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Michigan Health Endowment Fund selects Neel Hajra as next CEO

BRIGHTON, Mich. – The Michigan Health Endowment Fund (Health Fund) announced today that Neel Hajra will lead the foundation as its next chief executive officer. Hajra is an accomplished champion of community health and the nonprofit sector in Michigan, coming to the Health Fund after serving as CEO of the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation (AAACF) since 2015.

“We are thrilled to have Neel Hajra join the Health Fund to help advance our mission to improve the health and wellness of Michigan residents young and old,” said Susan Jandernoa, chairperson of the Health Fund’s Board of Directors. “His track record of fostering collaboration, pioneering innovative, community-driven initiatives, and displaying thought leadership at the local and national level will be a tremendous asset to our organization as we continue to grow our impact.”

Hajra’s appointment comes as the Health Fund enters a new five-year strategic plan, which calls for a continued commitment to the health of Michigan residents, especially children and older adults, along with an expansion of grantmaking and non-grantmaking activities. He succeeds the Health Fund’s founding CEO, Paul Hillegonds, who guided the organization through its first five-year plan and over \$177 million in grant awards.

“The Michigan Health Endowment Fund has played an invaluable role in Michigan’s health landscape—particularly during this past year and a half, which has been difficult and transformative for so many Michigan communities, nonprofits, and health organizations,” Hajra said. “I look forward to working alongside Health Fund staff to continue to support Michigan residents through collaborative leadership and innovative, equitable, community-driven care.”

Hillegonds expressed confidence in Hajra's leadership and the Health Fund's direction following his retirement.

"Neel has been a brilliant leader for Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, and he will be a wonderful fit to take the lead at the Health Fund during this critical time," he said. "His fresh perspective will be a great benefit as the foundation continues efforts to respond to the most pressing health needs in Michigan through the new strategic plan."

After obtaining his JD from the University of Michigan Law School, Hajra started his professional career as a corporate attorney at Ford Motor Company. It was during a one-year sabbatical from Ford that Hajra developed his passion for supporting communities through the nonprofit sector. That passion first came to professional fruition through nine-year tenure at Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW), including two years as NEW's president and CEO.

He joined AAACF in 2011 and became CEO in 2015, where he developed and executed a successful five-year strategic framework, helped the foundation become the largest grantmaker for older adults among Michigan community foundations, launched a scholarship program that doubled graduation rates for underserved students, and established robust capacity-building and operating support for nonprofits in Washtenaw County.

Hajra has been recognized for his leadership through two national fellowships and a 2020 "CEO of the Year" award from the United Way of Washtenaw County. Under his leadership, AAACF received the U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development's Award for Public-Private Partnerships in 2016, and he has received numerous Teaching Honor Roll awards for his graduate course at the University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy. In addition to being a member of the State Bar of Michigan, Hajra is a Vice Chair for the Council of Michigan Foundations and the Washtenaw County Board of Health and a Trustee for Grantmakers for Effective Organizations.

Hajra lives with his wife, Lisa, and their three teenage children in Ann Arbor, where he was born and raised. His start date with the Michigan Health Endowment Fund has yet to be determined.