



Grand Rapids health centers among 5 in study of children's asthma

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By **Paul R. Kopenkoskey | The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS — Three community health centers in Grand Rapids will take part in a four-year [study](#) intended to ferret the best ways to control children's asthma, the most common reason they're hospitalized due to chronic disease.

Cherry Street Health Services, Baldwin Health Center and Clinica Santa Maria — as well as two other federally qualified health centers in Tucson, Ariz. and Rincon, Puerto Rico — were tapped by the Community Healthcare [for Asthma](#) Management and Prevention of Symptoms (CHAMPS) and The Merck Childhood Asthma Network Inc. to be part of the \$4 million study.

Of that \$4 million, \$465,000 is earmarked for the three Grand Rapids-based clinics.

A report The George Washington University authored in 2010 identified the five community health centers as ideal for treating high-risk children with asthma.

Community health centers are considered the front door to health care for more than 20 million Americans — including for the thousands of children with asthma living in low-income and medically underserved communities in the Grand Rapids area.

"Low-income children are exposed to toxins and allergens disproportionately to children who live in suburban areas," said Dr. Floyd Malveaux, executive director of the Merck network. "Many are from rural areas as well."

"We're going to have a very rigorous evaluation component so we'll be able to identify some of the best practices in terms of implementation of these tools. We'll be able to get some insight into what it costs to do this and we'll be able to determine how effective these programs are in reducing hospitalizations and emergency rooms visits."

Asthma, which is triggered by genetics, allergens and environmental factors, such as pet dander and second-hand smoke, afflicts 232,770 children in Michigan, of which 11,755 live in Kent County.

It is the most frequent reason for pediatric hospitalization due to chronic disease, with an estimated cost in Michigan of \$394 million per year, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health.

The prevalence of the chronic disease of the airways that makes it difficult to breathe is increasing in all age groups but more rapidly in children than adults, according to the Asthma Network of West Michigan.

Rose Rumball, clinic director at Cherry Street Health Services' Grand Rapids pediatric clinic, said she hopes the study will help cull the best practices to sustain interventions and health improvements for the children.

"We'll be [learning](#) from networking and see what works best when CHAMPS does their evaluation," Rumball said.

"Maybe ours is working the best. At this point, we don't know."

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