

Your Community Health Center welcomes everyone

By Eric Owen

Imagine a healthcare system that serves everyone, turns no one away due to inability to pay, delivers high-quality care that heals the sick, prevents illness and saves money for patients and taxpayers. That's what a Community Health Center does.

RiverStone Health – your Community Health Center – has provided primary care since 1984 on South 27th Street. More than 25 years ago, we became one of the first Teaching Health Centers in the nation and currently are training 27 family physicians for rural practice in the Montana Family Medicine Residency.

On a typical day, our medical, dental or behavioral healthcare providers serve patients in half a dozen locations in Yellowstone and Carbon counties. We see patients in rural clinics, in school-based clinics, at our clinic location in downtown Billings and at our Healthcare for the Homeless Clinics. We also meet people where they're at whether that's in their home, on the street or in a nursing home. RiverStone Health is one of 14 Community Health Centers serving more than 117,500 Montanans annually from 80 locations across our great, big state.

Most patients who come through our doors are people who may have difficulty accessing other health services. Among our nearly 14,000 patients, about 1,000 have been homeless. The majority of our patients are enrolled in Medicaid or have no insurance coverage at all. We also serve Medicare enrollees and people with private insurance.

RiverStone Health is proud to create a safe space for everyone to get the affordable, quality healthcare they deserve, especially for people least likely to have access to it, reducing unnecessary hospitalizations and emergency department visits. When people who rely on public health coverage avoid unnecessary healthcare costs, taxpayers save money. Research has shown that costs of care for Medicaid and Medicare patients are less at Community Health Centers and they receive the same high-quality care people get at private providers. In the year 2021, Community Health Centers nationwide were estimated to have saved those government programs \$25.3 billion.

Our clinics are supported by federal grants that allow us to offer patients discounted fees based on their income. The funding enables us to provide healthcare to all, regardless of their ability to pay. We can help people who have no insurance and people who cannot afford the deductibles on their insurance.

Our primary care patients can receive an array of cutting-edge integrated services. Our professional counselors provide mental healthcare. Our addiction medicine specialists treat substance use disorders. Our patients have access to our Live Well Center with professional coaching on fitness, nutrition, weight control and access to exercise equipment. Our Community Health Center includes a dental clinic for kids and adults and a pharmacy – all in one conveniently located building.

We connect our patients to other RiverStone Health Services, including case management, home care, hospice, WIC and home visiting programs to support pregnant women, families, and children living in foster care settings.

During Community Health Center Week Aug. 7-12, we thank our patients for entrusting us with their care and allowing us to be part of their journey to better health. We celebrate our dedicated staff, and we highlight our mission to improve life, health and safety for our entire community. If you would like to learn more, check us out at riverstonehealth.org.

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