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FEATURED

## River Valley Family Health racks up federal honors, highlighting commitment to care-access

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From left: River Valley board secretary Sue Schreier; River Valley board member Tracy Gallegos; River Valley CEO Jeremy Carroll and State Rep. Matt Soper usher in the opening of River Valley Family Health Centers Convenient Care Clinic in Delta late last month. The federally qualified health center complex of three facilities in Olathe, Montrose and Delta racked up several big honors awarded by its federal oversight agency. (Courtesy photo/River Valley)

Increased access to medical care is a driving force for River Valley Family Health Centers — and, despite being in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the local federally qualified health centers complex actually grew its patient base.

The increase exceeded 20%, more than enough to secure River Valley an Access Enhancer award from the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration when the federal body recognized clinics with annual Quality Awards. River Valley was one of only two federally qualified health centers in the state to receive the honor and one of only three to grow patient numbers by at least 5% in 2020.

“In a pandemic, it’s amazing. That just shows the dedication of all of our staff standing tall in the face of COVID,” River Valley CEO Jeremy Carroll said Wednesday, Sept. 29. “We never laid off a single person. We created a safe environment. We’re really proud we still grew in the middle of a pandemic.”

The clinic was also one of three federally qualified health centers in the state to be recognized as a Gold Level Health Center Quality Leader, putting it in the top 10% of all such centers nationally for clinical quality measure performance. It’s the fourth year in a row River Valley nabbed the honor.

The clinic further received honors in the category of Health Disparities Reducer, meeting federally established goals for improvements in areas of low birth weight, high blood pressure or uncontrolled diabetes for at least one racial or ethnic minority group. River Valley was the only federally qualified health center in the state to receive this recognition.

Also, it was one of 15 in Colorado to receive the Advancing Health Information Technology for Quality award and was recognized for Patient Centered Medical Home, the latter due in part to having three clinic locations.

A federally qualified health center is a community-based health care provider that receives Health Resources and Services Administration funding to provide primary care in under-served areas. Among requirements for such centers is a sliding-fee scale based on ability to pay and a governing board that includes patients. River Valley accepts all forms of insurance, as well as uninsured patients.

The recent honors reflect River Valley’s commitment to patient access, Carroll said.

“Access to care is the No. 1 priority for River Valley. Our mission statement is to provide access,” he said.

The focus is on access, quality and integration of care (medical, mental health and dental).

To rise to the challenge, River Valley recently added its Convenient Care Clinic in Delta to complement its Montrose and Olathe locations; it is also planning to build a full-service clinic in Delta next year, with a drive-through pharmacy similar to the one at the Montrose facility. Opening it will be “huge” for overall service and increased access, Carroll said.

In about just two weeks of being open, the Convenient Care Clinic logged 80 patient encounters, addressing general illness, COVID testing, wounds and other concerns. The hope is to continue working with Delta Health (formerly Delta County Memorial Hospital and including its associated clinics) and to open seven days a week, up from the current availability of Monday – Thursday.

“I think our community has much better access than we have had in years and I think that is exciting, but I don’t think we’re done,” Carroll said.

He’s especially proud of the Health Center Quality Leader Award, which is given for quality performance. “For the fourth year in a row, we have been in the top 10% of all federally qualified health centers in the nation. We are No. 1 in the state for meeting quality metrics,” he said.

“The mission is access, then quality. Our staff does a phenomenal job in offering full-body care. To get that (award) is pretty cool on the Western Slope of Colorado.”

River Valley achieved the Health Disparities Reducer Award in part by significant improvements in the areas the government spotlights. As just one example, Carroll pointed to staff working to schedule procedures such as colonoscopies and mammograms during the height of the pandemic.

At that time, these were difficult to schedule because there were no places performing them; hospitals in general were not scheduling elective procedures. River Valley staffers kept track of which patients were due for these types of procedures and, once hospitals were again offering elective services, the patient health navigators and referral specialists worked hard to schedule them.

“It was about being patient, but also about being diligent in who needed them and, once (facilities) opened, getting them scheduled as soon as we could,” Carroll said.

River Valley's technology quality award recognizes how the clinic uses technology to share critical information with other health care facilities. The clinic further routinely receives designation as a Patient Centered Medical Home, going through recertification each year for the designation.

River Valley Family Health Centers can be reached in Montrose at 970-497-3333; in Olathe at 970-323-6141 and in Delta at 970-874-8981. Visit [rivervalleyfhc.com](http://rivervalleyfhc.com) for more information.

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