

**Indigenous**

## ‘Warrior Up’ COVID-19 PSA features well-known Indigenous actors, artists, and leaders

Campaign highlights impacts of coronavirus pandemic on Indigenous communities

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IllumiNative partnered with Indigenous artists, influencers, and leaders to spread the word and invite others to #WarriorUp against COVID-19. (IllumiNative)

Stay away, together.

It’s the message of a new campaign aimed at raising awareness of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on Indigenous communities.

The campaign, called Warrior Up, was created by IllumiNative, a nonprofit launched to increase the visibility of Indigenous people in the United States. The campaign includes a public service announcement featuring a slew of Indigenous actors, artists, and political leaders, and allies.

Celebrities like Taika Waititi, Ed Helms, Wilmer Valderrama, Riley Keough and Taboo from the Black Eyed Peas appear in the PSA.

They all have the message to #StayAtHomeTogether and being “a good nephew,” or “a good auntie” by physical distancing and washing your hands in order to protect elders.

“I just wanted to be a part of something positive during this crazy time,” said Kaniehtiio Horn, one of the actresses in the video.

“It would be devastating to lose anyone to this virus, but our elders especially who

have so much knowledge and are our connection to our past and who we hold so dear in our culture.”

Horn is a Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) actress from Kahnawake, Que., and has been spending time at home reading and cooking.

“I am not on the front lines, I’ve been on my couch, so it was nice to feel kind of useful by using whatever ‘following’ I have to spread the word and encourage our people to stay healthy and do their part to potentially save lives,” she said.

### **Spreading awareness**

Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs is another Kanien’kehá:ka actress in the PSA. She said she wanted to be involved to help spread awareness about the importance of self-isolating and physical distancing.

“In many ways, this pandemic is almost contradictory to how we live as a people. It’s kind of counterintuitive for us to be staying in isolation, so that’s why it’s important to get this message across,” said Jacobs.

“It is hard to be on your own and not go visit your tóta (grandparent), see your cousin and your auntie. That’s something that’s so vital to the community, so it’s especially important to keep in mind keeping our distance so that it actually does benefit our family members in the long run.”

### **Ensuring Indigenous visibility**

IllumiNative founder and executive director Crystal Echo Hawk said the campaign is about ensuring Indigenous people are seen, heard, and included in solutions and conversations around the ongoing public health emergency.

“We need to change the narrative about Native people in this country and the dominant narrative is that we no longer exist, we’re not a meaningful part of society,” she said.

“Invisibility was a problem prior, our research shows that. Invisibility during a pandemic can really be a matter of life and death.”

In addition to the PSA, IllumiNative partnered with artists like Steven Paul Judd and Jeremy Fields to create shareable artwork to encourage Indigenous youth and communities to #WarriorUp. They will also be releasing a weekly podcast that will focus on telling stories about the impact of the coronavirus on Indigenous communities.

“Everything we’re working on right now is to shine a light on what’s happening and to take care of our communities — wanting to make sure they know how important it is for us to protect our communities, protect our elders, to stay at home,” said Echo Hawk.

“This has been so scary and devastating, seeing the different impacts it’s having from our perspective. but there’s been some powerful moments that have brought Indigenous communities together.”

One of those moments, she said, was when jingle dress dancers across Canada and the United States posted videos across social media to help heal the world.

“That was one of the first moments that brought so much comfort for so many. I’ve seen so many examples of that since the pandemic exploded.”

*Ka’nhehsí:io Deer is Kanien’kehá:ka journalist from Kahnawake, Que. She is currently a reporter with CBC Indigenous covering communities across Quebec.*

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