

Letter to the Editor (Op-Ed)

Celebrate National Health Center Week 2024 with RiverStone Health

Communities across the country are celebrating National Health Center Week from August 4–10, 2024. I ask for your support in recognizing the critical work of our local community health center at RiverStone Health, and the work we do to keep our communities healthy and safe.

Current bipartisan support of community health centers shows that not only is it possible to move beyond the partisan divide over health care, but essential to support and agree on a program vital to the success of urban, rural and frontier communities across Montana and the U.S.

Community health centers provide integrated preventive and primary care services to 31.5 million people and are the first to respond with wraparound care during disasters and health emergencies. Our patient-directed model of care is tailored to meet the unique needs of each community. Together, we are the backbone of the nation's primary care system. [Health centers save the U.S. healthcare system money by](#) reducing the rate of chronic diseases and costly hospital visits.

Community health center staff are not just healers; they are innovators who look beyond medical charts to not only prevent illness but also address the factors that may cause poor health, like poverty, homelessness, substance use, mental illness, access to nutritious food and unemployment. The work of RiverStone Health directly generates over \$49 million in economic impact to Yellowstone County.

RiverStone Health is a critical part of our community's health care system and collaborates closely with hospitals, local and state government, social and business organizations to improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs. RiverStone Health and the other 1,400 health centers across the country are dedicated to making high quality, affordable health care available to everyone in their communities, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

This year, RiverStone Health celebrates 50 years of public health service as the Yellowstone City-County Health Department, founded on June 25, 1974. RiverStone Health Clinic is also celebrating 40 years of healthcare delivery as Montana's first community health center, which began seeing patients on the corner of South 27th Street and 1st Avenue South as the Deering Clinic in 1984.

Today, RiverStone Health Clinic provides comprehensive primary care, behavioral health, and dental care services to over 13,000 patients annually. Yet, we're so much more than just a clinic. As home to the Montana Family Medicine Residency, RiverStone Health develops the next generation of family medicine physicians to support rural and frontier communities across Montana and the mountain west. Our RiverStone Health Home Health and Hospice programs continue to receive the best quality and patient satisfaction scores in our region, ensuring dignity and high-quality care for Montana's aging population.

I am grateful that Montana's Congressional delegation, Senator Steve Daines, Senator Jon Tester, Representative Ryan Zinke, and Representative Matt Rosendale have shown bipartisan leadership in supporting and sponsoring legislation that will sustain community health centers and graduate medical education programs benefiting all Montanans. Long-term, stable funding for health centers ensures we can keep our doors open and work to narrow the growing gap in health care access for medically vulnerable communities.

Please join me in thanking the dedicated team at RiverStone Health for their service to our community as we celebrate National Health Center Week 2024!

Jonathan Forte

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