



Groundbreaking set for Heart of the City Health Center in Grand Rapids

By [Kyla King The Grand Rapids Press](#)

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GRAND RAPIDS -- Treating chronic mental health illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and severe depression can be a constant struggle for low-income patients. Often, those conditions are coupled with such physical ailments as asthma, heart disease and diabetes.

Soon, West Michigan will have a unique one-stop location in the new [Heart of the City Health Center](#) where underserved populations will receive blended medical and mental health care. It is expected to put Grand Rapids on the map as a national model.

"The biggest difference is we're operating in the same site, with the same plan of treatment so when a patient comes in they'll come in for more than one service and be checked to see they've received all the care they need," said Chris Shea, executive director of [Cherry Street Health Services](#).

To mark the \$30 million achievement, organizers will hold a ceremonial groundbreaking Friday at the site of the new center, expected to open in June 2011. The project is a collaboration among

Cherry Street Health Services, [Touchstone Innovare](#) and [Proaction Behavioral Health Alliance](#). Right now, it is not much more than a hole in the ground near the corner of Cherry Street and Sheldon Avenue SE.

But next year, it will be home to doctors, dentists, psychiatrists, psychologists, health coaches, social workers, physical therapists and dietitians, all working under one roof to serve a low-income population.

The new building will replace the cramped Grand Rapids Pediatrics and Ferguson Dental offices with expanded facilities and relocate all but one of the mental health and substance abuse programs offered by Touchstone Innovare.

Touchstone President Greg Dziadosz said about 1,200 patients will be enrolled in a pilot program based on an integrated care model for chronic illness originally developed for medical conditions and general health care.

"Rarely has it been used with mental health, and not very often with more than one condition at a time," Dziadosz said.

The program is significant because, according to studies, more than 60 percent of adult Medicaid patients have a chronic or disabling condition, and an estimated one-quarter of the entire Medicaid population has a mental disorder.

When complete, the center is expected to serve almost 27,000 patients, including 13,000 who are not receiving health care, Shea said. That's because a recent study shows the demand for health

care for low-income patients in Kent County currently exceeds supply and is growing 24 percent a year.

Health centers and hospitals have the capacity to serve about 60 percent of the primary needs of Kent County's 194,000 low-income population. The other 40 percent go without care or to emergency rooms, he said.

And because federal health care reform is expected to enroll additional patients in the Medicaid health insurance program, Shea expects 40,000 new patients over the next five years.

"We take a high volume of Medicaid patients (already), and we'll probably be providing the most care to Medicaid patients of any agency in town when this is all completed," Shea said. "In terms of dental service, we are just about the only game in town that accepts Medicaid."

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