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Wal-Mart Seeks Partners for Health-Care Expansion

By MIGUEL BUSTILLO

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. says it is aiming to become "the largest provider of primary healthcare services in the nation" and is seeking other companies to help it provide medical care for the new program, which it will market through its giant fleet of more than 3,800 U.S. stores.

The world's largest retailer is seeking "strategic partners to rapidly create a comprehensive healthcare solution" as part of a plan to offer "the lowest cost primary healthcare services and products," according to a request for information the retailer recently sent out to other companies.

A Wal-Mart spokesman confirmed the authenticity of the proposal, first obtained by the Kaiserhealthnews.org, but said it was preliminary and downplayed its ambitious-sounding intentions.

Wal-Mart made a huge splash in the health-care business five years ago when it began offering generic prescriptions of many popular medicines for \$4, a move that was widely credited with bringing down health-care costs. For Wal-Mart, it also had the benefit of bringing more customers into its warehouse-sized stores.

But subsequent moves by the Bentonville, Ark., retailer into selling electronic health-care records and offering some in-store clinics run by outside contractors have had a far more limited impact.

Wal-Mart said in its proposal document that it is interested in offering services including clinical care such as monitoring for asthma, sleep apnea and osteoporosis; diagnostic services such as allergy and blood testing; and preventative services such as vaccinations and physical exams, as well as health and wellness products.

It asked vendors to propose low-cost plans and said it would make final selections by January.

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