



New Orleans Musicians' Clinic &
Assistance Foundation
kari@nomaf.org
Kari Elgin, Communications Director
(504) 415-3514

For Immediate Release

Musicians' Clinic, Ashé Cultural Arts Center, and New Orleans Health Department Facilitate Vaccine Drive For 238 New Orleans Culture Bearers

First partnership of its kind to prioritize artist and musician access to the COVID vaccine

[Watch Event Video Here: <https://youtu.be/oLf-Xeq8xA8>]

NEW ORLEANS, LA - *March 11, 2021* - On March 4, 2021 the Ashé Cultural Arts Center opened its doors to 238 elderly and medically at-risk New Orleans Musicians' Clinic patients and cultural community members to provide first COVID vaccine doses. The partnership, one of the first in the nation to prioritize artists and musicians for access to the vaccine, gave shots to elders and medically vulnerable musicians, culture bearers, cultural educators and visual artists.

The event provided direct access to care resources for members of the local cultural community in line with the Musicians' Clinic's mission to overcome health disparity and uplift the performers who are the heartbeat of this city. NOLA Ready, coordinated by the New Orleans Health Department, facilitated the shots, and the event was supported by city and state health department officials.

"We gave 238 doses of relief today. We gave our elders a fighting chance against this virus, and a protective shield against this pandemic that's taken far too many from our community today."
-Arséne DeLay, Musicians' Clinic Program Manager and Local Musician

After a year of NOLA's treasured culture bearers gracefully stepping back and enduring hardships in the interest of public safety, vaccinations offer relief, hope and a chance for our cherished cultural traditions to resume. This particular model of community care engagement is one of many COVID-19 response offerings from the New Orleans Musicians' Clinic, the first healthcare clinic specifically designed to provide medical care to performing artists in the nation.

"We are honored to have partnered with these incredible people and organizations. Of the 238 culture bearers vaccinated that day, 89% were black. It's an important step in combating the inequality apparent in our nationwide vaccine rollout." - Asali DeVan Ecclesiastes, CEO Chief Equity Officer, Ashé Cultural Arts Center



"Few in our community have suffered more from the impacts of COVID than our culture bearers, so it's important to all of us that they are protected with vaccines. We hope this is the first of many vaccination events so we can ensure they are safe, healthy, and leading our post-COVID comeback." - Dr. Jennifer Avegno, New Orleans Health Department Director

Organizers say participants were excited and eager to get the shot, and that many had already. "We called 750 elders from different lists culled from NOMC patients and legacy and emerging partner organizations like MaCCNO, WWOZ, KNOMA, ELLA Project, the Musicians' Union, Ubuntu Village and Queens of the Nation," says NOMC Program Manager, Arsène DeLay. "Out of that, many musicians had already received the shot, but they were happy we asked - only 16 people refused, many of whom said they wanted to speak to their doctor first due to a condition they managed. We listened, and asked if we could include them on the list for future check-ins."

In addition to providing nearly-free medical care for artists year-round since 1998, during the pandemic the Musicians' Clinic's community programs have centered around reducing harm in the cultural community. In response to recent mental health crises - both those brought on by the pandemic and those deepening given intersectional trauma in the cultural community - the agency enrolled dozens of private practice mental health practitioners (with a focus on engaging diverse providers who specialize in addiction, depression and family issues) and lifted all mental health co-pays for its patients with support from the New Orleans Theatre Association, the Brett Thomas Doussan Foundation, and private donors.

"The Musicians' Clinic is a vital and sometimes overlooked piece of the local nonprofit community and cultural infrastructure, so we were proud to be among the first in the nation to partner with agencies we love in this way - we've been advocating for decades," says NOMC's Managing Director Erica Dudas. "So many of our city's cultural elders perform into their 80's, 90's and even 100's, and asking them to put their calling on hold this past year for their physical safety has been devastating for their mental health. Vaccines represent that turning point for many who consider 2020 to be the worst year of their lives, and the Musicians' Clinic exists for both this and for the long-term support Culture Bearers will need once life gets back to normal. We're calling on all arts advocacy organizations in the nation to prioritize artists' access and encouragement of vaccine and support."

Other robust COVID-19 response health offerings from the agency include: [Makin' Groceries](#) (weekly grocery delivery for 100 elder/ immunocompromised patients); [Play It Safe](#) (musician-specific PPE and education around safe performances); [Testing 1-2-3](#) (free, monthly COVID testing for culture bearers); [You Got This](#) (mental health self-care and resource for artists). In the summer, they plan to train hundreds of musicians in CPR and Mental Health First Aid.



ABOUT NEW ORLEANS MUSICIANS' CLINIC

The New Orleans Musicians' Clinic (NOMC, established 1998) is an established health and medical local 501(c)3 nonprofit. The NOMC's mission is to keep New Orleans music ALIVE by sustaining the city's traditional and emerging music cultures. We do this by providing cost-efficient access to direct healthcare, mental health support and social services for 2,500 performing artist patients and are the nation's ONLY organization to provide direct medical services to musicians and culture bearers regardless of their insurance status. The NOMC's community health programming promotes wellness, preventive health education, musician advocacy and support in the broader New Orleans music community. For more information on the NOMC, please visit neworleansmusiciansclinic.org.

ABOUT ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

The mission of Ashé Cultural Arts Center is to use art and culture to support human, community, and economic development. Ashé's innovative programming is designed to utilize culture in fostering human development and civic engagement. They maintain 5,000 square feet of gallery space, creating and preserving opportunities for the curation, exhibition, and commission of fine, folk, and fine-folk art of the African Diaspora. Producing over 350 music, theater, dance, spoken word, drum circles, and multi-disciplinary events a year, Ashé believes in art as a paradigm-shifting call to action. Please visit Ashenola.org

ABOUT NOLA READY

NOLA Ready is the official preparedness campaign for the City of New Orleans, managed by the Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness. ready.nola.gov

PARTICIPATING PARTNERS:

- New Orleans Musicians' Clinic / @no_musicians_clinic
- Ashé Cultural Arts Center / @ashecac
- NOLA Ready / @nolaready
- City of NOLA Health Department
- Jennifer Avegno, Sarah Babcock
- Ubuntu Village / @ubuntuvillagenola
- Musicians' Union
- The Ella Project/ @theellaproject
- MaCCNO / @musicculture504
- Keep New Orleans Music Alive
- WWOZ / @wwoz_neworleans
- Preservation Hall Foundation/ @preshallfoundation

SOCIAL MEDIA TAGS:

#sleevesupnola

#keepthebeatalive

#rollwithit

#byanymeansecessary