

**By Ilana Lowery -
WESTMARC**

The booming West Valley health care sector continues to create thousands of jobs and is helping to drive the region's economic growth as more people move to the area. And with the West Valley's population projected to grow at twice the national rate between now and 2025, the need for more health care services is expected to increase significantly.

That need is rapidly being fulfilled by health care companies and developers working to bolster the sector over the next three to five years.

Statistics from the Maricopa Association of Governments shows that 38% of the health care workers in Maricopa County live in the West Valley, and with more than 1,412 health care-related businesses employing more than 46,000 workers, the region's health care sector is poised to continue its remarkable growth, said Sintra Hoffman, president and CEO of WESTMARC.

Data collected for six West Valley cities (Avondale, Glendale, Goodyear, Peoria, Sun City West and Surprise) found that most of the health care workers in these communities provide office and administrative support, but a significant number were practitioners, diagnostics and support personnel, and technicians — totaling roughly 41,000 skilled health care workers and 12,000 technology and STEM workers, Hoffman said.

Economic development experts see the health care business trajectory to continue to grow. Trevor Stokes, CEO at the Partnership for Workforce Innovation, said the industry is consistent and he sees, “a remarkable growth trajectory in this industry is consistent and it outperforms the economy overall.”

Stokes said health care sub sectors that are seeing the most growth include services for the elderly, those with disability. And substance abuse and mental health.

With the construction of hospitals, clinics and rehabilitation centers, the need for medical office space is surging, according to a report from [Colliers Arizona](#) . And the demand for health services for seniors and children will continue to grow as the population increases, which is projected to drive demand for medical office space.

The region is projecting 2.1 million residents by 2030, up from the current 1.7 million, and pediatric population is expected to increase from 400,000 to 500,000 by 2030, according to

Phoenix Children's hospital officials, so the specific need for pediatric health services also will grow.

Phoenix Children's has three major expansion projects in the West Valley: Phoenix Children's Hospital – Arrowhead Campus, Southwest Campus in Avondale and a Sports Medicine Clinic that will bring a \$200 million investment and more than 650 jobs to the region. The facilities will provide inpatient, emergency and surgical care with 29 in-demand specialties, said hospital spokesperson Katy Springer.

The \$135 million Arrowhead Campus, at 18701 N. 67th Ave., in Glendale, will be a three-story structure with 473 employees and a 45,000-square-foot multi-specialty clinic

Over the summer, Phoenix Children's broke ground on its \$40 million emergency department and expanded medical campus in Avondale.

The Southwest Campus will include a 35,000-square-foot freestanding emergency department similar in size to the Phoenix Children's Hospital emergency department. Hospital officials said the Southwest Campus, which is expected to open in 2023, also features a multi-specialty clinic that will serve about 40,000 West Valley children each year.

Phoenix Children's CEO Robert L. Meyer said the projects will address a pressing need for pediatric-specific emergency health care in that part of the metro.

Earlier this year, Abrazo Health, which is owned and operated by Dallas-based Tenet Healthcare Corp., purchased a 27-acre parcel in Buckeye with plans to build a medical campus.

The parcel, which is on the southwest corner of Interstate 10 and Verrado Way in Goodyear, is about 10 miles from its Abrazo West Campus, which includes a 216-bed Level 1 Trauma and Stroke Center.

According to officials, plans call for a medical office building, ambulatory services and an acute care hospital.

"As one of the Valley's largest health care systems, Abrazo continues to invest in facilities, talent, and technology to grow with the communities it serves," said Hans Driessnack, CEO of Abrazo West Campus.

To serve the growing the West Valley, Abrazo also operates a freestanding emergency center at I-10 and Watson Road. The company recently completed a 16-bed expansion at its Abrazo West

Campus. That campus has made major investments in high-acuity services and technology, including trauma, stroke, cardiology and advanced spine care, and recently completed a 16-bed expansion, Driessnack said.

In 2020, Abrazo also opened a small-scale hospital in Surprise that with a 13-bed emergency department, one operating room and eight inpatient rooms. It employs 50 full-time equivalent clinical and support staff.

Health care subsectors, such as services for the elderly and out-patient services for mental health and other needs also are growing at a rapid pace in the West Valley.

One example is national rehabilitation hospital company ClearSky Health, which is opening a 43,000-square-foot hospital this year with 30 beds near 109th Avenue and McDowell Road in Avondale.

The hospital includes private rooms, a rehabilitation gym, dining room and daily living spaces. The Avondale facility will be ClearSky's first in Arizona.

ClearSky Health CEO Darby Brockette said the company's decision to open a facility in Avondale stemmed from the unmet need for inpatient rehabilitative services

"[We] feel we can make a positive impact on the community by providing services that individuals would otherwise have to leave the area to receive," Brockette said.

The facility will be tailored to treat those living with disabling injuries and diseases, including strokes, brain injuries, hip fractures, spinal injuries, multiple sclerosis and COVID-19.

Apricus Health LLC is adding two surgery centers in the West Valley, with plans for two more in Arizona by the end of next year. The physician-led and -founded company will open Apricus Health Surgery Centers of Avondale and Surprise in mid-2022.

"As Arizona's population continues to grow, so does the need for community-based, high-quality surgical care," said Dr. Kishlay Anand, president of Apricus Health. "This is especially true in the West Valley. Our new surgical centers are part of a larger plan to address the health care needs of this community and serve patients in a proactive, coordinated and supportive manner."

Each of the new surgery centers is equipped to serve 5,000 patients each year. They represent a combined investment of more than \$10 million.

Apricus Health Surgery Center of Avondale is located on the first floor of the newly constructed Akos Medical Campus on 107th Avenue and McDowell Road. Forty clinicians and administrative employees will staff the 10,320 square-foot center, which will offer three operating rooms, two procedure rooms and 16 patient care bays.

The health system also plans to open a new micro-hospital in Avondale, and, in July, the company will open the Apricus Health Sun City Imaging Center.

In the past two to three years, Banner Health, HonorHealth and Valleywise Health also built new or expanded their West Valley facilities, as more health care projects are expected west of Interstate 17.

Despite the new health care projects in the West Valley, there is a concern that staffing the facilities will be the biggest challenge.

Stokes said he anticipates a shortage of 14,000 nurses across Maricopa County.

All health systems are struggling to find qualified health care workers. Finding qualified nurses and nursing assistants, lab professionals, medical assistants, pharmacy technicians, therapists among other skilled labor has been difficult — especially during the past two years with the Covid pandemic.

HonorHealth, for example, is looking to immediately fill about 1,200 positions across all of their facilities, said Leah Hill, workforce development consultant at HonorHealth, at last Spring's West Valley Health Care Industry Spotlight hosted by WESTMARC.

"We're looking for ways to strategically, creatively and innovatively develop our workforce," Hill said.

Both Glendale and Estrella Mountain Community Colleges support the West Valley's health care needs by providing education and training in several fields, including nursing (certified nursing assistant, registered nurse and licensed practical nurse), as well as emergency medical technician, paramedic and allied health programs.

Paula Livingston, dean of Instruction and Occupation Education at EMCC, said the strength and support of the community college programs is contingent on university and industry partners. Education partners include Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, the University of Phoenix, Grand Canyon University and Ottawa University. Industry partners include Dignity Health, HonorHealth, Abrazo West Campus, Sun Health, Banner Health, Midwestern University and HealthSouth.