

## HEALTHCARE &amp; INSURANCE

## Valley Community Healthcare Helps Bring the Affordable Care Act to the Valley

The hoped-for success of the Patient Reform and Affordable Care Act (ACA) was based on the nationwide expansion of the community health center system that aimed at providing a medical home for the millions of men and women newly eligible for health insurance. People frequently ask "Did the Affordable Care Act impact Valley Community Healthcare?" The answer is a resounding YES! If these newly insured individuals

### HEALTHCARE SPOTLIGHT

don't have a doctor who will accept their Med-Cal or Covered California insurance plans, they will continue to use local emergency rooms for non-urgent care. And this prompted Valley Community Healthcare to significantly expand its array of services and provide these San Fernando Valley residents with a Medical Home.

The ACA provisions that had the most impact on lower-income people and Valley Community Healthcare are the state-subsidized exchange of qualified health plans, and the expanded Medi-Cal coverage for adults. The new health insurance marketplace successfully launched in California in 2014, provides businesses with less than 50 employees and individuals with incomes up to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) access to affordable health care. More significantly, Medi-

Cal became available to *any adult* who earns less than 138% of the FPL (family of four earning \$32,449 annually). Previously this coverage was only available to adults if their children were enrolled in Medi-Cal. In addition, Medi-Cal itself expanded coverage of primary care to include dental care, and for the first time, behavioral health services.

This demonstrates how the ACA impacted the low-income community; but the real, and perhaps more significant impact, is its power as an economic engine. As a direct result of the ACA, 45 new positions were created at Valley Community Healthcare, and the staff base increased to over 200 employees. Among these new positions were medical practitioners and support staff, and the Enrollment Department increased from four to 16 staff members.

Valley Community Healthcare has been preparing for this expansion for several years. In 2010 it began an enormous ramp-up at the North Hollywood Center broadening the array of clinical services offered to include a prenatal program, comprehensive adolescent medicine, and integrated behavioral health services. In early 2015, VCH's new, full-service 15,000 sq. ft. North Hills Wellness Center opened for limited services, and will continue to expand

the range of services through 2015 and beyond.

The new site, adjacent to Monroe High School, will serve the attending students, their families, and the medical-ly underserved residents of all ages in the surrounding communities. The Wellness Center provides easy access to one stop care, encouraging patients to visit their medical home rather than an emergency room or urgent care center. By providing residents with access to a full array of services, pediatrics, dental and optometry in one location, North Hills Wellness Center addresses transportation difficulties and other obstacles that frequently prevent patients from receiving ongoing care and treatment.

Its proximity to the school (students can enter the Wellness Center through a private walkway directly from the campus, thus ensuring their safety and confidentiality) provides special opportunities for health programs that directly impact the students. Valley Community Healthcare's award-winning Valley Teen Clinic is already on campus, providing special teen-focused education on pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections, as well as access to primary care.

In order to cover the cost of its extended operations Valley Community Healthcare conducted a successful expansion campaign, raising over \$3.65M,

which expanded the North Hollywood Center, equipped and furnished the new North Hills Center, and provides the operational funding necessary before the new site becomes fully functioning and sustainable.

Because of the 2014 implementation of the ACA, Valley Community Healthcare staff enrolled 5,000 new previously uninsured patients to Medi-Cal, and provided valuable assistance to people signing up for health coverage for the first time. "The shortage of primary care providers is growing, and insured patients still face significant barriers to care. Our health care systems are in transition," said Roger A. Peeks, MD, Chief Medical Officer at VCH, "and so we are looking at introducing new models of patient care. These go beyond the one-on-one doctor/patient visit to include an integrated team approach to treatment, tele-medicine, and group visits."

As a direct result of the Affordable Care Act, Valley Community Healthcare created a new medical home in the North San Fernando Valley, and thousands of its low-income residents have access to healthcare for the first time in their lives.

For more information about Valley Community Healthcare, visit [valleycommunityhealthcare.org](http://valleycommunityhealthcare.org)