

EXPOSURE



BRIDGING THE GAP

A nurse's heart for community

Story by [Fresno State](#)

March 25th, 2021

With decades of nursing experience under her belt, Dr. Kathleen Rindahl has led the charge toward health equity and hands-on learning since becoming an associate professor of nursing at Fresno State in 2013. Her heart for the community and drive to educate the next generation of leaders led her to spearhead the Community Health Mobile Unit, a project that allows supervised Fresno State students to offer free health screenings in underserved communities throughout Fresno County.

“It’s a labor of love for me,” Rindahl says. “If we can help get out there, reach the individuals

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Since February, the Community Health Mobile Unit has shifted its focus and partnered with community organizations to increase access to the COVID-19 vaccine for some of the Valley's most vulnerable populations. Holly Vu, a fourth-semester nursing major, is one of many students who has been humbled by their experience with the project. She and numerous other students have helped the Unit distribute over 6,000 vaccines.

"It is so important for me to give back now as a health care provider because my community has given so much to me," Vu says. "With the prevalence of COVID, I want to be a part of the work that protects our elderly population and our community. This is why I chose to be a nurse."

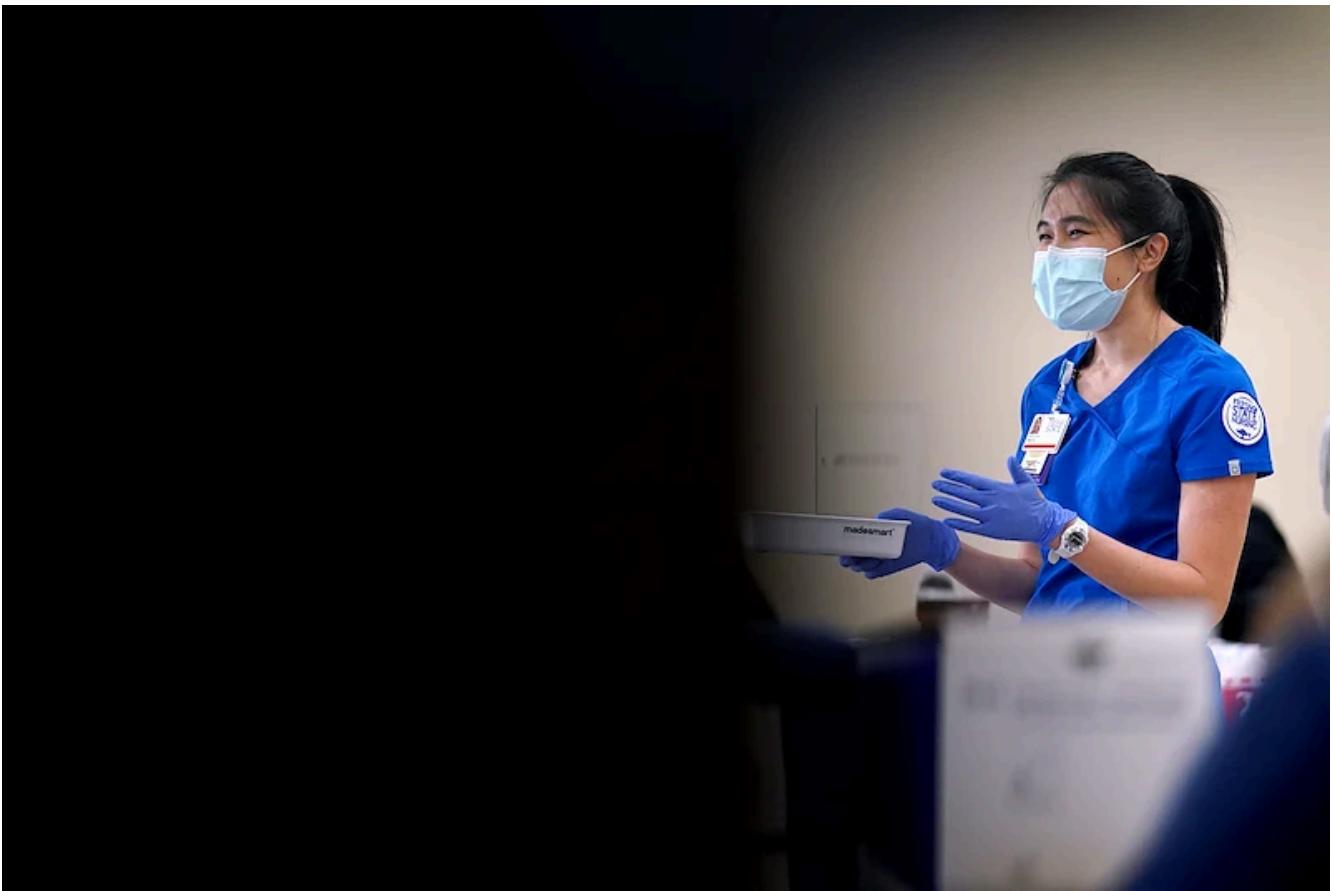
Rindahl discusses the transformative work she and her students are doing and why the Community Health Mobile Unit is a unique opportunity for hands-on learning in the Q&A below.



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How have Fresno State students impacted Valley communities through the Community Health Mobile Unit?

Rindahl: The community is so appreciative of the students being out there. I can't tell you how many times they tell them, "Thank you for coming out." We were in Cantua Creek, and the house across the street from the parking lot we were at, they were making homemade fried chicken and burritos and rice. I mean, they're feeding them, they're just so thankful. And then one lady told one of the students, she was so tearful, thanking them for coming out because she would not have gotten her injection had they not come out there. Because there's nowhere for them to go. And the students just love it. They really do.



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Do you feel a responsibility to utilize your available resources and the knowledge and skills of the students you teach to help mitigate the effects of COVID-19?

Rindahl: Yeah. I mean, I'm a health care provider and it's my duty to ensure the safety of individuals. So whatever I can do, and I'm pretty sure every nurse feels this way, that it's our calling. That you roll up your sleeves and you get out there and you do what you can.

**And what is it like to have your students right alongside you, getting this hands-on education?**

Rindahl: That's my best part of my job. This is what feeds my soul. This is the only thing that keeps me going, is being out there with the students, because it's not work.



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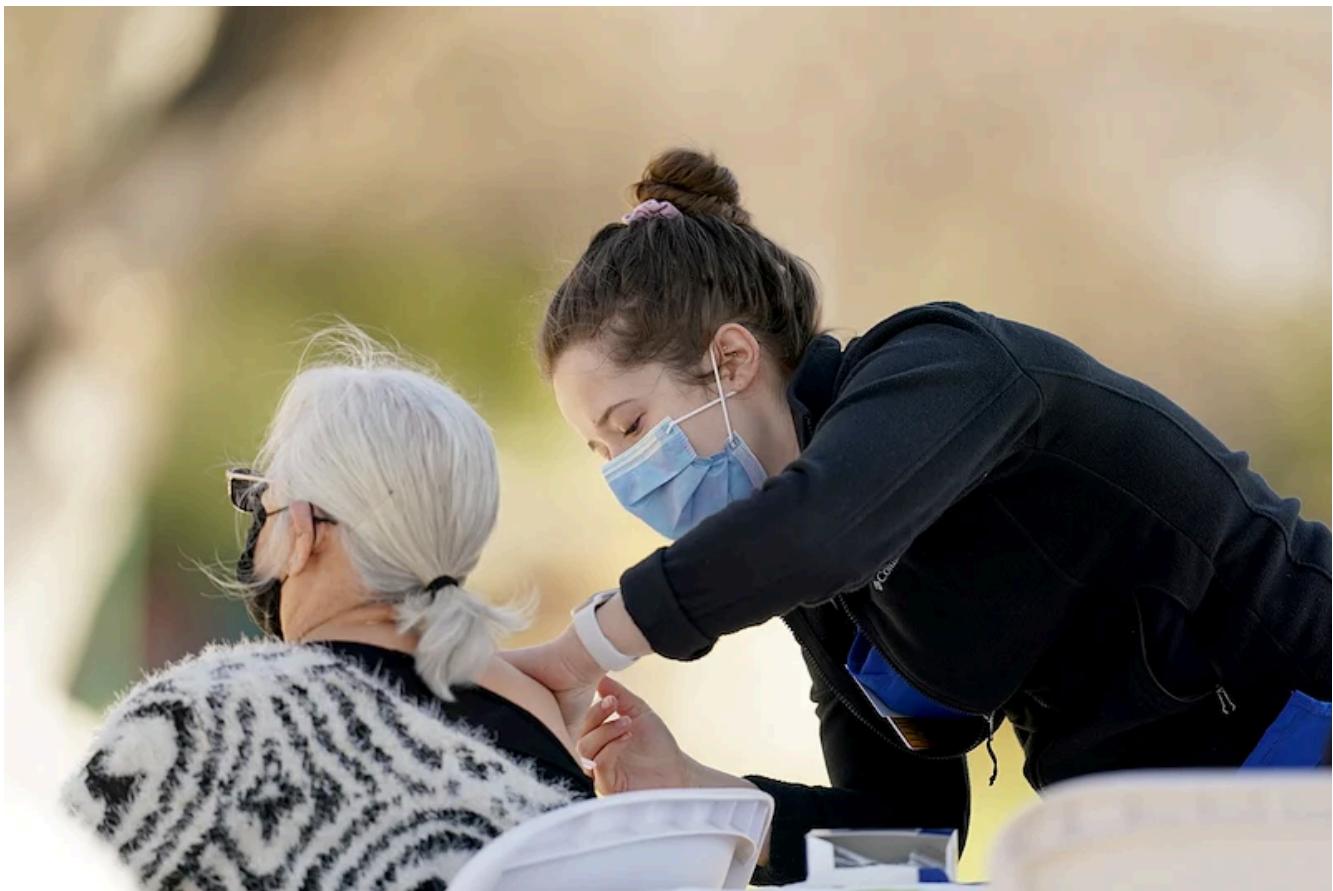
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In what ways have you seen students grow as health care professionals during their time with the Community Health Mobile Unit?

Rindahl: So when they first come into nursing, all their training starts in the hospital. When the patient's in the hospital, they're just in a room in that bed, Mr. Smith. The hospital's in charge of their care. But when you're out in the community and you're in their environment, the students quickly learn that Mr. Smith might not have the medicine he needs, because one, it's not a priority. His first priority is finding a place to stay, or feeding his family, or taking care of some other person's health care need in the family. So he might put his own health on the back burner, but you don't see that in the hospital. So having them go out to these areas where people are from, they get a better understanding of how to care for that patient. An understanding that maybe your priority for this patient is different than what their priority is.



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Do you think that this is especially important here in the Valley?

Rindahl: Absolutely. We have a lot of rural areas, a lot of health literacy issues that people don't understand. So bridging those gaps is huge.



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What are some of the biggest takeaways that you hope your students get from this experience?

Rindahl: That everybody has a right to feel healthy, no matter where you come from. If you don't have housing, if you don't speak the same language, or you don't have a lot of money, you still have the same rights as everybody else to feel healthy and be cared for.





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In honor of her tireless leadership and commitment to the community, Rindahl was named the 2021 Woman of the Year for Assembly District 31 by California Assembly Member Dr. Joaquin Arambula.



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Footnote: Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Victoria Cisneros — University Brand Strategy and Marketing

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