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Patient First Coalition to Honor the Life and Legacy of Louisa “Lou” Whitaker

Annual Lifetime Achievement Award Renamed in Her Honor at Healthy America 2026

Washington, D.C. — April 30, 2026 — The Patient First Coalition is proud to announce a special tribute honoring the life and legacy of Louisa “Lou” Whitaker, a passionate advocate whose vision and dedication helped shape a more accessible and patient-centered healthcare landscape.

Lou Whitaker was the inspiration behind “*Lou’s Law*,” an initiative focused on expanding healthcare access and ensuring that seniors have the freedom to choose their medical providers. Her work ignited meaningful progress and empowered countless individuals to advocate for dignity, choice, and quality care within the healthcare system.

Beyond her public advocacy, Lou lived a rich and deeply meaningful personal life. Born on May 7, 1942, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, she passed peacefully on April 18, 2026, at her home in East Bend, surrounded by what she lovingly called her “earthly angels”—her caregivers and close friends. She was a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she studied journalism, and spent years working with the Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel. Lou found her greatest joy on her Yadkin County farm, where she raised horses, nurtured nature, and shared the serenity of her surroundings with others. A devoted animal lover, she cherished her German Shepherds—especially her loyal companion, Rufus. Known for her quick wit, warmth, and free-spirited love of life, Lou left a lasting impression on all who knew her. In her later years, she founded the Every American Wellness Center, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing naturopathic care and expanding access for those navigating chronic illness and recovery—further reflecting her lifelong commitment to helping others.

“Lou’s legacy is one of compassion, courage, and commitment to putting patients first,” said Doug Bennis, Advisory Board Chair for the Patient First Coalition. “Her vision continues to guide our mission, and this award will ensure that her spirit lives on through those who dedicate their lives to serving others.”

In recognition of her extraordinary contributions, the Patient First Coalition will formally rename its highest annual honor, the **Legacy of Health Service Award**, to the “**Louisa Whitaker Legacy of Health Service Award.**” This prestigious lifetime achievement award is presented to individuals who have devoted their lives to advancing the health and well-being of others. It celebrates unwavering dedication, exceptional service, and enduring contributions to building a healthier America.

The official renaming ceremony will take place on the evening of May 5, 2026, during the Healthy America 2026 – Going for the Summit in Park City, Utah. The ceremony will serve as a moment of reflection, gratitude, and inspiration, bringing together leaders, advocates, and innovators from across the healthcare ecosystem to honor Lou’s lasting impact.

“Lou embodied the very best of what it means to serve others. said, Shannon Burns, Senior Advisor to Patient First Coalition. “Her courage to challenge the system, her compassion for those in need, and her unwavering belief in patient choice created a legacy that will continue to guide our work every day”.

About the Patient First Coalition

The Patient First Coalition is a national movement dedicated to advancing health freedom, patient-centered healthcare through innovation, collaboration, and advocacy. Through its programs, partnerships, and events, the organization brings together leaders across healthcare, policy, and wellness to drive meaningful change.

For More Information:

www.1stcoalition.org

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