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New low-cost clinic opens in Oakland County

BY ROBIN ERB
FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

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With the pockets of poor growing throughout Michigan, low-cost health care has expanded again — this time with a new clinic in one of the state's wealthiest counties.

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Covenant Community Care, a faith-based nonprofit focused on low-cost primary medical care, has teamed up with Beaumont Hospital to open a Federally Qualified Health Center at 27776 Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak. The idea is twofold at the 3,800-square-foot center -- provide regular patient care to those who otherwise don't have a doctor and reduce the burden on local emergency rooms.

In addition to care for ill adults, the center will offer obstetric and pediatric care, as well as preventive care, such as wellness checks for children and immunizations.

"The thing that's so costly both for the patient and for society is that (patients) wait until their condition is so bad that they have to go to the ER," said Gary Petroni, program director of the Southeast Michigan Health Association. Such health clinics offer top-notch care, helping to stabilize the health of a local population, he said.

With the designation of Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, a clinic can tap into federal grants to help cover the costs of care and to purchase patient medications at a discount.

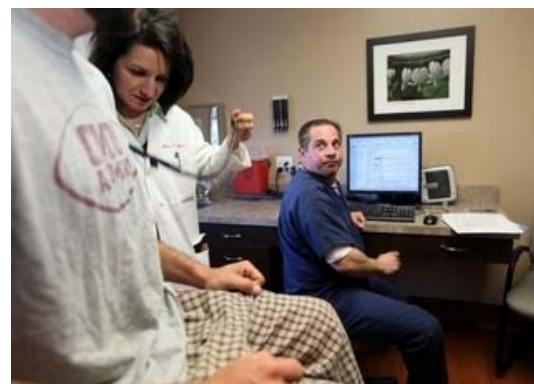
That means it must also accept all Medicaid and Medicare insurance plans and provide other services, like a dental clinic, said Paul Propson, executive director, Covenant Community Care.

There are several such clinics in Wayne County. A "look-alike" clinic serves a similar population, but it doesn't have the full designation as the new Covenant site.

But only a handful of fully designated clinics or "look-alikes" operate in Macomb and Oakland counties, according to federal data.

One other clinic in Oakland County is a full FQHC - Oakland Primary Health Services in Pontiac.

The decision to expand into Oakland, the state's second wealthiest county, was an easy one, Propson said.



Dr. Marisa Abbo, checks the heart of Aaron Wipfel, of Roseville as Al Bucci, medical assistant enters all the patient's information into a computer at the Covenant Community Health Center in Royal Oak, Mich., on Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2010. The health center offers high quality, affordable primary health care for area residents with or without insurance. (ANDRE J. JACKSON/DETROIT FREE PRESS)



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Over the years, the Wayne County centers have seen an increasing number of patients streaming in from Oakland and Macomb, he said. Many had health care for years, but lost it as the economy tanked.

“There are so many people with desperate medical situations, but manageable situations,” he said. “Because they don’t have a doctor or those medications, their health erodes very quickly.”

Covenant will operate the center; Beaumont will provide some of the medical staff as well as \$1.4 million in financial support to help cover capital and operational costs. Beaumont will also provide in-kind donations, such as lab testing for patients.

The center is open 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, noon-8 p.m. Tuesday and 8 a.m-4 p.m. Friday.

Call 248-556-4900 to schedule an appointment.

Contact **ROBIN ERB**: 313-222-2708 or rerb@freepress.com.

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