

# FOR RELEASE

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## Heartland Community Health Center and Health Care Access to join forces

Lawrence, Ks - Heartland Community Health Center and Health Care Access (HCA) would like to announce that the two organizations have signed a definitive agreement of acquisition. In a decision inspired by a shared vision to expand capacity for accessible health care in and around the community, HCA has agreed to merge their staff and assets into Heartland's. The anticipated result is a more unified community health access point with robust resources and staffing to support comprehensive and integrated services.

The two organizations announced an exploratory process and intent to merge back in June 2017. They now target February 2018 for the close of the acquisition and the transference of staff, services, and assets to Heartland, which will include the HCA's 330 Maine St. clinic. Current renovations at the Heartland facilities in the Medical Arts Building at 346 Maine St. will further expand integrated service delivery. Neither organization anticipates any disruptions to patient care.

"This merger is about improving access to care, so naturally we are committed to assuring no disruptions to our current patient - provider relationships," said HCA CEO Beth Llewellyn. "Scheduling will be synchronized, so that it is as seamless as possible for patient's to access the clinic as usual, during the integration period."

Heartland and HCA have been engaged in evaluation of a possible merge since 2015, however, addressing a myriad of technical and operational differences has taken time. But, as Heartland Board Chair James Pavisian wrote in a message to the new transition team, "the little things may have been different among us over the years, but the big thing has been the same." The message was intended to solidify a unified mission and vision for the future.

Heartland's status as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) allows them to leverage federal dollars to provide services with less reliance on state and local funding, thereby creating a more sustainable and quality-driven business model that expands capacity for the insured and uninsured, alike. It was this model that tipped the scales for HCA, making a merge feel like a way to accomplish their goals in the community. HCA Board Chair Devon Kim's guiding mantra to capture HCA's passion for the uninsured living with limited financial means had always been, "providing care for the most people, the best way."

The two organizations have served the same community with models based on affordable, accessible health care for a combined nearly 50 years. With 19% living below the poverty line and over 10,000 still uninsured in Douglas County, alone, the need for affordable care remains high and adds to strong local support for the merger. HCA's assets include the generosity of individual donors and grants from such sources as The United Way, which has represented one third of HCA funding. These donor investments will remain instrumental as the two organizations move forward together.

The mission and vision of the surviving organization will emphasize the two's shared principals of inclusivity, accessibility, efficiency, integration, quality health care, and positive outcomes. Also included is a focus on innovative approaches aimed at changing health care for the community at large.

"Heartland is using its added resources to build something significantly different," said Heartland CEO Jon Stewart. "In the next few years, I hope the community will see how we have moved quickly to affect change and to deepen our commitment to multi-disciplinary integration. Heartland is smart about making sure we challenge the status quo, yet balance that with staff and patients' need for stability and predictability. Staying nimble helps us to be progressive and serve with a high standard of care."

The Heartland and HCA merge news comes alongside recent planning by key organizations and offices in Douglas County on collaborative solutions to mental health care coordination and other aspects of the health care continuum.

"Heartland, with an infusion of staff and resources from Health Care Access, will be well positioned to continue partnering on larger, more collaborative, communication and delivery initiatives," said Stewart. "I believe this will make us a model for other counties and cities across the US."

Moving forward, Stewart will stay in his position as Heartland CEO. Llewellyn will serve as a transition leader throughout the merge process and remain for a period of time as an advisor post-acquisition.

"I look forward to sharing my experience from many communities, and in diverse organizations with leaders stewarding their organizations for tomorrow," said Llewellyn.

Heartland Community Health Center serves Douglas County and surrounding areas with primary care, behavioral health care, psychiatry, dental care, and physical therapy, along with assistance programs and wrap-around services. Services are available to all, regardless of income or insurance status. In addition to its designation as an FQHC, Heartland is also a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH), a model that emphasizes patient accessibility, as well as coordinated, compassionate and integrated care to ensure that all needs are met.

Health Care Access has been a health care provider to the uninsured poor of Douglas County for 29 years. Health Care Access aims at providing access for patients to a continuum of community-based services in order to promote health and well-being, employing a collaborative spirit and advocacy to support their efforts. The clinic's comprehensive care approach has included three medical provider teams, counseling, referral and wellness services. Health Care Access is also a Level 3 PCMH.

[www.heartlandhealth.org](http://www.heartlandhealth.org)

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