

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

HEALTH CARE

Kidney care giant DaVita evolves beyond dialysis, stays committed to downtown Denver



Davita CEO Javier Rodriguez poses for a portrait at Davita Headquarters on February 12, 2025, in Denver.

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The top executive of a Fortune 500 health care giant that treats over 250,000 patients across 14 countries sees continued expansion ahead as the Denver-based company starts its second quarter-century in business.

Kidney care company DaVita Inc. (NYSE: DVA) isn't done growing. During its fourth-quarter earnings call Thursday, CEO Javier Rodriguez said the business remains focused on finding the "right opportunities" to scale further. Equally important, though, are efforts to improve health results for its patients, he says.

Such is the theme of Rodriguez's outlook for DaVita as he looks back on the company's first 25 years. DaVita, formerly Total Renal Care, re-launched from near bankruptcy in 2000 with a new name, mission and set of values.

In an exclusive interview with the Denver Business Journal, Rodriguez laid out his expectations for the kidney care market, hinted at a few upcoming projects and shared his perspective on being an anchor employer located at the end of Denver's 16th Street Mall.

An evolving industry

DaVita's core business is dialysis, which is the process of removing fluids and toxins from the blood when a person's kidneys aren't functioning properly.

When DaVita announced its headquarters move to Denver in 2009, the company said at the time that it operated more than 1,400 outpatient dialysis centers and hospital units, having a presence in most U.S. states. Today, DaVita operates more than 3,000 centers worldwide, with its most recent international expansions to Chile, Ecuador, and Japan.

In recent years, DaVita has invested more heavily in infrastructure that allows patients to do their dialysis at home. That is particularly helpful for rural patients who don't live near a dialysis center, Rodriguez has said. In 2024, the company reported that 15% of all its patients use at-home dialysis.

At-home health care can be more cost-efficient, but Rodriguez said the chronic nature of kidney treatment – dialysis most often needs to be done three times per week or more – means that DaVita must consider patient lifestyle.

"I don't have a bias as to where you have it," Rodriguez said of dialysis. "What I want to create is a lot of options so that I meet your lifestyle wherever you're at."

To support at-home treatment, Rodriguez said DaVita implemented connected cyclers, which is a technology that allows care teams to remotely monitor patients at home. More than 80% of people who do home treatment are now covered by the technology.

In future years, Rodriguez said he expects "really cool things" to come from DaVita's joint venture with Medtronic. The offshoot, called Mozarc Medical, is looking for ways to make at-home dialysis less burdensome and more comfortable. Each company contributed about \$200 million to launch the joint venture.

Medtronic leaders have said the new offshoot is looking into a medical device solution for vascular access, which are the catheters or tubes used in dialysis that can lead to clotting or other complications.

The partnership is beneficial because DaVita has a large patient base that can offer real-time feedback on Medtronic's solutions, Rodriguez said.

"We're several years into it, and it's been a sizable investment, and I can't talk much about what we're doing," he said of Mozarc Medical. "But we're excited."

Working downtown

DaVita has about 3,000 people working based out of its two buildings downtown, the company said.

Its global headquarters address is 2000 16th St. The company has a major interest in the future of downtown Denver and 16th Street, Rodriguez said.

Efforts to revitalize and rebrand the pedestrian corridor, including months of construction updating the 16th Street Mall, have made a difference, he said, but he believes there is still a long way to go.

Rodriguez and other company leaders are deeply involved in downtown efforts, he said.

"It's one of these things that you can't be critical of something and be passive," he said.

DaVita last year partnered with a local real estate company to build workforce housing at 2000 Welton St. in northern downtown. DaVita saw a major need for

more affordable housing, Rodriguez said. The project is on track to break ground late this year or early 2026, he said.

"We know that it's a drop in the bucket, meaning it's a big issue we have to challenge," he said of affordable housing. "Instead of saying, 'Are we going to solve everything? No.' But can we solve one thing? Can we help some people? And the answer is 'yes.'"

No matter what, Rodriguez said, DaVita's downtown presence is a priority. One way to contribute to downtown vitality is to simply continue to have employees coming downtown for work, he said.

"This is our home. We're staying," Rodriguez said.

The 'holy grail' of health care

When it comes to meeting patients where they are, DaVita has evolved from being a dialysis provider to more of a comprehensive kidney care company, Rodriguez said. That encompasses early intervention and counseling through more complicated conditions and supporting patients through kidney transplants. In 2024, a record 8,200 DaVita patients received a kidney transplant, the company says.

More holistic, individualized care is the "holy grail" in health care, Rodriguez said. Treating patients before their kidneys significantly deteriorate makes a major difference in cost and outcome, but a fragmented health care system often gets in the way, he said.

Rodriguez said he believes DaVita can be the health care provider that connects the dots for patients, from managing burdens associated with transportation and payment to preventing further complications.

"The hope is that we eliminate unnecessary health care that happens because proactive health care did not happen," he said. "You're going to consume health care, but if it's organized and coordinated, it's likely to go way, way better for you and your lifestyle and your quality of life, and for the cost."

Rodriguez admits that fully integrating health care is a lofty goal. Thousands of DaVita employees are dedicated to figuring out how to move past challenges like care fragmentation and a distrust of the health care system that keeps vulnerable patients from getting needed preventative care, he said.

Rodriguez is motivated by successes like a recent milestone DaVita reached in being available to the patient of any hospital in need of dialysis care in as little as four hours, he said.

"They're pieces of the puzzle that you're putting together," he said. "You can't do it all in one year."

Other Denver-based companies are tackling the preventative health care challenge with similar vigor.

Strive Health was founded in 2018 by former DaVita executive Chris Riopelle. The company, which uses software for early intervention of kidney disease, has grown rapidly to serve patients in most U.S. states. Other companies, like startup Virta Health, which relocated its headquarters to Denver in 2023, are using preventative methods like nutrition to tackle sustainable weight loss and diabetes reversal.

Rodriguez said he doesn't see those companies as competitors.

"Everybody's trying to solve for it slightly different," he said. "We don't proclaim to say that we have the answer, but we believe that we have a very strong presence with people that will help in the local market."

Labor challenges persist

Rodriguez started as DaVita's CEO in 2014 after working with the company since 1998. He said his experience as a longtime employee has shaped his priorities in recruiting and retaining talent in the face of an unprecedented shortage of health care workers.

Fewer tenured employees are leaving the company, but Rodriguez said there is more churn among newer employees just starting their careers. For that reason, he said DaVita started a shadowing program for new entrants. And he's looking



Davita headquarters on April 7, 2022, in Denver.



An art installation marking 25 years of Davita at Davita Headquarters on February 12, 2025, in Denver.



An art installation of the new mission statement with the signatures of employees as the background at Davita Headquarters on February 12, 2025, in Denver.

for other ways to ensure employees are fulfilled and to show that they matter, he said.

"The reason I stayed for 25 years was because I grew up here," Rodriguez said. "People took care of me."

He said he expects talent to be a persistent challenge.

"I think it's going to be a theme for the foreseeable future as to how we keep re-energizing people to give energy," he said. "You're giving and you're giving, and what we found is that if you get fulfillment from it, you come back."