington, and the CAA Foundation, the philanthropic arm of entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA), #FirstRespondersFirst provides support for this workforce, ranging from minimum-wage hourly workers in home-care settings to social workers, nurses, physicians, and beyond.

## What was the vision for creating #FirstRespondersFirst and how do you define its mission?

At the onset of the pandemic, our partners at Thrive Global and the Harvard Chan School of Public Health were asking the question: Who is going to care for the caregivers? Our mission at #FRF takes a whole-human approach to supporting the frontline healthcare workforce, who continue to put their lives on the line to care for us.

## Will you highlight the efforts of #FirstRespondersFirst's since its launch?

Since launch, we have raised over \$10.5 million, launched two websites (First-Responders-First.org and AllInForHealthcare.org), partnered with 50+ organizations on various initiatives, and amplified the importance of clinician well-being to combat clinician suicide and burnout. We have also helped to create the impact campaign for the documentary film *The First Wave*, and most

recently brought together Hollywood creators and writers to share stories and solutions from doctors and nurses to be woven into network television medical shows.

Our efforts can be broken down into 3 phases:

Phase 1: Fund and provide PPE, accommodations, childcare and food to support the frontline healthcare workforce.

Phase 2: Fund and distribute self-care resources and support for healthcare workers' mental health and well-being.

Phase 3: (a) Provide amplification for legislative change in partnership with the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation to support the Dr. Lorna Breen Healthcare Provider Protection Act. (b) Launch the ALL IN campaign to support clinician well-being within healthcare systems.

## What are the key initiatives for #FirstRespondersFirst as you look to the future?

Looking ahead, we will promote the 2022 Healthcare Rescue Workforce Package, which was created in partnership with leading healthcare experts from our coalition and the National Academy of Medicine, who identified the top 5 actions leaders should take to support the healthcare workforce.

We will also deploy over \$1 million through our ALL IN Fund to provide financial resources to healthcare organizations to implement healthcare workforce well-being solutions and/or further scale promising practices.

And of course, being in the entertainment industry, will use the power of storytelling in all of its forms to push for policy change.

## What are the keys to driving impact for #FirstRespondersFirst and how critical are metrics to measure the impact of #FRF's efforts?

For us, the immediate need to care for frontline healthcare workers drives our continued efforts. Our impact has been significant. Since launch, FRF has:

- Deployed over \$1.1 million to mental health providers and/or organizations to provide mental health services to the most vulnerable on the front lines.
- Provided almost 600 first responders with over 7,900 nights of hotel accommodations in 79 cities and towns across the country through Marriott and IHG Hotels & Resorts, in addition

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to providing funding to build 20 housing units for first responders in the Navajo Nation.

- Provided over 55,000 meals to first responders through World Central Kitchen and Newark Working Kitchens.

- Provided over 7,200 days of childcare to almost 300 children in eight locations through Bright Horizons.

- Deployed more than \$2 million to purchase PPE, including N95 masks, gowns and other essential medical items.

- Launched the ALL IN: Well-Being First for Healthcare campaign and fund to advance a state where the well-being of the healthcare workforce is prioritized, in partnership with the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation and leading healthcare organizations.

**Will you discuss #FirstRespondersFirst’s focus on creating partnerships and will you highlight some of the partners that #FirstRespondersFirst is working with as part of this effort?**

We could never have done this work on our own. The impact we achieved, even in our first year alone, is remarkable. The founding partners is where the story begins: Harvard brings scientific breakthroughs from the academy into people’s everyday lives; Thrive Global is the leading behavior change technology company helping individuals, corporations and communities improve their well-being and performance through its platform and services; and CAA and its philanthropic arm, CAA Foundation,

harnesses the power and reach of the entertainment industry to create positive social change.

The story continues as we form a number of strategic partnerships across sectors. We worked with those who could deliver services to the field, like AmeriCares and Direct Relief. We also partnered with experts in mental health like NAMI and the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes’ Foundation, the latter of which led the way to the first-of-its-kind legislation to support clinician well-being. Participant Media also partnered with us to support the creation of an impact campaign that aligned with our work. In addition, we formed partnerships with leading healthcare organizations who historically worked in silos but who understand the power of working together on this critically urgent issue.

**What is the purpose for ALL IN: WellBeing First for Healthcare, and how does this new interactive online community of practice work?**

The healthcare workforce is experiencing unprecedented rates of burnout, trauma, and isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic – the most severe global mass trauma event since World War II. We are just beginning to understand the full impact of these traumatic events, but it is no exaggeration to say frontline workers are on the brink of a secondary health crisis – one that could last for generations.

Time and again, our healthcare professionals have stepped up to take care of us. It’s time that we take care of them.

The ALL IN Campaign is calling on healthcare leaders to affirm their commitment to workforce well-being by signing a commitment to prioritize well-being strategies, resources, and policies in the workplace. This commitment requires healthcare leaders to acknowledge their role in investing in and cultivating a healthy environment for their workforce, clearly define goals to improve the well-being of workers, and share tools with peers to achieve goals – actions that will shift the onus from the individual to the system itself.

Leaders and practitioners are invited to join us in building a community of practice where we can share promising practices, add to the conversation, contribute to the evidence base, and move the needle where it matters the most in prioritizing the well-being of the healthcare workforce. Together, we will identify and create a future ecosystem where healthcare workers feel valued and can sustain purpose and meaning in their work in order to return to their original mission: help people.

**When addressing a challenge that requires a long-term focus and commitment, how do you measure success?**

We are measuring success in several ways:

- Impact – Have the resources that we’re putting out into the community been engaged with and are therefore leading to more positive outcomes? When they haven’t been engaged with, we have asked: What are the barriers to accessing needed resources? This is informing the current phase of our work (phase 3), addressing system level changes.

- Awareness – Two years ago and prior to the pandemic, the topic of clinician well-being was not being discussed outside of the academies and healthcare institutions. It is now making headlines in leading consumer newspapers.

- Narrative Change and Culture Shift – This is the current phase of our work and addresses: Are the stories and solutions that we are pushing seen regularly on TV and in film? Do hospitals begin to invest differently in the well-being of their workforce? Do state licensing boards change their business practices? Is the stigma that currently exists in healthcare around accessing mental health services reduced?

Another important area we are focused on is the fear of clinicians losing their jobs for accessing mental health services and we are constantly trying to improve this area. ●

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