

Premera Blue Cross, Kinwell Medical Group Team Up to Expand Primary Care Access Across Washington State

Kinwell Medical Group's new clinics exclusively serve Premera members; part of health plan's long-term strategy to address primary care crisis

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Mountlake Terrace, Wash. – Premera Blue Cross and Kinwell Medical Group today announced a collaboration to improve access to primary care in Washington. Kinwell Medical Group is opening primary care clinics across the state, which will exclusively serve people who have Premera Blue Cross, Premera Blue Cross Medicare plans or LifeWise Health Plan of Washington as their primary insurance, as well as BlueCard holders.

This partnership is a key part of Premera's strategy to address the growing primary care crisis. By 2034, the U.S. is projected to face a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians, 48,000 of which will be in primary care alone, according to a 2021 study by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).

While the study focuses primarily on future physician shortages, Americans are feeling the shortfall now. According to research conducted for AAMC, 35 percent of respondents said they had trouble finding a doctor in the past two or three years. That's 10 points higher than when the question was asked in 2015.

"If we're going to live up to our mission of making healthcare work better, we simply cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and allow this crisis to grow," said Lee McGrath, executive vice president of health care services for Premera. "This is why Premera is working to improve the care experience for our members today and investing in educational programs focused on growing the pipeline for future primary care providers."

Kinwell Medical Group's first two primary care clinics opened in December 2021 in Yakima and Wenatchee. Designed as integrated care centers, Kinwell Medical Group's clinics provide onsite access to a variety of services. This will greatly improve customer service and reduce wait times for Premera members. Additional clinics will open throughout Washington this year.

"At Kinwell, we believe that, along with medical expertise, developing a true connection always makes a difference, and we are excited to provide this level of care to the Yakima and Wenatchee communities," said Dr. Mia Wise, president of Kinwell Medical Group. "We want to provide personalized, wholehearted care by removing obstacles for patients looking to improve

their health and create a real relationship with their care team. We look forward to expanding our offering into communities all over Washington state in the coming years.”

The collaboration with Kinwell Medical Group expands the concept first undertaken in Spokane. In 2019, Premera joined forces with Vera Whole Health to open Vivacity Care Centers, which are primary care centers exclusive to its members. Today, there are four Vivacity Care Centers in Spokane County that offer Premera members more access to primary care, an improved approach to their healthcare, and a better customer experience.

Investing in the Primary Care Pipeline

While Premera is focused on addressing the immediate need for access to affordable, quality care for members, increasing capacity for rural family medicine residencies remains important in the long-term efforts to improve healthcare for the more than one million people living in Washington’s rural areas.

A 2017 study from the National Rural Health Association found people living in rural areas have less access to primary and preventative care, and are more likely to experience chronic disease, disability and premature death.

“If we don’t address the potential shortfall of primary care providers now, rural communities are set to feel the worst of it in the future,” McGrath said. “This will compound an already growing health equity issue. We must invest in and grow educational programs focused on both primary care and rural healthcare.”

Since 2018, Premera has committed more than \$58 million to improve access to care in rural areas. The company is focusing its investments in the following areas: physician, nurse and health aide recruitment and training; clinical integration of behavioral health; programs to increase the capacity of mental health crisis centers in rural areas; and small equipment grants to rural providers.

This included a recent \$5.5 million grant to support Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences' (PNWU) rural family medicine educational pathway and training, which was developed in collaboration with MultiCare Health System, a leading not-for-profit healthcare organization. Premera also provided a \$4.7 million grant to the University of Washington to establish the Rural Nursing Health Initiative to place current students in rural practices in Washington state.

Learn more about how Premera is [investing in rural communities](#).

About Premera Blue Cross

Premera Blue Cross is a leading health plan in the Pacific Northwest, providing comprehensive health benefits and tailored services to more than 2.5 million people, from individuals to Fortune 100 companies. For more information, visit www.premera.com.

About Kinwell Medical Group

Launched in 2021, Kinwell Medical Group is a physician-owned, exclusive in-network provider serving people who have Premera Blue Cross, Premera Blue Cross Medicare plans or LifeWise Health Plan of Washington as their primary insurance, as well as BlueCard holders. Kinwell is changing the conversation about healthcare to include wellness and prevention. At Kinwell clinics, care is provided by clinicians of Kinwell Medical Group. They are supported by an independent company, Kinwell Physician Network, that provides administrative and business services that allow Kinwell Medical Group to focus on what it does best—taking care of patients. For more information, visit www.kinwellhealth.com.

MEDIA CONTACTS

For Premera Blue Cross

Courtney Wallace

Phone: 425-381-8470

Email: Courtney.Wallace@premera.com

For Kinwell Medical Group

Kristin Gladfelter

Phone: 425-381-8572

Email: Kristin.Gladfelter@kinwellhealth.com

For Kinwell Medical Group

Joleen Zanuzoski

Phone: 646-573-2580

Email: joleenz@greenrubino.com

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