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Kansas clinics honored during Community Care Clinic Week

August 9, 2020

TOPEKA – Ever since the federal health center program began in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, such clinics have targeted medically underserved communities. Their purpose was to remove barriers that limited access to care, reduce health disparities, improve population health and save money in the long run through system-wide reform.

Since that time, tremendous strides have been made in all the targeted areas. In 2020, however, all remain serious issues for individuals and communities throughout the nation.

In Kansas, there is a network of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Look-Alikes (LALs), Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) as well as public and private nonprofit primary care clinics, dedicated to providing integrated care that is accessible to all Kansans, regardless of their ability to pay. The Community Care Network of Kansas is comprised of 34 community-based clinics with more than 100 sites that are the state’s largest source of comprehensive care for medically underserved populations.

Since 1989, Community Care has helped grow and strengthen network clinics and the availability of resources so that all Kansans can access primary medical, dental and behavioral care close to home. Whether preventive care or treatment for an acute condition is needed, Community Care works to make sure Kansans have access to the care they need and deserve.

But it is the clinics themselves that provide the services. And every August, a week is dedicated to recognize the incredible work these passionate professionals perform throughout the year.

August 9-15, 2020, is Community Care Clinic Week as well as National Health Center Week. Governor Laura Kelly signed a proclamation encouraging the people of Kansas to participate in the observance.

The governor noted Community Care clinics serve one in nine Kansans with whole-person care, save money by reducing the total cost of care, and leverage federal, state, local community and foundation resources. Every clinic in the network delivers care in the way that makes most sense to the communities they serve. What they have in common, though, is their commitment to serve everyone, regardless of ability to pay.

Last year, the clinics reached a milestone. Kansans were served through more than 1 million visits, receiving care for their minds, bodies and smiles, along with support for life circumstances that create barriers to health.

This year, Community Care clinics stepped right to the front line of the pandemic by screening, testing, diagnosing and caring for COVID-19 patients since the alarm was sounded in Kansas. Capacities for these operations were developed by partnering with local hospitals, health departments and other community stakeholders. Parking lots have been transformed into drive-through and walk-up clinics. Mobile clinics travel to homeless shelters, jails, long-term care facilities and other high-risk institutions. Clinic spaces have been segregated for obvious reasons. All these practices were designed to help flatten the curve and alleviate what could have been an overwhelming burden on local public health departments and hospitals.

Simultaneously, Community Care clinics transformed their delivery of primary, behavioral and dental care to telehealth as usual patient needs did not disappear during the pandemic. Again, 100 percent of health centers now provide non-emergent care through patient portal, telephone and video services. This enables face-to-face visits to be focused on COVID-19 and emergency care.

In short, the state's health safety net is responding as designed. It will continue doing so even after the pandemic ends. That is worth celebrating.

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About Community Care Clinic of Kansas: Community Care exists to achieve equitable access to high-quality, whole-person care for all Kansans, regardless of ability to pay. As the Primary Care Association (PCA) for Kansas, Community Care supports and strengthens its members through advocacy, education and communication. Community Care's diverse membership includes Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and Look-Alikes (LALs), as well as public and private nonprofit Community-Based Primary Care Clinics (CBPCCs) and Rural Health Clinics (RHCs).