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DAILY BULLETIN

East Valley Community Health Center opens its doors in south Pomona



Dr. Li Wong, right, examines the ear of Fatima Muñoz, during the grand opening of the new East Valley Community Health Center facility in Pomona Tuesday. East Valley provides low-cost modern health care medical services that include primary care, pediatric services, HIV testing and others. Photos by James Carbone.

By [Monica Rodriguez](#), Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

POMONA >> For years, East Valley Community Health Center's Pomona clinic served thousands of patients from a 10,000-square-foot storefront in a strip mall along Fairplex Drive on the city's western end.

Tuesday afternoon, health care professionals, administrators, elected officials and plenty of guests celebrated the opening of a new and much-improved Pomona facility in what was once a grocery store in the 1500 block of South Garey Avenue.

The move to the 25,000-square-foot facility is going to allow East Valley to provide a broad range of health services including primary care for children, teens and adults; prenatal care and family planning services; dental care, mental health services and comprehensive HIV services. Assemblyman Freddie Rodriguez, D-Chino, said that during his tenure as a Pomona councilman East Valley representatives approached him about opening a health care facility at the location.

I was looking at keeping this as a grocery store," he told the audience of more than 150 people. East Valley's idea was a good one and presented an opportunity to have "affordable health care in our back yard."

Mayor Elliott Rothman said he was familiar with the Fairplex Drive facility but it "just wasn't enough for the amount of people they're servicing."

Alicia Mardini, East Valley's chief executive officer, said the new facility is going to allow the Pomona clinic's personnel to provide services to many more people, primarily those who are low income and don't have insurance, she said.

"We believe quality health care services are a right for all people, not just those who can afford it," Mardini said.

At the Fairplex Drive facility, personnel were able to provide services to 8,500 individual patients who made 20,000 visits a year to the facility, she said after the ceremony.

Cool Facts

The Fairplex Drive facility is 10,000 square feet. The Garey Avenue building has 25,000 square feet.

Fairplex Drive consisted of 8 examination rooms and the Garey Avenue building has 18 exam rooms.

At Fairplex Drive provided services to 8,500 patients annually who made 20,000 visits a year. In two to three years the Garey Avenue facility will have about 17,000 patients making about 59,500 visits a year.

The Fairplex Drive facility had at total of 75 employees and the Garey Avenue clinic has 100.

Fairplex had seven health care providers. Providers include physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, dentists and mental health specialists. East Valley has just hired a dentist and mental health provider and will add additional positions based on the Pomona Center's growth.

In two to three years, the new facility is expected to provide care to about 17,000 individual patients who will make about 59,500 visits a year, she said.

After the ceremony, Mardini said the \$4.5 million project came about with \$1.4 million in grants from the Keck Foundation, Ahmanson Foundation, Parsons Foundation, W.M. Keck Foundation, the Weingart Foundation and the Rose Hills Foundation.

Another \$3.1 million came from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources Services Administration, which allocated funds for capital expansion in connection to the Affordable Care Act, she said.

East Valley Community Health Center also has facilities in West Covina and La Puente.

Rebecca Armendariz of Pomona has been a patient at the Pomona center for about five years. Armendariz worked for the Pomona Unified School District for about 10 years but in 2008 health problems that include arthritis and diabetes forced her to leave her job.

Finding herself without health insurance, she turned to East Valley where she found assistance in applying for an insurance program for people on a limited income. At East Valley, Armendariz has a doctor who cares for her medical needs and who is compassionate but is also firm about discussing medical care.

“She scolds me, she helps me, and I appreciate her so much,” Armendariz said told the audience. Armendariz said she likes the new Pomona center, particularly the ample parking. Parking at the Fairplex Drive facility was limited.

With the help of East Valley, Armendariz said her health has improved enough that she is now able to be a part-time volunteer secretary at her church.

Registered nurse Jessica Oregel said the new facility is good for both patients and staff. Oregel began working at East Valley’s Pomona Center about 2 1/2 years ago, starting shortly after completing her nursing training.

At East Valley, Oregel provides care to her patients and does something she knew she wanted to do when she began her training. She is able to help educate people so they can live healthier lives.

“I wanted to help educate the community,” Oregel said. “In a lot of these patients, I see my family, my mom, my aunts, people who need health education,”

Councilwoman Cristina Carrizosa said East Valley’s Pomona center has taken an abandoned grocery store and turned into a “professional, elegant and functional” facility that is going to provide much-needed health services to area residents.

In addition, the facility is going to boost the neighborhood economy. “All these small businesses are going to benefit from this,” she said after the ceremony.