A Message from Our CEO

2019 marked Thundermist’s 50th anniversary. It was an important recognition— not only of longevity, but of impact.

The vision of a few dedicated individuals who believed every person should have access to health care has evolved into a health care delivery system that helps improve and saves lives. Our founding medical director, Francesco Cannistra, MD, felt strongly that our organization should be there when people had nowhere else to turn. His legacy of compassion, care, and excellence is still apparent five decades later.

Thundermist’s impact is far reaching. In 2019, we cared for 51,405 Rhode Islanders. We employ 628 people with wages and benefits totaling $45 million. Last year, our operational budget totaled $67 million. We’re training the next generation of health care providers through three residency programs that train family medicine physicians, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and family nurse practitioners. Our innovative model of care and cultural competence are unlike what is found at most health centers or primary care offices. We help patients improve their physical, emotional, and oral health and also address barriers to health care, often called the social determinants of health.

Our impact is statewide; our patients come from every zip code in Rhode Island. We care for one out of every 20 Rhode Islanders. We thank the patients who trust us with their care.

None of this would be possible without you. The support of our donors, community partners, and stakeholders allows us to do what we do.

We look forward to what the next decade holds and ways we can continue to strengthen primary care in Rhode Island.

Best regards,

Jeanne LaChance
President/Chief Executive Officer
A Different Kind of Care

Normand was just days away from starting a new job when he had two strokes in 2012. In just three days he would have started a new job and had health coverage. Now his future looked different.

His strokes left him unable to work, without health care coverage, and in need of substantial care and resources to get better. The social workers at the hospital said he should go to Thundermist Health Center for the help he needed.

“At first, Thundermist seemed like this big scary place,” said Normand Giguere. “But I was quickly blown away by how they helped me. It was a wonderful feeling to have all of these people who really cared.”

The staff at Thundermist quickly got to work helping Normand get the care he needed following his strokes and helping him to find the resources in the community that could help him get back to living the life he had before.

“Thundermist managed my care and helped me keep on top of what I needed to do to be safe and healthy,” said Normand.

The strokes meant Normand now needed expensive medication. He didn’t have insurance to pay for it, but Thundermist still made sure he had his medicine.

“I really believe that without Thundermist, I would be homeless,” Normand explained. “I still can’t work, and without insurance, the care and medicine I need is very expensive. If I had to pay for my medicine, I would not be able to afford to live.”

Normand says the support of his children, Christopher and April, was also important to his recovery. “My kids were working two jobs and taking care of me,” said Normand. “It was hard for me to accept that I was not independent anymore, but everyone was there for me and I am so thankful for that.”

“I think if I wasn’t part of Thundermist my quality of life would be different. I really appreciate everything Thundermist has done,” said Normand. “People have an idea of what they think Thundermist is. They don’t realize it’s the best care you can get.”

Normand’s story highlights Thundermist’s role as patient-centered medical home. The services that have made a difference to Normand are often not reimbursed by private or public insurance plans. Without our supporters and community partners, we would be unable to offer the services that help Normand get the medical and emotional support he needs. He says it’s something he wishes everyone could experience.
Ending Hepatitis C

“Why do you go to Thundermist?”

Many of our patients respond to this question with a clear answer – Thundermist provides high-quality care.

“I could go anywhere, but I choose Thundermist because it’s the best care I have ever gotten. The care is individualized and comprehensive,” said Sandra Enos.

Thundermist plays a critical role in improving health outcomes and ensuring access to high-quality, integrated care. Many of the patients we reach are at greater risk of health complications. We provide a wide array of comprehensive services to meet the complex health needs of our patients.

“Thundermist offers a comprehensive model of care that includes primary and preventive care, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, and social services. We help patients make better-informed decisions about their health care,” said Jeanne LaChance, president/CEO. “We respond to the needs of each patient and provide individualized services, such as care coordination, transportation, outreach, and case management. This model of care leads to better outcomes for our community.”

In 2019, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) recognized Thundermist for efforts to improve the quality, efficiency, and value of the health care we provide. Thundermist earned awards in more categories than any other health center in the state.

In 2019, the team increased the screening rate for this population from 49% at higher risk for hepatitis C (people born between 1945 and 1965). In nine months, the team increased the screening rate for this population from 49% to 66% and identified 171 new cases.

The medication is highly successful. We have seen an almost 100% cure rate.”

This is a quote from Sapna Chowdhry, MD, an infectious disease specialist and medical director of Thundermist Health, Center of Woonsocket when talking about a recent effort to screen patients for hepatitis C. Screening is important because most patients have no idea they are infected.

The goal of the project is to end hepatitis C by treating everyone who is infected. “If there is no disease to transmit, there can’t be any new cases,” explains Dr. Chowdhry. “The disease is curable with medication.

The evidence is clear we must address the social determinants that impact health. Thundermist is actively addressing food insecurity. Funding from Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island supports two exciting projects aimed at food insecurity in Woonsocket. Each month, patients can receive a voucher to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at the Winter Farmers Market held at the health center. In addition, a new investment will support our Woonsocket Emergency Food Cabinet and ensure patients who are hungry go home with several healthy meals that meet guidelines for chronic diseases, such as diabetes.

Innovative Technologies and Treatment

Thundermist clinicians are on the cutting-edge of new technologies, evidence-based practices, and new approaches to the way care is delivered. A recent example is the addition of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) for prevention of HIV to the services offered at Convenient Care. People can walk into any Thundermist Convenient Care location to receive the service. PrEP is a new, safe, HIV prevention method for HIV-negative people to reduce the risk of becoming infected.

Policy Development

Thundermist recognizes we must have a voice in crafting policies that extend far beyond the exam room. Two areas we have been recent active participants are ensuring Rhode Islanders access to affordable housing in a healthy area and safe, reliable transportation.

These are only a few examples of how Thundermist will continue to change the way we think about primary care and play a critical role in improving the health and strength of our state.

The Next 50 Years

Thundermist Health Center has redefined primary care and will continue to do so.

During our 50-year history, we established a medical home that now cares for more than 51,000 Rhode Islanders. These patients receive an innovative, patient-centered model of care that evolved to better meet the needs of each individual person.

Primary care at Thundermist includes much more than medical care. A multi-disciplinary care team helps each patient improve their physical, emotional, and oral health while also addressing the social determinants impacting their health and well-being.

How will Thundermist continue to evolve over the next 50 years?

Trauma

The immediate answer is addressing trauma. Thundermist will accomplish this by becoming the first trauma-informed health center in Rhode Island and training our workforce to provide trauma-informed care following an approach outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

A patient’s experience with trauma impacts every area of their life. Trauma also impacts families across generations. Evidence shows many poor physical and behavioral health outcomes are directly related to past traumatic experiences.

Social Determinants of Health

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Connecting Children to Oral Health

Thundermist acted quickly to expand dental care to children following the licensing of public health dental hygienists.

A new, innovative program is a prime example of the success that comes from integrating medical and dental care.

Public health dental hygienists are trained to perform oral hygiene care without direct oversight of a dentist. Two public health dental hygienists work in Thundermist’s Woonsocket medical practice. They collaborate with pediatric and family medicine providers and the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) to identify children in need of dental care. If a child has not received dental care in the past year, we offer a same-day appointment with a public health dental hygienist.

Services include a basic screening, dental cleaning, fluoride treatment, sealants, nutritional counseling, and oral health instructions. Patients are also scheduled for an appointment with a dentist for additional care.

“Oral health is important to a child’s overall health. It is important children see a dentist before their first birthday, receive sealants, and regularly see a dentist. This program helps to connect children with oral health care,” said Eric Prosseda, DMD, chief dental officer.

During the first month of the program, more than 200 children got the care they needed. They will now receive regular dental care, but most importantly their medical and dental care providers will work in coordination to improve their overall health.

“Our approach to care is unique. This integration of medical and dental care improves the quality of care for our patients. They receive all the care they need in one place. It’s convenient for the patient and improves outcomes,” said David Bourassa, MD, chief medical officer.

Four-year-old twins, Kevonna and Keseana, recently benefited from this program. They received their first dental cleaning while at Thundermist of Woonsocket for a medical appointment. The kids have follow-up appointments with a dentist, and their mom got tips on how to take care of their teeth. Their siblings will also see a dentist in the coming weeks.

“This was really helpful. I didn’t know juice was bad for their teeth,” said their mom, Shamekia Coger. “I’m grateful that my kids will now have a dentist.”

In 2019, the Thundermist dental team worked toward an important goal – ensuring every patient between the ages of six and 14 receives sealants. Sealants help prevent cavities and decay in molars.

Their focus and commitment made a tremendous impact. Thundermist is now in the top quartile of health centers across the country for patients with sealants. In addition, the percentage of Thundermist patients between the ages of six and 14 with sealants grew from 40% to 85% in 2019.

It’s important that children receive sealants soon after their molars grow, around age six. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says school-age children without sealants have almost three times more cavities in their first molars than those with sealants. Untreated cavities can cause pain, infection, and problems eating, speaking, and learning.
Thank you for your generosity. 88% of Thundermist revenue supports direct patient care.

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You helped raise more than $40,000 to support health care for those in need. You, along with more than 100 community members, supported our mission with your generosity in our raffle. Your support helped raise nearly $1,300 for our food pantries that help hungry patients.

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