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YCCH to change name to RiverStone Health

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Hoping to allay confusion about its diverse programming and unify efforts across more than 20 departments, the Yellowstone City-County Health Department plans to adopt a new name.

Beginning June 30, it will be called RiverStone Health.

"We want to have one name and one direction for our organization," Chief Operating Officer Lil Anderson said.

Since its inception in 1974, Yellowstone City-County Health has been home to a raft of distinct programs, including Deering Community Health Center, Big Sky Hospice, Healthcare for the Homeless, Environmental Health Services and WIC.

Since 1998, the department has operated as an independent health district governed by a board of directors. Unlike most public health agencies, it is not a division of city or county government.

Some of its programs kept their own identities after becoming part of the larger organization, while others were launched with unique names to avoid stigma associated with county health, Anderson said.

"What we've done over the last 30 years is name our programs something other than Yellowstone City-County Health Department so people receiving care wouldn't know it was from Yellowstone City-County Health Department," she said.

The problem became that people, including some of the 300 who work there, didn't know that the programs were connected.

In a local survey conducted last year, only half of respondents knew what the Yellowstone City-County Health Department was, said Dr. Doug Carr, chairman of the agency's board.

"We had this long moniker that just wasn't usable," Carr said. "People would get this blank stare."

Once survey respondents were given a description of Yellowstone City-County Health, 77 percent of them said they trusted the organization and would recommend its services.

Even people who work for and understand the agency could not agree on its identity.

When employees sat down with a Bozeman consultant to begin developing what became the RiverStone

brand, they ended up debating what kind of business they were in, Anderson said.

Each department argued passionately for its own cause. Ultimately, the group decided that the health department was in the business of connections.

"We connect people to what they need in the community," Anderson said. "The real overall goal we have is to help people have a better life."

Agency leaders began searching for a new identity two years ago and have spent "a couple hundred thousand dollars" on the process, officials said.

Another \$400,000 has been budgeted for newspaper, television, radio and billboard advertisements to introduce the RiverStone Health name.

Many of Yellowstone City-County Health's programs will receive new names using the RiverStone anchor, including Deering and Big Sky Hospice.

They will be called RiverStone Clinic and RiverStone Hospice.

The agency's public health arm, which investigates disease outbreaks, will probably be known as RiverStone Public Health, Anderson said.

"It's a unique approach, but I understand the marketing strategy and their goal of putting all services under one umbrella," said Joan Miles, director of the state Department of Public Health and Human Services. "Certainly, there will be some adjustments and we trust efforts will be made to convey to the public that RiverStone Health is their public health agency."

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