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Children's Nebraska Behavioral Health Urgent Care – Kearney Expands Access to Pediatric Mental Healthcare in Central Nebraska

KEARNEY, Neb. (Sept. 30, 2024) – Children's Nebraska Behavioral Health Urgent Care – Kearney officially celebrated its opening Monday afternoon, welcoming community leaders and guests for a ribbon cutting ceremony. The new facility is dedicated to helping children and adolescents up to 22 years of age showing signs of a behavioral or mental health crisis, and it is the first of its kind in Nebraska.

One-third of Nebraska counties lack a behavioral health provider, making pediatric-specific resources critically important for the young people and families of the state. The behavioral health urgent care opened its doors in June and is conveniently located at 211 West 33rd Street in Kearney. It will offer earlier intervention across the mental healthcare continuum through triage and screening; crisis stabilization and psychiatric evaluation; coordination and linkage to appropriate care; short-term bridge care and referrals to community resources. Together, these services have expanded access to pediatric mental health services available to youth and their families in rural communities across Central Nebraska.

"The pediatric mental health crisis is real, and our new behavioral health urgent care in Kearney is an example of the swift action Children's Nebraska has taken to address the behavioral and mental health needs of youth and families statewide," said Chanda Chacón, MPH, FACHE, Children's president and chief executive officer. "This first walk-in clinic is the result of leadership, advocacy and collaboration with many partners to support the health and wellbeing of young people. It is our mission to improve the life of every child, and we are committed to leading the way for better pediatric behavioral and mental healthcare for years to come."

In 2022, Children's was awarded \$10 million in federal funding from the Nebraska State Legislature through the American Rescue Plan Act. State policymakers recognized alarming trends that demonstrated rising rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, self-harm and other behavioral health challenges leading to the youth mental health emergency. A significant portion of that one-time investment – along with part of another \$1.8 million of ARPA funding issued by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for telehealth infrastructure – has supported Children's Behavioral Health Urgent Care – Kearney. The endeavor has increased availability of quality pediatric mental healthcare and will impact youth statewide for a lifetime.

"The innovative model of care available at Behavioral Health Urgent Care – Kearney allows qualified Children's providers to offer the right care at the right time," said Renee Rafferty, LIMHP, Children's senior vice president of Behavioral Health & Wellness. "The support and collaboration of numerous state officials, healthcare partners, community leaders and schools has bolstered our effort to open this new clinic in Kearney, bringing a sense of hope and healing to families in the communities of Central Nebraska."

Children's Nebraska is committed to expanding access to behavioral and mental healthcare statewide. Remaining ARPA funds are being used toward the Behavioral Health & Wellness Center at Children's Nebraska, built in partnership with the Mental Health Innovation Foundation. The facility is under construction adjacent to Children's main hospital campus in Omaha and will open in early 2026. For more information, visit ChildrensNebraska.org.

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About Children's Nebraska

Children's Nebraska is the only full-service, pediatric healthcare center in Nebraska, providing expertise in primary care and more than 50 pediatric specialty services to children across a five-state region and beyond. Children's is home to Nebraska's only Level IV regional Newborn Intensive Care Unit and the state's only Level II Pediatric Trauma Center. Children's is recognized as a 2023-24 Best Children's Hospital by U.S. News & World Report, ranked among the best in the specialty of Pulmonology. Visit us online at ChildrensNebraska.org.