



VAL VERDE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2013

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I. Executive Summary

Val Verde is a rural county with a small population. Val Verde Regional Medical Center (“VVRMC”) is the only hospital in Val Verde County and is located in the city of Del Rio, Texas. The hospital opened in the 1950s by Val Verde County. In 1975, the Texas Legislature authorized the creation of the Val Verde County Hospital District (“VVCHD”). Val Verde voters affirmed the District’s creation soon thereafter, after which the Hospital, and all its assets, were transferred to the District. In 1999, the Hospital and its assets were transferred to a Texas Non-Profit Corporation called Val Verde Hospital Corporation. Today, the District is the sole member of the Corporation and retains numerous rights with respect to the operation of the Corporation, including appointment and dismissal of the Corporation’s directors, establishments of the Corporation’s budget, setting the Corporation’s strategic goals, and general oversight of day-to-day control over Hospital operations remains with the Corporation. Val Verde County Hospital District still works to provide care to the indigent of the county.

VVRMC has a level IV trauma center and offers imaging services, dialysis services and some specialized care. It has a women’s center that delivers nearly 1,000 babies per year. Even with all its services, VVRMC and the hospital district struggle to meet the needs of the community. As this report will show, Val Verde County lacks primary care and specialty care providers. Additionally, many of its residents are not able to access care because they live too far from the local providers.

South Texas residents suffer from obesity and diabetes at higher rates than the rest of Texas.¹ VVRMC is concerned that higher instances of chronic conditions, combined with fewer primary care appointments leads to inappropriate emergency room usage. VVRMC wants its patients to get the right care in the right setting and believes more access to doctors will help. And for individuals in the emergency room with life threatening conditions, it wants to provide the appropriate specialists so that there will be fewer dangerous transfers.

Based on the findings in several studies of South Texas Counties and VVRMC’s own community needs assessments, VVRMC believes that an expanded telemedicine program, additional primary care appointments and greater capacity for specialty follow-up and acute care services would improve the health of the residents of Val Verde County. In 2012, VVRMC started a nonprofit organization to help recruit physicians to the region, but more still needs to be done.

¹ Appendix to the Summary, Findings About the Obesity Epidemic in Texas, http://txsdc.utsa.edu/Reports/2009/ObesityRateProjections/THI_Obesity_Summary_Appendix.pdf.

II. General Description of Val Verde Regional Medical Center

VVRMC is a Joint Commission-accredited 93-bed, level IV trauma center that serves Del Rio and the surrounding communities in Val Verde County, Texas. VVRMC opened in 1959 and has consistently improved the healthcare offered to its community by expanding its facility, enhancing its diagnostics and treatment capabilities, adding services, improving efficiency, and staffing a team of competent and caring healthcare professionals.

Today, VVRMC offers medical services, hospice care, full-service imaging center, an intensive care unit, outpatient counseling for seniors, surgery, respiratory care, inpatient dialysis, rehabilitation services including physical speech and occupational therapy, and a special procedures unit. VVRMC is home to HOPE Cancer Resource room, which provides staff members to support cancer patients, their families, and their caregivers. Staff members are available to meet one on one to answer questions regarding treatments, diagnosis, coping, and barriers to health care.

VVRMC's Hospice provides comfort and emotional support to terminally ill patients and their families. Pain and symptom control is the primary focus of the hospice team. The team is comprised of the patient's physician, hospice nurses who specialize in palliative care, medical social workers, chaplain, home health aides, volunteers and bereavement counselors.

VVRMC has a seven-bed intensive care unit. This unit provides care for patients of all ages who are critically ill and require constant monitoring. VVRMC also has a special procedures unit that provides: angiography, cardiac catheterization, cardioversions, kyphoplasty, outpatient blood transfusions, outpatient observation, pacemakers, pain management and other minor procedures.

The imaging center at VVRMC is staffed with registered technologists that perform all modalities of imaging. The center includes magnetic resonance imaging, diagnostic imaging with fluoroscopy units and radiographs, ultrasound department, and mammography.

In 2012, nearly 1,000 babies were born in the Women's Center at VVRMC. VVRMC has a sexual assault nurse examiner or SANE available 24 hours a day to assist victims of sexual assault.

The emergency department at VVRMC is a fully equipped, eight-bed, level IV trauma center. In addition to the emergency department, highly trained medical professionals at Val Verde Health Clinic provide urgent care services to treat minor injuries and illnesses.

A staff of more than 400 health care professionals strives to provide high-quality services to patients and their families.

III. Community Served by VVRMC

A. Population Demographics

VVRMC is located in Del Rio, Texas, which is the county seat for Val Verde County. Val Verde is located on the Texas/Mexico border and occupies 3,144.75 square miles in the southwest of Texas. Del Rio has a population of 40,000 and Val Verde County has a population of 48,705, according to a US Census Bureau 2012 estimate. The population has decreased 0.4% in the past two years and only has about 15.5 people per square mile.²

People	Val Verde County	Texas
White persons, percent, 2011 (a)	95.6%	80.9%
Black persons, percent, 2011 (a)	1.9%	12.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2011 (a)	0.7%	1.0%
Asian persons, percent, 2011 (a)	0.6%	4.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons, percent, 2011 (a)	0.1%	0.1%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2011	1.0%	1.7%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino Origin, percent, 2011 (b)	80.1%	38.1%
White persons not Hispanic, percent, 2011	17.4%	44.8%

People	Val Verde County	Texas
Population, 2012 estimate	48,705	26,059,203
Population, 2010 (April 1) estimates base	48,879	25,145,561
Population, percent change, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012	-0.4%	3.6%
Population, 2010	48,879	25,145,561
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2011	8.2%	7.6%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2011	29.5%	27.1%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2011	12.7%	10.5%
Female persons, percent, 2011	49.7%	50.4%

² U.S. Census, Quickfacts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48465.html>.

B. Socioeconomic Characteristics

Between 2007 and 2011, the estimated number of people over 16 years of age was 35,522, and of that number, 22,075 individuals, or 62.1% of that population were in the labor force (58.8% in the civilian labor force, 3.4% in the Armed Forces). Thirty-seven point nine percent (37.9%) of the population of Val Verde County, 16-years and older, is not in the labor force. The County has an approximately 8.8% unemployment rate.

For the roughly 19,051 employed civilian workers in Val Verde County, management, business, science and arts occupations; service occupations; and sales and office occupations are [the top three types of occupations for workers, each respectively holding 26.3%, 24.8% and 22.9% of the working population]. The top four industries in Val Verde County are: educational services, healthcare and social assistance (25.9%); public administration (14.8%); retail trade (12.5%); and arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation and food services (9.0%).³

The most important employers in Val Verde County are: Laughlin Air Force Base, VVRMC, Comstock ISD, San Felipe-Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District, Val Verde County, and the Del Rio International Airport.

Between 2007 and 2011, the median income in the county was \$38,747 for a household and \$42,160 for a family. Males had a median income of \$36,644 versus \$28,776 for females. The per capita income for the county was \$17,180. About 17.5% of families and 23.0% of the population were below the poverty line, including 31.6% of those under age 18 and 23.8% of them age 65 or over.⁴

³ all of the above: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

⁴ http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_DP03.

C. Access to Health Insurance⁵

	Year	Val Verde County	Region 8
18 Years and Younger, Without Health Insurance	2007	2,794	120,981
18 Years and Younger, Without Health Insurance (%)	2007	18.6%	17.0%
Younger than 65 Years, Without Health Insurance	2007	11,855	515,571
Younger than 65 Years, Without Health Insurance(%)	2007	29.7%	23.9%

Ratio of 2009 Population per Health Care Professional⁶

The table below shows the number of physicians to individuals in the county and in Health Service Region 8. The same calculation is performed for specialists, allied health professionals, and nurses.

	Year	Val Verde County	Region 8*
Direct Care Physician Ratio	2010	75.9	171.2
Primary Care Physician Ratio	2010	47.9	70.9
Physician Assistants Ratio	2010	14.0	24.8
Registered Nurses Ratio	2010	333.6	763.3
Licensed Vocational Nurses Ratio	2010	375.5	398.5
Nurse Practitioners Ratio	2010	12.0	22.2
Dentists Ratio	2010	24.0	48.7
Pharmacists Ratio	2010	30.0	81.7
Chiropractors Ratio	2010	4.0	14.3
Veterinarians Ratio	2010	8.0	25.6
EMS Personnel Ratio	2010	299.6	225.6

*Texas Health & Human Services Commission, Health Services Region 8⁷

⁵ http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/hcquery/report/?mode=soci&areas=233_263_255.

⁶ http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/hcquery/report/?mode=hprc&areas=233_263_255.

⁷ <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/regions>.

D. Education

Del Rio is home to one of the three campuses for the Rio Grande College of Sul Ross State University. Rio Grande College of Sul Ross State University serves 13 counties in the area, and is traditionally known for its teacher education program, as well as offering coursework in liberal arts and business. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the students at Rio Grande College of Sul Ross State University are part-time, and 28% are full-time. Rio Grande College of Sul Ross State University is one of the largest producers of Hispanic teachers in Texas.⁸ In addition to Rio Grande College of Sul Ross State University, Southwest Texas Junior College Del Rio and Park University – Laughlin AFB Campus are located in Del Rio.

The estimated population of people 25 years and older in Val Verde County is 28,855. Of that number, 6,734 (23.3%) have attained an education level that did not exceed 9th grade. Twenty-five point six percent (25.6%) graduated from high school or attained an equivalent degree; 16.3% attended some college, but did not obtain a degree; and 6.3% have an associate's degree. Only 12.3% of the population over 25 years of age has a bachelor's degree (though 64.6% graduated college and attained some level of higher education, and 4.1% has a graduate or professional degree [a combined 16.4% of the over 25 population]).⁹

The main public school system in the area is San Felipe-Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District. Of the 3 years and older population, 13,185 are enrolled in school. Elementary and high school age children make up the majority of this population, at 47.8% and 24.3% of the school-age population, respectively.¹⁰

⁸ <http://www.sulross.edu/page/1569/about-rgc>.

⁹ http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_DP02.

¹⁰ http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_DP02.

IV. Health Status of the Community

The counties in South Texas, which include Val Verde, have a higher incidence of obesity and diabetes than the rest of the state. A report by the state comptroller showed that between 2000 and 2005, 30% of adults in South Texas were obese and that this has the greatest impact on the general health of the area's population. The same study found that the incidence of obesity and diabetes was higher in Hispanics than whites, but that the incidence of these conditions in non-Hispanics in South Texas was significantly higher than in the rest of Texas.

Obesity, a causal risk factor for diabetes, can be directly linked to lifestyle behaviors such as inadequate physical activity and poor eating habits. Among all of the health conditions studied in a 2006 study performed by UT Health Science Center, it found that obesity had the greatest impact on people living in South Texas, and diabetes had the second greatest impact. They also found that prevention efforts could reduce the burden of these diseases in South Texas.

Because obesity creates a higher risk for comorbidities as does diabetes, the lack of primary care in Val Verde County is a significant problem. Having few primary care physicians leads to overutilization of the emergency room. This overutilization occurs for two reasons: patients struggle to get primary care appointments and insufficient of follow-up after a hospital discharge. When individuals cannot get in for a primary care appointment, but are not feeling well, they may visit the emergency room because they know they will be treated. However, this setting is the most costly for non-emergent conditions. Further, when people cannot get primary care appointments, their chronic conditions deteriorate until they become true emergencies. The problem repeats itself once the patient is released from the hospital and cannot see their primary care or specialty physician for follow-up care. This creates a cycle of needless emergency room use and a general deterioration of health, particularly for those with chronic conditions.

Between 2005 and 2010, there were 61 hospitalizations at VVRMC due to short-term complications of diabetes. These hospitalizations are considered potentially preventable because they would not have been necessary if the individual had access to appropriate outpatient healthcare, including primary care and appropriate specialty follow-up care. During the same timeframe, VVRMC had 338 hospitalizations due to long-term complications of diabetes. These too were considered potentially preventable. These potentially preventable hospitalizations cost VVRMC and the community \$10,770,345.¹¹

Other conditions that had a higher incidence in South Texas than in the rest of Texas are: tuberculosis; chlamydia; cervical cancer; liver cancer; stomach cancer; gallbladder cancer; child and adolescent leukemia; neural tube defects; other birth

¹¹ Texas Dept. of Health and Human Services, Preventable Hospitalizations, <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/ph/county.shtm>.

defects; and pesticide poisoning.¹² VVRMC cannot lower the prevalence of all of these conditions, but several could be affected by more access to primary and specialty care. South Texas women are less likely to have had an up-to-date pap test than women in the rest of the state.¹³ This lack of screening likely contributes to the higher incidence of primary cervical cancer in South Texas. With additional primary care appointments, women are more likely to get yearly exams that include pap tests, and would indicate cervical cancer at a curable stage. This is also true of chlamydia.

¹² Institute for Health Promotion Research, UT Health Science Center, South Texas Health Status Review, http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu/sites/ihpr-drupal/themes/ihpr2/files/So_tx_review/so_tx_review.pdf.

¹³ *Id.*

V. Health Care Resources

VVRMC is the only hospital in Val Verde County and operates the only surgical suite. Laughlin Air Force Base has an outpatient clinic that members may use for minor health needs, but all surgeries, emergencies, and inpatient health care needs are furnished at VVRMC. The Women's Center handles many of the service members' births. Most people in the county reside in Del Rio, where VVRMC is located, but many county residents still struggle to obtain even basic care because there are no providers in their area.

Hospital Resources

	Year	Val Verde County	Region 8	Texas
Acute Care Hospitals	2009	1	45	553
Psychiatric Hospitals	2009	0	4	43
Acute Care For-Profit Hospitals	2009	0	25	279
Acute Care Non-Profit Hospitals	2009	0	4	151
Acute Care Public Hospitals	2009	1	16	123
Beds Setup and Staffed for Acute Care	2009	73	6,615	64,022
Beds Setup and Staffed for Obstetrics Care	2009	20	565	5,961
Acute Care Licensed Beds	2009	93	8,439	78,368
Psychiatric Care Licensed Beds	2009	0	746	5,450

Del Rio is a medically underserved community that is in need of primary care and specialty providers.

Specialty	Current Supply	Physician Demand	Variance
Family Practice	8	18.91	10.91
Internal Medicine	6	11.05	5.05
Urology	0	1.39	1.39
Cardiology	1	2.13	1.13
Vascular Surgery	0	.5	.5
Psychiatry	.2	3.67	3.47
Otolaryngology	0	1.69	1.69
Orthopedics	2	3.23	1.23
Surgery	2	4.26	2.26

¹⁴

Currently, primary care physicians at the hospital and its related clinic have 4,740 visits per year. The specialty clinic had only 1,100 visits in 2012.

¹⁴ HCAPS Community Needs Assessment Group, Val Verde Regional Medical Center, Community Needs Assessment November 2013.

As a result of the primary care physician shortage, many patients visit the emergency room for primary care-type issues. The residents of Val Verde County currently do not feel confident that they will be able to access medical care in other settings. Even those individuals that access primary care often are left without options for referral because there are so few specialists in the county.

Adding to these problems is the low rate of insured individuals in the area. VVRMC's current payer mix is 28% Medicaid, 41% Medicare, 20% HMO/PPO and 11% self-pay.

It is difficult to recruit and retain doctors in this environment, but VVRMC has been working to increase the number of physicians since 2011. That year, they established a non-profit corporation that serves as a clinic for primary care physicians and specialists. This clinic is a recruitment vehicle for VVRMC and has attracted several doctors since its founding.

Even with the creation of the clinic and VVRMC's efforts to attract specialists, some specialties will not remain in the community because the population is too small to support them. However, their services are still required on an ad hoc basis. In order to alleviate this problem, VVRMC started a geriatric psychiatric telemedicine program. That service currently provides 420 visits per year.

The emergency room is the appropriate setting for some types of care, and VVRMC suffers from a lack of neurologists and cardiologists in the area to serve those having acute, life threatening conditions. As a result, many patients who arrive at the emergency room with a stroke or heart attack must immediately be transferred to another facility. This is accomplished via air and ground transfers at a high cost to the community. These transfers are often very risky because treatment time is so important in cases of stroke and heart attack. By recruiting specialty care physicians to the area, VVRMC will be able to treat emergent conditions as well as provide follow-up services that could reduce overall emergency room usage.

VI. Community Input

In order to get input from people who represent the broad interests of the community served by the hospital facility, we surveyed the VVCHD board members. The members have special knowledge of public health as representatives of the Hospital District, and some have hands-on healthcare experience. They also represent the residents of the county and have information relevant to their health needs. Every board member is elected and therefore represent medically underserved, low-income and minority populations as well as those with chronic disease needs.

Board Member	Precinct	Tenure	Occupation	Board
Raul Alatorre	At-large	May 2012	Home Health Coordinator	VVCHD
Frank Larson	At-large	July 2010	Self-Employed	VVCHD
Jane Morain	4	May 2008	Retired Teacher	VVCHD and VVHC
Roy Musquiz	2	August 2012	Retired School Administrator and former County Commissioner	VVCHD and VVHC
Jonathan Pina	1	May 2010	Banker	VVCHD
Barbara Plyler	At-large	May 2006	Self Employed	VVCHD
Tony Sotelo	3	May 2000	Home Nursing Assistant Administrator	VVCHD and VVHC
Sylvia Owens	Community Representative	February 2010	Banker	VVCHD
Charlie Qualia	Community Representative	February 2010	Certified Public Accountant	VVCHD

Overall a vast majority of respondents (9/9) rated the health and quality of life in Val Verde County at the fair or good level. The majority of respondents (5/9) find health and quality of life in Val Verde County improved or stayed the same, but some indicated a noticeable change. This improvement was attributed to the proactive committed staff of VVRMC and their involvement and pride in the Val Verde County Community. The respondents felt that staff was an essential component in the growth of health and human services. They also noted lack of education as a key component hindering individuals from making better health choices. Many residents of Val Verde County do not have the skills to fill out forms that may grant governmental assistance or to educate themselves about proper nutritional information. Not only do community members in Val Verde County lack education, and many suffer from severe financial hardships. As a result, many individuals are not able to take care of themselves properly, and a lack of specialty or primary physicians exacerbates the problem. Respondents noted the lack of health insurance for many in the community as another concern. Survey respondents believe this situation drives up the cost of care. Overall, respondents felt that in order to address barriers to community health improvement and quality of life in Val Verde County, VVRMC staff should be provided with better equipment and education to support community needs.

Additional community input occurred as a result of VVRMC's involvement in the Texas Medicaid Transformation Waiver ("Waiver"). It is a member of Regional Healthcare Partnership 6 ("RHP 6"). One of the functions of the Waiver is to address unmet needs in Texas. Because Texas is a geographically large state, it was divided into RHPs that each conducted a Community Needs Assessment ("Assessment"). The communities in RHP 6 were given the opportunity to view a draft Assessment on RHP 6's website before it was finalized in November 2012. They were also allowed the opportunity to comment on it and it was adjusted according to those comments from the community. In addition to general public input, RHP 6 engaged the following healthcare providers in the region: University Health System; Teaching Hospitals of Texas; Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals; the Texas Hospital Association; the Texas Medical Association; and the Texas Council of Community Health Centers.

VII. Attachment A – Implementation Strategy

VVRMC identified three key health issues in its community: lack of primary care providers; lack of specialty providers; and high incidence of obesity and diabetes. It has created three plans to address each of these needs.

Plan 1: Expand Primary Care Capacity

VVRMC plans to increase access to primary care by recruiting additional primary care providers to the area and by adding clinics. The project will also add a nurse advice telephone number so that patients will be able to maintain coordinated care delivery. VVRMC believes that in five years the community will achieve better health, better patient satisfaction, increased utilization of primary care services, and reduced inappropriate utilization of the ER for patients with chronic diseases. Today VVRMC's clinic offers 4,740 primary care visits per year. Once the project is underway, the number of primary care visits in 2014 is projected to be 7,145.

Plan 2: Expand Specialty Care Capacity

VVRMC plans to increase access to specialty care by recruiting additional specialty care providers in the area. The project will benefit the medically underserved border community. Since the community lacks these specialists, patients must travel to San Antonio for care or be air ambulated, which increases the cost of care. The primary goal of the project is to expand specialty care in Val Verde County and to improve access to these services. Today VVRMC's specialty care clinic offers 1,100 visits per year. With recruitment into cardiology, ENT, and Urology, specialty care visits are projected to reach 2,700 in 2014.

Plan 3: Implement Telemedicine Program

VVRMC plans to introduce a robotic telemedicine program for access to specialty care, as currently patients are immediately transferred out to a higher level of care. The project will assist VVRMC in an effort to reduce both ground and air transfers as more patients will be able to be treated locally in Del Rio. The top three priority areas in which a telemedicine program would have a significant impact in the region include behavioral health, neurology, and cardiology. Today there are no resources available in any of these three important specialties for patients who require these services urgently in the ER or inpatient setting. Leading causes of death in RHP 6 include cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes. These certain specialties are logistically difficult to have on a full-time basis, but these services are needed on an ad hoc basis in the small rural border community.

VIII. Attachment B – Community Stakeholder Questionnaire

Date: _____

Name: _____ Title: _____

Agency/Organization: _____

Number of years living in area: _____ County of residence: _____

Number of years in current position: _____ Email: _____

Val Verde Regional Medical Center is gathering local data as part of developing a plan to improve health and quality of life in Val Verde County. Community input is essential to this process. This questionnaire is being used to engage community members. You have been selected for an interview because of your knowledge, insight, and familiarity with the community. The themes that emerge from these questionnaires will be summarized and made available to the public; however, individual answers will be kept confidential.

Use the space below to explain briefly about the work that you and your organization do in the community?

Questions:

1. In general, how would you rate health and quality of life in Val Verde County?
Poor Fair Good Excellent

2. In your opinion, has health and quality of life in Val Verde County improved, stayed the same, or declined over the past few years?

3. Why do you think that is the case?

4. What other factors have contributed to that?

5. Are there people or groups of people whose health or quality of life may not be as good as others?
 - a. Who are these people or groups?

 - b. Why do you think their health/quality of life is not as good as others?

6. What barriers, if any exist to improving health and quality of life in Val Verde County?

7. In your opinion, what are the most critical health and quality of life issues in Val Verde County?

8. What needs to be done to address these issues?
9. In your opinion, what else will improve health and quality of life in Val Verde County?
10. Is there someone who you would recommend as a “key informant” for this assessment?

Thank you so for sharing your concerns and perspectives on these issues. The information you have provided will contribute to develop a better understanding about factors impacting health and quality of life in Val Verde County. Before we conclude, is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you!

IX. Attachment C – Board Resolution