

# Telling Missouri's Public Health Stories



## Stepping Up to the Plate

Paige Behm hung up the phone feeling heartsick. She had just received word that the company that had been providing Title X family planning services in her community would be closing their doors. They stated that mounting program costs were making the program cost-prohibitive, and increasing insurance coverage was decreasing the need for the program.

McDonald County has the highest rates of uninsured adults<sup>1</sup> and Stage 3 breast cancer in Missouri.<sup>2</sup>

"I thought about all those women, and wondered where they would find services now," says Behm, administrator of the McDonald County Health Department in Pineville, Missouri. "If we lose Title X funding and don't have it for another year, where are these women going to be by then?"

Behm began making calls, but found everyone was struggling to find grants for women's health services and a new Title X application could take up to a year. She knew Joplin offered services, but many of the women in her county didn't have the means to make the 40-mile trip.



"We decided we're just going to have to do it ourselves," she said. But without the funds to hire a nurse practitioner that would be needed for the program, Behm knew she'd have to reach out.

She met with Ozarks New Hope, an affiliate clinic of Ozarks Community Hospital, and asked for their help. They agreed to send a nurse practitioner from Webb City to provide full women's health check-ups, offer breast cancer screenings, and even discuss other health issues like diabetes or high blood pressure with patients. Behm agreed to host the clinic at the Health Department in Pineville and provide clinic supplies and birth control pills. It took two weeks to solidify the new public health partnership and three weeks to get the clinic set up.



Health Department staff check the height of a patient during her visit to the women's clinic.

"The beauty of it was we found out the first week in April that we were losing family planning, and we had our clinic open by May 7<sup>th</sup>," said Behm. "We just had to move quickly. We could not let these women go without services."

The clinic currently serves about 85 clients and is able to provide broader women's health services than the Title X program allowed. There are no age restrictions or health insurance restrictions, however Behm says they definitely reach out to women who are uninsured.

“We’re able to conduct clinic visits in about half the time of a Title X visit and at a fraction of the cost,” says Behm. “Several clients we’ve talked to are thrilled that they won’t have to find another practitioner and won’t have to travel.”

Behm is quick to add that McDonald County Health Department is not the first to test this model in Missouri. She says she received a lot of advice from the Hickory County Health Department in Hermitage.

“When you can’t count on funding, it’s like, we’ve got to do something,” says Behm. “Maybe this will open the door for something else we can provide, through collaboration with a couple of other agencies. By all means, if we can meet the need, we want to.”

In fact, she is already planning the future.

“We’re hoping to open the door to doing some chronic disease clinics. We have broader needs than just women’s services.”

The county has the highest rate of uninsured children in Missouri,<sup>1</sup> and there are many undocumented children who can’t get Medicaid.



The clinic offers broad public health services for women, including car seat installations.

“I see this clinic as being a first step down the path to open the door to see how we can meet the needs of the uninsured and how we can make it work. If we can meet the needs of women’s health, then surely we can do something about chronic health.”

The US Department of Health and Human Services promotes the Public Health 3.0 model, emphasizing strong leadership from local public health agencies acting as “Chief Health Strategists” and encouraging cross-discipline collaboration in order to ensure the conditions in which everyone can be healthy. McDonald County Health Department is living proof that this model works.

“It amazes me,” says Behm. “Sometimes we think no one wants to help, and then you ask, and they say ‘Oh my gosh, we would love to do that!’ Sometimes you just have to give them a reason, and they step up to the plate and do it. That is the nice thing about rural communities.”

<sup>1</sup>US Census Bureau. Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE). Retrieved May 31, 2018 from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p30-03.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Missouri Information for Community Assessment (MICA). Retrieved May 31, 2018 from <https://webapp01.dhss.mo.gov/MOPHIMS/ProfileBuilder?pc=26>.

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The #HealthierMO initiative is seeking more stories like this one that demonstrate how partners in Missouri’s greater public health system are working together to transform the future of public health in our state and offer every resident the opportunity for a healthier life. If you have a story to share, message us on Facebook @HealthierMO or email Communications Coordinator Jaci McReynolds at [jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org](mailto:jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org). Learn more about the initiative and how you can get involved at [HealthierMO.org](http://HealthierMO.org) or on Facebook @HealthierMO or Twitter @aHealthierMO.