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## St. Petersburg Times

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### Clearwater to open health clinic for city employees

By Mike Brassfield, Times Staff Writer

*Clearwater wants to control costs for the 4,000 people enrolled in its health plan.*

CLEARWATER - Fed up with spiraling health care costs, Clearwater officials are trying out a new strategy - the first of its kind in the Tampa Bay area.

They're opening their own medical clinic for the city's 1,400 employees.

The intent is to cut out the middleman so workers and the city will pay less to Cigna, their health insurance company. Although it will cost millions to set up and operate the clinic, officials are confident that city taxpayers will save money in the deal.

"Conservatively, we think we'll save two dollars for every dollar we invest," said Joe Roseto, the city's human resources director. "Our whole focus here is mitigating our health care costs."

Clearwater is the first city in the bay area to do this, although cities elsewhere in Florida have taken this step. Other local municipalities are watching to see how this experiment turns out. And Dunedin is considering becoming a partner in Clearwater's clinic.

The Clearwater City Council voted Thursday night to ratify a three-year, \$2.6 million contract with a company called CareATC, which runs clinics like this one.

The clinic will be in Morritt Professional Center, an office building at 401 Corbett St. just south of Morton Plant Hospital. It is expected to open in about a month. It will serve city employees, retirees and their dependents - about 4,000 people who are covered by the city's health insurance plan.

Employees will not be required to go to the clinic. But many of them will likely use it because they won't have to pay a co-pay to their insurance company, and they'll be able to buy prescription drugs at the wholesale cost.

Its services will include primary care office visits, acute and urgent care, dispensing prescription drugs, immunizations, health risk assessments and disease management.

The clinic idea has been discussed for some time. This week, City Council members debated where to locate it before they settled on the Corbett Street location.

"This journey has taken many, many years to get to this," said Stephen Sarnoff, president of a city employees union. "Once it's open and running, nobody's going to care much about where it is."

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