

HEALTH

Rural health access for all

CHCNEO clinics a vital resource for northeast Oklahoma



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AFTON – Community Health Centers (CHC) had their start over 50 years ago when community health activists came together on a national level to form a new healthcare model targeting specific barriers faced by underserved rural and urban communities to establish neighborhood clinics.

Since then, expansion of the federally-supported health center system has grown to over 1,400 organizations providing affordable health care options for more than 27 million people, according to the National Association of Community Health Centers.

According to the Oklahoma Primary Care Association, CHCs are community-based and patient-directed organizations that serve local populations in high-need areas identified by the federal government as having limited physicians, higher than average infant mortality, and elevated poverty.

CHCs primarily operate as federally qualified health centers with their organizations receiving grants under Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act. This qualifies them for enhanced reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid, as well as other benefits. As such, federally qualified health centers must serve an underserved area or population, offer a sliding fee scale, provide comprehensive services, have an ongoing quality assurance program, and have a governing board of directors.

By offering care to everyone regardless of an ability to pay or insurance status, CHCs provide greater access to preventative services, chronic disease management, oral health, and behavioral health to improve the quality and longevity of the communities they serve.

Building Local Healthcare Access

Among the over 1,400 CHC organizations representing more than 9,800 service sites in the U.S., more than 55 percent are in rural communities, among them, clinics in Afton, Grove, and Welch facilitated by Community Health Center of Northeast Oklahoma, Inc. (CHCNEO).

In 2009, several area community leaders determined there was a need to establish a local clinic to provide primary care to the uninsured, underinsured, Medicaid and Medicare patients residing in the Craig, Delaware and Ottawa County region.

After an initial petition for federal grant funding for a local CHC was denied, efforts continued with additional grant applications and a board of directors was established instituting corporate bylaws and applying to the state to become incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

A third grant application was finally approved in 2014 paving the way for the opening of CHCNEO's first clinic in Afton in March of the same year then named the Route 66 Health Clinic with health services under the supervision of Dr. William Durick.

Since then, CHCNEO has established two additional CHCs, one in Grove and one in Welch.

In 2016 the CHCNEO Board of



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Pictured from left at the Afton Community Health Center are CHCNEO Licensed Clinical Social Worker Diane Vinsion and CEO Patrick Peer. Vinsion recently relocated to the region and is now providing behavioral health services, with an emphasis on reducing dependency on opioid medications and adolescent counseling, through CHCNEO.

CHCNEO's first clinic in Afton began as the Route 66 Health Clinic and has since been renamed the Afton Community Health Center and moved to a new facility at 21965 Bison Drive in Afton just off Highway 59, west of the Miller Pecan Company.

COURTESY PHOTO



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In 2016 CHCNEO opened its second location in Grove at 10405 US Highway 59. Pictured is CHCNEO staff at the ribbon cutting, with Dr. William Durick, the supervising physician and provider given the honor of making the ceremonial cut.

CHCNEO CLINICS

Clinic hours for all three CHCNEO locations are Monday thru Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., closing for lunch from noon to 1 p.m.

Afton Community Health Center
21965 Bison Drive
Afton, OK 74331
918-257-8029

Grove Community Health Center
10405 U.S. Hwy 59 North
Grove, OK 74344
918-801-7504

Welch Community Health Center
343 South Commercial Street
Welch, OK 74369
918-788-3918

Directors approved a request by CHCNEO CEO Patrick Peer to establish the Grove Community Health Center at 10405 US Highway 59 with Durick moving his practice to Grove and later joined by Russell Peters, APRN-CNP.

In July 2016 of the same year, a business decision was made by St. Francis Hospitals to close their clinic location in Welch and an offer was extended to CHCNEO administration to lease the site at 343 S. Commercial St.

The CHCNEO Board of Directors approved the request to establish the Welch site and in October 2017, after receiving authorization from the federal government, the Welch Community Health Center began operation.

The reopening of the Welch facility under CHCNEO also allowed clients in northern Craig and Ottawa counties to continue receiving care under the supervision of Family Medicine Physician Assistant Billy R. Evans who has practiced at the clinic location for over 20 years.

Since reopening under CHCNEO the Welch clinic has also extended its service hours from three days a week, two of which were half days, to 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday to

SEE CLINICS, C6