



New women's health clinic aims to ease burden of increasing demand

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SAN JUAN — As they recognized the opening of the Rio Grande Valley's newest healthcare center for the low income and uninsured, several area leaders recalled the time when the only health care they themselves could get came from such clinics.

"It was always Nuestra Clinica del Valle that was there to provide that care for us," said Mayor Pro Tem Armando Garza, recalling seeking childhood medical attention when his family would return from picking crops up north.

The organization marked its 40th anniversary Wednesday with the opening of a women's clinic at 806 W. Third St. The location is Nuestra Clinica del Valle's 11th location in the Valley and is only a block away from its largest facility.

Leaders of the organization are hoping that separating out obstetric services will allow them to serve more patients and lighten the load on the other crowded clinics.

"We had our services already established at our main clinic in San Juan," said Community Outreach Director Christian Muñoz. "Having all our services in one building, the traffic was enormous."

The new, 10,500-square-foot facility is expected to see about 2,000 patients per year. But even with that, leaders of Nuestra Clinica said it is a challenge to meet rising demand for health care from uninsured patients in the region.

"It's estimated that probably 30 (percent) to 40 percent (of people in Hidalgo County) are uninsured, and we serve about 40,000," Executive Director Lucy Ramirez said. "The need is great."

Muñoz and Ramirez said cuts to government services being made and patient confusion regarding changes to Medicaid have complicated the healthcare climate. Overall, pressure on low-cost clinics is increasing.

"Sometimes it's a little overwhelming with the people who come in, but we try our best to accommodate everyone," Muñoz said.

Elected officials from around the region turned out Wednesday to celebrate the clinic, which began accepting patients that afternoon. Leaders called having a center dedicated to women's health care especially important.

"I do believe that it's probably women who wait until the last minute to see a doctor, as primary caregivers in their families," Mayor San Juanita Sanchez said.

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