

FEATURED

## Waldorf clinic receives \$325,000 grant

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9 hrs ago

Health Partners in Waldorf has received a \$325,000 grant to expand and develop its dental services for low income and underinsured children and adults.

The grant comes from the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission, an independent commission established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2005 to expand services for underserved populations.

The clinic has been expanding its dental services since first offering dental services in 2007, and the grant will help fund paying the salaries of the dentist, the dental assistant and dental hygienist, allowing long-term expansion of the program, said Chrisie Mulcahey, executive director of Health Partners.

The clinic also provides a mobile dentistry bus that visits elementary and middle schools in the county, Mulcahey said.

“We take the mobile unit to the schools, and see any kids who are identified as being in need, regardless of whether they have insurance or not. We do a screening, a cleaning and then if they need anything further then they’re scheduled for an appointment,” Mulcahey said.

Mulcahey said the clinic offers services on a sliding scale based on the patient’s ability to pay, which the grant will help pay to support.

Sen. Thomas “Mac” Middleton (D-Charles) of La Plata said that although Medicaid covers dental, low income families and individuals often face many challenges to accessing dental health care.

“A lot of Medicaid patients were going without good dental screening, and good dental care,” Middleton said.

Mark Luckner, executive director of the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission, commended the clinic for the work it does in the community.

“They are really the backbone of delivering health care services for folks who are low income and folks who are uninsured,” Luckner said.

Dr. Harry Goodman, director of the office of oral health for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, said many people do not realize the importance of maintaining oral health.

“Tooth decay is an infectious disease, the most common chronic disease in children, and it’s 100 percent preventable,” Goodman said. “Many people don’t understand that when kids sit in class, in pain from a toothache, it hinders their ability to grow, to learn and to interact.”

Goodman said the tragic situation of Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old Prince George’s County boy who died in 2007 after an untreated tooth abscess spread lethal bacteria to his brain, helped drive the conversation to make this grant possible.

“We took it seriously, and Maryland committed itself to improving comprehensive care for every child in Maryland,” Goodman said. “Maryland has gone from worst to first; we’re now recognized nationally as a leader in oral health, but there still continues to be issues, and that’s why this grant is so important, especially for our rural areas.”

Middleton said preventative care can help keep costs for treatment down.

“What we pay now is a small price compared to what we would pay without preventative care,” Middleton said.

Funding for the grant comes in part from the CareFirst BlueCross Blue Shield health insurance.

Deborah Rivkin, vice president of governmental affairs for CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, said the funding for the grant is part of CareFirst's efforts to reach out to the community.

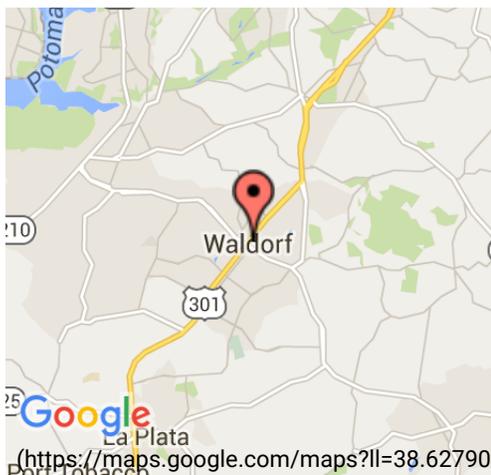
"The role of good health care in the region is important to everyone, not just CareFirst members, and so part of our mission is to go beyond our membership and look at needs throughout the community," Rivkin said. "Oral health care is integral to health care and I think it has taken a while for people to understand that."

Kit Wright, president of Health Partners' Board of Directors, said he has seen how the clinic's dental services have helped children.

"There's one gal, now a senior in high school, and we've been with her all the way through middle school, and Health Partners was the only one providing dental service, and I'm proud to say, she has pretty good teeth," Wright said.

He said he encountered another child at the mobile clinic, four years old, with every tooth rotten.

"That is a tragedy, and it's only programs like this that are getting to those kids," Wright said.



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