

A Fresh, Ambitious Approach to Community Health

Want a glimpse into the future of healthcare delivery? Take a look at Blackstone Valley Community Health Care

Central Falls, Rhode Island is one of the most densely populated communities in the United States, with 19,000 residents living in a little more than one square mile. About 70% of the population is Latino; 40% speak a language other than English at home. Many residents live in poverty.

“Central Falls is the poorest city in Rhode Island, but it also has a tremendous amount of resilience with many different ethnic communities and many people who work two and three jobs,” says Dr. Michael Fine, senior population health and clinical services officer at Blackstone Valley Community Health Care, which has been serving Central Falls since 1976.

Until recently, Blackstone Valley Community Health Care has been slowly and incrementally growing in Central Falls. “We were always limited by the size of our facility,” explains Raymond Lavoie, executive director. “We could never employ more than three and a half docs, which was enough to serve about 6,000 patients.”

A chain of events that occurred in Central Falls created the opportunity for Blackstone Valley to not only expand exponentially in the community, but to implement an exciting, potentially far-reaching new model for delivering healthcare.



CLIENT PROFILE

Blackstone Valley Community Health Care

- Formed in 1990 when smaller health clinics in Pawtucket and Central Falls, Rhode Island joined together
- Practice sites in Pawtucket and Central Falls, as well as a separate dental facility
- Offers a medical home to patients of all ages
- Services include pediatric, adolescent, and adult preventative and acute care; prenatal care and women’s health; behavioral health; and dental services
- Serves as a support center for a network of health centers advancing health information technology in Rhode Island
- A Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) health center quality leader, among the top 30% of HRSA-supported health centers that achieved the best overall clinical outcomes

HIGHLIGHTS



Supported implementation of a new model of care delivery—the neighborhood health station



Enabled practice to grow to become a strong neighborhood resource with the goal of delivering quality care to 90% of the community



Facilitated pre-visit planning for virtually every patient in the appointment schedule



Earned designation as an accountable entity by the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, one of six practices designated as accountable entities in the state

A time of change for Central Falls

The city of Central Falls went into bankruptcy in 2011. The bankruptcy, and the city's emergence from it, according to Dr. Fine, was a turning point in the history of Central Falls.

"After it went into bankruptcy, Central Falls got a new mayor and new city council. These were forward-thinking young people," explains Dr. Fine. "The mayor was Latino. Most members of the city council were Latino or people of color."

A concept becomes reality

In 2013, Dr. Fine served as the director of the Rhode Island Department of Health and as part of his work, he was developing a concept of a neighborhood health station.

This would be a new kind of community health organization that builds community as it improves the health of individuals. It would provide a place for people to access a variety of medical services and a coordinated team of health professionals to oversee care. It would also serve as a community organization that advocates for the health of residents.

During this time, the Rhode Island Department of Health was going through a community health assessment and as a part of this process, the department went on a listening tour.

At the meeting, many residents expressed concerns about the closing of the community recreational center in Central Falls—a result of the bankruptcy and a significant loss in a densely populated city with no open spaces. They also expressed concerns about access to medical care.

"Among the things we heard was that people felt they didn't have access to primary care or that they wanted better access," recalls Dr. Fine.

The Department of Health began reaching out to medical, recreational, and social service organizations as potential partners with the goal of addressing the needs residents expressed at the meeting. Out of that process emerged an idea: "Why don't we just build a neighborhood health station in Central Falls."

Thus, events in Central Falls created the opportunity to put the first urban neighborhood health station on the map, and to show the value of this care delivery model.

A new building for a new approach to community health

In June 2019, Blackstone Valley Community Health Care moved into a 47,000-square-foot, brand-new building and began operating as a neighborhood health station. They now practice in cooperation with several other healthcare service providers who've taken up residence at the same address.

As a neighborhood health station, Blackstone Valley can deliver extensive services beyond what is traditionally offered by most community health centers (CHCs). Lavoie calls it a "CHC on steroids."

"Our local hospital closed down about a year and a half ago when our new building was still on the drawing board," says Lavoie. "We knew we had to expand the size of the building compared to what we first contemplated. We knew we had to offer more preventative care because the people of Central Falls no longer had a hospital to go to within a stone's throw."

"This would be a new kind of community health organization that builds community as it improves the health of individuals."

Staff at Blackstone Valley are enthusiastic about having varied services offered under one roof. “In a typical community health center a doctor may tell a patient to get an x-ray, but the patient may never get that x-ray because of lack of access to transportation or other reasons. Here with a radiology practice in the same building, a Blackstone Valley staff member can literally walk them across the hall,” says Lavoie.

Goal: Reaching 90% of the population

According to Lavoie, the goal of the neighborhood health station is to serve 90% of the people in Central Falls with 90% of their healthcare needs. There will be 100 people working in the building, serving 17,000 patients—about 90% of the citizens of Central Falls—and managing from 80,000 to 90,000 visits a year, of all types, including medical, dental, and behavioral health.

Robust analytics are needed to support Blackstone Valley’s innovative move towards a one-stop-shop care model. According to Lavoie, that need is filled through NextGen® Population Health.

“With the increasing number of patients we see each day, NextGen Healthcare’s population health analytics allow us to operate more efficiently. It helps us keep our focus on being a strong neighborhood hub to deliver the quality care residents need and deserve.

“Our partnership with NextGen Healthcare is helping propel us towards the goal of becoming a true care innovator among today’s CHCs,” adds Lavoie. “They’ve helped us become a leader in population health. We’re the only practice in the state with access to information built on marrying claims data with clinical data.

“We can do wonderful things with this information. We can do pre-visit planning for virtually every patient on the schedule. As long as they’re a member of an insurance plan that sends us claims data, we will know their gaps in care and whether they’re a high-cost or high-risk patient.

“Based on this information, we’ll staff their visit appropriately; for example, with a nurse care manager, a behavioral health worker, or a community health worker. We’re able to pinpoint the patient’s needs before we even see the patient,” says Lavoie.

Blackstone Valley offers primary care, pediatrics, OB/GYN services, and a walk-in clinic called Express Care. Healthcare services in their new building include:

- The Providence Center – care for serious, persistent behavioral health issues
- Lifespan Outpatient Rehabilitation – physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and on-site lab services
- Advanced Radiology – walk-in x-rays
- Blackstone Valley Community Health Care Dental Services in the onsite Delta Dental Clinic
- An optometry clinic, a Blackstone Valley Community Health Care service
- CVS pharmacy



Reaching the full potential of population health

Dr. Fine says that Blackstone Valley's population health initiative is significant when one considers the limited ability of traditional public health initiatives to achieve measurable results when seeking to improve the health of a community.

"Let's say, for example, we initiate a public health campaign to lower rates of smoking in a given location. Traditionally, we might put up billboards or place ads on radio or TV. One way or another we'll beg the population to stop smoking, but we have no way to actually measure if our efforts have any effect."

One problem: Lack of meaningful data. "In truth, says Dr. Fine, all healthcare data we currently can access is survey data that's subject to sampling bias. We have no reliable record of the incidence and prevalence of disease in any geographical population in the United States of America. None.

"However, that's going to change. By enrolling 90 percent of the population in our health IT tools, Blackstone Valley Community Health Care will be able to create some public health magic. We will have the data. The data in the electronic medical record will constitute data on the incidence and prevalence of disease in the city of Central Falls.

"This is very profound. As we perform interventions, we'll be able to track outcomes. We'll have the data we need to monitor outcomes on a population level for the first time in the public health history of the United States. When we review our interventions, we'll be able to see if they're effective or need to be modified from a broad, public health perspective."

As an example, Blackstone Valley has a community outreach team working with a list of all patients who smoke. Outreach workers are calling all of them and encouraging them to participate in interventions that achieve a 30 percent quit rate based on evidence. Dr. Fine believes that if the health center can get all of the pieces of the puzzle to work together, they ought to be able to reduce smoking incidence in the City of Central Falls by 15 to 30 percent.

A model for the future?

Blackstone Valley Community Health Care recently became an accountable entity under Rhode Island's Medicaid program. An accountable entity is Medicaid's version of an accountable care organization (ACO). Under this program, a healthcare practice is accountable for quality of care, outcomes, and the total cost of care for an assigned population.

Blackstone Valley Community Health Care is one of six accountable entities in the state. According to Lavoie, the broad base of specialties on its staff—behavioral health, dentistry, oral surgery, pediatrics, OB/GYN, and family practice—is what enabled Blackstone Valley to become a single-practice accountable entity.

Dr. Fine believes that the experience of administering an accountable entity based upon a foundation in population health holds lessons for the future of healthcare.

"Traditionally, medical practices are used to thinking only about the people who walk through their doors," says Dr. Fine. "I think the government is becoming more and more interested in paying practices to progress beyond that way of thinking and take more responsibility for overall health of the population of their local area.

"Nobody has ever been able to get this close to such quantifiable results on a public health level. But that is what we can do in Central Falls."

Dr. Michael Fine, Senior Population Health and Clinical Services Officer
Blackstone Valley Community Health Care

“Eventually, the government will pay healthcare providers to manage populations. The way the government goes about achieving this goal may be unfocused and painfully bureaucratic in the near term, but eventually I think that’s where we’ll end up.

“It’s the future of healthcare. No longer will healthcare providers focus solely on the individual patient who walks through the door; they’ll also plan and implement strategies for using medical services effectively to lower the incidence and prevalence of disease and reduce the overall cost of care in the population they serve. This is meaningful change and it’s made possible by the integration of the EHR with the population-based approach to healthcare.”

Blackstone Valley Community Health Care is working toward a long-term goal of harnessing data to monitor outcomes on a population level and achieve quantifiable improvement in health for the entire community.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Partner with us at **855-510-6398** or **results@nextgen.com**.