

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care is seeking nominations for 2021 Missouri Rural Health Champions. Awards will be presented on November 18, 2021, during the Missouri Rural Health Day celebration. This award is designed to honor a minimum of one individual and one group, depending on the number and type of nominations received. The person or group honored should demonstrate how their contributions are making a difference in Missouri rural health care through collaboration, education, innovation and communication. The nomination deadline is September 7, 2021.

Are you nominating an individual or a group?

- Individual
- Group

Who is your nominee?

Nominee Name

Affiliated Organization

Nominator Information

Name

Organization

Nominee's affiliated organization type

- Hospital
- Rural Health Clinic
- Federally Qualified Health Center
- Outpatient Clinic
- State Government
- University
- Other, please specify

What rural community does your nominee serve?

Please describe your connection/affiliation to the nominee.

We are partnered in many community coalitions, and our medical providers volunteer at the clinic.

In 1,000 words or less, please describe why do you believe your nominee is the best individual for the 2021 Missouri Rural Health Champion Award? Please provide timeline of specific activities.

The Community Clinic of Southwest Missouri has provided services throughout the pandemic to the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach residents of Southwest Missouri. The staff and volunteer team has responded proactively to the COVID-19 outbreak, implementing policies and procedures to ensure the health and safety of their patients, staff and volunteers. The policies developed by the clinic were used by free and charitable clinics throughout Missouri. The Executive Director, Stephanie Brady, has provided technical assistance to clinics and other nonprofits nationwide regarding COVID response through the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics and Project Finish-line. The Community Clinic primarily provides care in eight counties in southwest Missouri and four counties in southeast Kansas, though they do not turn away anyone who is in need. Services are available at no cost to individuals at or below 250% of the Federal poverty guidelines who do not have access to health insurance. The majority of our medical care is provided by volunteer doctors, nurses, and pharmacists. A small staff of paid employees relies heavily on the charitable nature of our community. Care is provided Monday-Thursday with specialty clinics one Friday a month and two evenings a month. Patients benefit from primary care, specialty care, nutrition, mental health counseling, dental care, physical therapy, patient advocacy, physical therapy, prescription services, and lab services at no cost.

Throughout COVID, the clinic has worked to ensure that those without insurance are able to access the care they need. The clinic has not lost a single day of service due to COVID, and quickly pivoted to provide appropriate care via telehealth. The clinic also began offering home delivery of medication as needed. The team implemented several safety features to reduce the risk to patients and staff and has not had a single outbreak or case tied to the clinic.

Clinic staff members have been mask advocates from the beginning. They mandated masks and had volunteers making masks to give to patients in the early days of COVID. When the City of Joplin was considering mask mandates, Stephanie Brady joined the rest of the medical community to advocate for the mandate. Stephanie spoke at City Council meetings and worked to educate the public about the safety and efficacy of mask usage.

On the vaccine front, the clinic has been a pioneer in southwest Missouri, taking up the call to provide the vaccine to the most at-risk populations. The clinic joined the Joplin Health Collaborative's COVID Task Force and quickly mobilized staff and volunteers to participate in and coordinate vaccine clinics. To date, the clinic has administered nearly 3,000 vaccines and has facilitated the administration of nearly 1,500 vaccines from other area providers.

At the clinic, we believe that if you take the vaccine to the individual, you will have greater success. With that, we are willing to go nearly anywhere to offer vaccine education and administration to at-risk populations. The clinic is the primary organization in southwest Missouri targeting the vaccine within the homeless population. The clinic works closely in this population to help dispel myths and gain trust to encourage the vaccine. To date, the clinic has provided 15 vaccination clinics at various homeless shelters and congregate meal locations throughout southwest Missouri, especially in rural areas. In addition, the clinic works closely with the Area Agency on Aging and local health departments to provide home administration of vaccines to homebound senior citizens in Jasper, Newton and Dade Counties. They have vaccinated more than 40 homebound seniors who would not have had access to the vaccine otherwise.

During COVID, there has been a significant increase in the need for anxiety, depression, and grief counseling tied directly to the pandemic. The clinic increased our counseling services from three to four days per week as a result. Approximately 60 percent of counseling services are currently provided via telehealth, which works well for the needs of rural patients as well as patients with high anxiety. The team recognizes the importance of mental health counseling to improve the overall health of patients and is dedicated to meeting their needs.

In addition to providing services in traditional clinical settings, they have looked outside the box to meet needs in a variety of nontraditional ways. The clinic has partnered with hair salons, factories, restaurants, coffee shops, schools, churches, and more to provide vaccination clinics on site and at various community events. When the vaccine first became available, the clinic offered three vaccination clinics at Joplin Public Schools, vaccinating more than 150 teachers and faculty. The clinic also works with Head Start and Early Head Start to offer vaccines and is currently scheduling fall drive-through COVID and flu shot vaccine clinics with the Head Start offices in three counties.

As outbreaks have occurred at area homeless shelters, the clinic has stepped up to provide on-site testing for residents to ensure the safety of the community. Recently, Soul's Harbor and Lafayette House both had significant outbreaks. The clinic tested all residents, staff and volunteers at both locations, provided guidance to the staff regarding quarantine and safety measures, and then offered vaccine clinics once the outbreaks were managed.

The clinic staff and board are dedicated to being advocates for the vaccine. As soon as the vaccine was available, 100% of the clinic staff and board members rolled up their sleeves and got vaccinated. Recently, the clinic board voted to mandate the vaccine for staff and volunteers. They believe if they are going to talk the talk, they need to walk the walk.

I can confirm that the nominee is making a difference in rural communities through collaboration, education, innovation and communication, and is working or volunteering in a designated rural area.

- Yes
 No

I can confirm that the nominee is a Missouri resident.

- Yes
 No

How did you hear about the 2021 Missouri Rural Health Champion Award?

Web site