



Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU)

Summary of Eye Care and Vision Program Grantees

The provision of on-site, comprehensive eye and vision care speaks directly to the mission of health centers to provide primary, preventive health care services. As such with the generous support of the Centene Foundation for Quality Healthcare, the Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU) has provided over \$500,000 in grants to 29 health centers to support the costs associated with establishing and expanding permanent eye health and vision care programs. Each recipient of the grant is required to submit data on the number of patients seen one year after receiving the grant. To date:

- 8,773 patients have received vision screenings
- 17,596 patients have received comprehensive eye exams
- 9,023 glasses prescriptions have been provided
- 1,221 referrals for specialist care have been made

If you would like more information you can contact Luke Ertle, ACU Program Director, at lertle@clinicians.org or (202) 213-9569.

Current Grantees

Cherokee Health Systems – Knoxville, TN

Since 1960, Cherokee Health Systems (CHS) has been providing comprehensive primary care, behavioral health, and prevention programs and services across East Tennessee. CHS's philosophy is that the best approach to wellness involves treating both the body and mind, and currently has 47 clinical sites in 13 Tennessee counties that provide medical, dental, and behavioral health care. With this grant, CHS aims to expand its services to include vision care and will focus on providing services to uninsured, underinsured, and underserved patients from across the lifespan (children, adolescents, adults, older adults) in CHS' upper east Tennessee service area.

Cumberland Family Medical Center - Columbia, Kentucky

Cumberland Family Medical Center (CFMC) serves a 30-county area in rural south-central and central KY. With this grant, CFMC will purchase portable equipment to provide optometry services to students through the Healthy Kids Clinic (HKC) School-based Health Center program. CFMC currently runs HKCs in 20 school systems across south-central and central Kentucky. Specifically, CFMC operates 152 school-based clinics within these 20 school systems. Services currently include acute/primary care, chronic care management and education, immunizations, well-child checks, sports physicals, individual, group, and family behavioral/mental health services, preventative and restorative oral health (screening, scaling, cleaning, x-ray, and sealant treatments along with restorative care if needed), and flu/COVID vaccines and tests. CFMC offers these services at no cost to the school systems, provides a Sliding Fee Discount Scale for eligible patients, and participates in the 340B Discount Pharmacy program.

East Georgia Healthcare Center – Swainsboro, Georgia

East Georgia Healthcare Center (EGHC), located in rural Swainsboro, provided health care to 20,828 people in 2019. At EGHC, 67% percent of the patient population belongs to a racial or ethnic minority group (30% Hispanic/Latino and 35% Black/African American) and 70% percent have incomes at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline. With the support of their grant, EGHC will offer much-needed eye health and vision care services one day a week.

El Dorado Community Health Center – Placerville, California

El Dorado Community Health Centers (EDCHC) are committed to improving the health of our community through quality healing and preventive services. Grant funding was applied to the purchase of equipment to outfit three exam rooms and one optical testing room. Opened in November 2022, the newly created optometry services serve low-income families who depend on Medi-Cal/Medicaid or do not have insurance. These services are available to the EDCHC patient population with a known diagnosis of hypertension and or diabetes. EDCHC currently set a goal to increase screening rates for patients with diabetes, specifically targeting annual retinopathy screenings. By having an onsite optometry professional, opportunities for preventative services will increase significantly.

Current Grantees

Great Lakes Bay Health Centers - Saginaw, MI

Great Lakes Bay Health Centers (GLBHC) currently has two vision exam rooms and is the only care provider in the area that takes all Medicaid plans. GLBHC is utilizing grant funds to fully equip both rooms in order to add a second doctor which will be a medical student thus doubling patient care.

HASC Diagnostic & Treatment Center - Brooklyn, NY

The Center serves general and special needs patients primarily from Southern Brooklyn although special needs patients travel from as far away as Queens and Long Island to take advantage of our specific sensitivity and ability to provide medical care and therapies to this population. Once established, the HASC Vision Center will offer permanent and comprehensive eye health and vision care programs, including comprehensive eye exams, to children, adults and special needs patients, so that vision problems can be diagnosed and treated and so that diseases, injuries and other disorders of the eyes can be managed. With the establishment of an on-site optometry department, HASC will be able to offer services to existing FQHC patients where they are already receiving primary and specialty care in a familiar and comfortable setting. Of great importance, we will be able to offer these services to HASC's special needs patients who are more comfortable receiving health care services in a setting knowledgeable of and sensitive to their needs and concerns. The Center is committed to serving the needs of the overall community and outreach will be done to inform potential new patients about the Center's new Vision Center.

Hilltown Community Health Center - Worthington, MA

Hilltown Community Health Center (HCHC) will use the grant funding to purchase new portable equipment to operate flexible clinics at our Amherst CHC and our Worthington CHC on a regular, year-round schedule. This equipment will allow our providers to offer direct vision services, comprehensive eye examinations, and prescription glasses. The Amherst CHC will also service HCHC's migrant farmworker community with this new equipment.

Current Grantees

Lowell Community Health Center – Lowell, Massachusetts

Lowell Community Health Center (CHC) utilized its grant funds to provide comprehensive vision exams for the first time at the Lowell High School School-Based Health Center (LHS SBHC). Lowell is the fourth-largest city in MA and home to significant immigrant and refugee communities. This project targets low-income Lowell High School (LHS) youth. Approximately 30% percent of students are Hispanic, 30% percent are Asian (mostly Cambodian), and 11% percent are African-American/Black. Twenty-four percent of the district's 14,436 students are English Learners who speak over 47 languages (top languages: Spanish, Khmer). From March 2018 to March 2019, 40% percent of pediatric patients seen by Lowell CHC optometrists failed a vision screening, and only 30% percent of these patients attended a follow-up eye exam. While the Lowell Health Department performs school-based vision screenings at all Lowell public schools, in 2020 only 17% percent of students who failed the exam returned a completed referral form for a complete eye exam. Cases seen at the LHS SBHC include uncorrected refractive error, amblyopia, strabismus and other conditions that may affect learning and development as well as life success. Additionally, headache due to eye strain is a major complaint. Parents often are not available to bring youth to specialty appointments including glasses fittings. In extreme situations, youth seek emergency services for eye-related conditions that may be properly diagnosed and managed with comprehensive care delivered during the school day at the LHS SBHC. Grant funding is expected to reduce the barriers to accessing vision services and improve health outcomes, specifically at this high school-based location.

Marias Healthcare Services, Inc. – Shelby, Montana

Marias Healthcare Services (MHSI) serves 20,000 patients in Pondera, Toole, Liberty, and Glacier Counties in Montana. Toole county is down to a half-time vision provider who is nearing retirement, Glacier County has one vision provider who is not accepting new patients as they are trying to retire. Pondera and Liberty Counties do not have a vision provider. Grant funds were utilized to open MHSI's first vision lane, and upon opening its optometry clinic in April 2022, MHSI became the first FQHC in the state of Montana to offer optometry services.

North Olympic Healthcare Network – Port Angeles, Washington

The goal of North Olympic Healthcare Network's (NOHN) program is to provide eye care to prevent medical eye disease to health center patients lacking access to such care currently in the community, primarily patients with Medicaid and Medicare coverage typically not accepted by most retail vision service providers. As for barriers to care, there are not enough vision providers in the area, and because NOHN's service area is so rural, patients travel long distances to obtain care. There is a significant lack of access to vision services for Medicaid patients in the area – with few providers offering little to no Medicaid access. NOHN will be the only provider of unrestricted access to vision services for Medicaid or uninsured patients in Clallam County.

Current Grantees

Peninsula Community Health Services of Alaska, Inc. – Soldotna, Alaska

The Kenai Peninsula where Peninsula Community Health Services of Alaska, Inc. (PCHS) is located has lacks vision care for publicly insured and uninsured individuals. Local social media (e.g., Kenai Peninsula Bad Business Pages) have thousands of comments pertaining to the lack of eye care services and the quality of eye care on the Kenai peninsula as local optometry offices are booked out for an average of 3 months. Since Medicaid does not reimburse these providers at the same rate as an FQHC, they only make a limited number of appointments available to Medicaid beneficiaries. Uninsured patients cannot book an appointment unless they agree to pay in full upfront. Many of these patients feel the need to travel three (3) hours to the closest clinic in Anchorage. PCHS saw this need, and decided to open their own optometry clinic leveraging their grant funds to cover pediatric vision tools, a trial lens kit, Volk lens, Vision charts, BAT vision screener, Cyl extenders, trial frames – adult and pediatric, and informative pamphlets/posters.

Swope Health - Excelsior Springs, Missouri

Swope Health will addi vision services to the future KidsCare Clinic, scheduled to open in 2023 in the Excelsior Springs Of the 2,900 students in the school district, 58% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch, demonstrating low-income levels of the majority of district families. Once established and running, the KidsCare clinic could also serve neighboring rural school districts, including the Kearney R-1 School District and the Lawson R-XIV School District.

Past Grantees

Albany Area Primary Health Care – Albany, GA

Albany Area Primary Health Care (AAPHC) is the primary source of health care for over 45,000 people living in southeastern Georgia. Eighty percent of their patients belong to racial and ethnic minorities (primarily Black/African American) and 77% have incomes at or below 100% of the federal poverty guideline. Their grant helped them purchase vision lane equipment and launch a vision care program at a school-based health center in February 2020. Unfortunately, the school shut down on March 13, 2020, reopened slowly in September 2020, and then shut down again with the most recent COVID-19 surge. During school closures, an AAPHC patient navigator worked to connect students to eye care available at their S. Trussell Medical Center and AAPHC collaborated with the Crisp County School System to transport students to a vision clinic at the School-Based Health Center located inside of Dooly County Elementary and Middle School. With schools closed, optometric technicians are reporting that many parents lack transportation and aren't picking up glasses which are normally given to the kids at school. AAPHC is exploring opportunities to deliver glasses to the homes of students.

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless – Denver, Colorado

As the largest Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) provider in Colorado, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) provided integrated health care, including Vision Services, to 15,494 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in 2020. CCH's Stout Street Eye Clinic (SSEC) is located within the Stout Street Health Center in central, downtown Denver. Volunteer providers at the clinic treat medical problems affecting the eyes including diabetes, hypertension, glaucoma, cataracts, retinopathy, macular degeneration, and eye diseases that cause blindness. In 2020, due to COVID-19, eye care services were interrupted and scaled back significantly. The SSEC is a main access point for people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness to receive a wide range of CCH's Integrated Health Services located within the Stout Street Health Center.

SSEC utilized its grant funds to purchase a retinal camera, visual field, and tonometer to expand its comprehensive vision services program. With this equipment, vision staff were able to increase clinic workflow efficiency, reduce patient wait times, and serve more clients. The retinal camera has helped vision staff streamline screening of retinal abnormalities and early detection of diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and other diseases. The visual field assisted staff with checking for blind spots and vision loss from diseases like glaucoma. The purchase of the tonometer has allowed SSEC to provide more screenings through community outreach events which will lead to more follow-up visits at the SSEC and more patients receiving comprehensive vision care.

Family Health Services of Darke County – Greenville, OH

Family Health Services of Darke County provides primary care to approximately 5,000 people living in rural Ohio. Their grant was used to extend services for patients by purchasing an Optos California retinal imaging device through Optos, Inc. offsetting the total cost of \$80,995. The imaging has allowed better monitoring of retinal diseases such as glaucoma, macular degeneration, histoplasmosis, diabetic retinopathy and more. The clinic started a campaign to increase rates annual comprehensive exams of patients with diabetes. Having photo documentation of retinal health at the time of their visit is a valuable piece of their medical record and a critical educational tool to help optimize health and increase compliance in keeping patients coming in from one year to the next.

Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center – Boston, Massachusetts

Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center (HSNHC) is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that serves a culturally and socioeconomically diverse population residing in Boston's poorest zip codes in Dorchester, Mattapan, Roxbury, Hyde Park and Jamaica Plain. HSNHC utilized their grant to cover the cost of equipment necessary for the expansion of their newly formed Eyecare & Vision Services clinic. The addition of this new equipment, along with the expansion of the clinic space within the health center, has enabled Dr. Angela Abraham, OD to provide comprehensive eye exams, treatment for eye diseases, contact lens services, urgent care, pediatric vision care, glaucoma treatment and management and cataract surgical consultations. The expansion has increased HSNHC's capacity to meet patient needs, while also offering an onsite eyeglasses dispensary. This grant has been a tremendous help for low-income underserved patient population served by HSNHC, many of whom consider eyeglasses and eyecare to be financially out of reach.

HealthLinc – Mishawaka, Indiana

HealthLinc provides care to underserved individuals and families living in St. Joseph County where Indiana's Medicaid Plan, Managed Health Services, has one of the highest concentration of members in the state. HealthLinc found significant barriers to affordable and accessible optometry services in the eastern part of the County. Notably, many optometrists in the area do not accept Medicaid and/or uninsured patients. With the support of their grant, HealthLinc now provides optometry services at their Mishawaka location where 60% of patients served are Medicaid beneficiaries and 9% are uninsured/self-pay.

Heartland Health Center – Grand Island, Nebraska

Heartland Health Center provides primary care for over 4,300 people in Grand Island, Nebraska. Nearly 70% of their patient population belongs to a racial or ethnic minority group (primarily Hispanic/Latino). Half of their patient population is uninsured. With their grant, Heartland Health Center was able to purchase a vision spot screener to provide reliable, objective assessments and instantly detect the indication of six major issues:

- Hyperopia: farsightedness
- Myopia: nearsightedness
- Astigmatism: blurred vision
- Anisometropia: unequal refractive power
- Gaze: eye alignment measurement
- Anisocoria: unequal pupil size

Additionally, screenings are now offered as part of their well-child package so that eye and vision issues are detected early. The health center is continuing to grow its eye and vision care program in hopes of increasing access to more comprehensive eye health and vision care for its patient population.

Hyndman Health – Bedford, Pennsylvania

Hyndman Health provides primary care to approximately 5,000 people living in rural Pennsylvania. Their grant helped them to purchase vision lane equipment and launch a vision care program at their Bedford clinic in October 2019. By March 2020, the program was so successful that the organization had plans to contract with a vendor to provide their own glasses to patients.

Lanai Community Health Center – Lanai, Hawaii

Lanai Community Health Center (LCHC) is located on the island of Lanai, the smallest of the major Hawaiian Islands with a land area of 140 square miles. Nearly a third of the current population is foreign born and 16% face linguistic isolation due to their limited proficiency in English. LCHC provides routine health services to approximately 60% of the island's 3,100 residents. There are no vision providers on the island. The grant covered contract costs with Maui Optix to bring an optometrist to the island one to two times a month.

North Texas Area Health Centers – Fort Worth, Texas

North Texas Area Health Centers (NTAHC) provided primary care to 12,669 people in 2019, 93% of whom belong to a racial or ethnic minority group (primarily Hispanic/Latino). Over half of the health center patient population is uninsured. The grant was used to offset startup costs, including supplies and equipment.

Omni Family Health – Lindsay, California

Over half of the 18,522 people living in Lindsay, CA, are low-income families who depend on Medicaid or public insurance, and a growing number of the population may have hypertension and or diabetes, which can affect the eyes. Omni Family Health purchased equipment to outfit a vision lane, cabinetry for eyewear, and optometry supplies.

Oneworld Community Health Centers – Omaha, Nebraska

Oneworld Community Health Centers is the largest provider of primary health care services in South Omaha, and the only primary care clinic in the area with a majority bilingual and bicultural staff. In 2019, they provided primary care to 44,408 people, over half of whom have no health insurance. With their grant, OneWorld was able to offset the cost of three Retinal Camera. Two of the new cameras are stationed at their primary clinic in South Omaha, and one at a satellite clinic in Northwest Omaha.

PrimaryOne Health – Columbus, Ohio

Columbus Neighborhood Health Center, Inc. d/b/a/ PrimaryOne Health (P1H) is a nonprofit organization that provides high-quality vision care, primary medical, dental, behavioral health, and other supportive services to uninsured, underinsured, and other vulnerable populations at 12 health center sites in Ohio's Franklin and Pickaway counties. Grant funds were used to support the purchase of an optical coherence tomography (OCT) machine for P1H's East Main Street location in Columbus, Ohio. This machine is currently being used to diagnose and help treat individuals with glaucoma and retinal diseases like age-related macular degeneration and diabetic eye disease. It has expanded and enhanced their ability to provide comprehensive care for their vulnerable patient population of individuals from communities disproportionately impacted by these issues. Prior to receiving the grant, P1H only had one OCT machine at its other vision care site on Columbus's West Side. When patients at the East Main Street location required the use of an OCT machine, P1H had to refer them to the other site, or to another provider that does not offer reduced fees and generally has longer wait times. This extra step significantly decreased the likelihood that these patients received the follow-up they need due in part to the transportation barriers faced by their patient population as a significant number of adults in this zip code do not own a vehicle (21.7%). By securing this new OCT machine, P1H has ensured that underserved individuals in the service population have access to quality comprehensive vision care and has significantly improved P1H's ability to ensure patients receive the follow-up care they need to live healthy lives.

Regional Health Care Clinic, dba Katy Trail Community Health – Sedalia, Missouri

Katy Trail Community Health is located in Pettis County, MO where 16.4% of the population live below the poverty line. The project targeted people under 200% of the federal poverty level. The funding was used to purchase equipment to outfit 2 exam rooms.

Spectra Health – North Dakota

Spectra Health identified a tremendous need for discounted vision services and committed to expanding services to include on-site optometry for low-income individuals in far northeast North Dakota. Funding will supported procurement of needed supplies and equipment for a vision lane.

Treasure Coast Community Health – Fellsmere, Florida

With their grant funds, Treasure Coast Community Health, targeted children and adults in the farming/migrant area surrounding Fellsmere, Florida. Funding was used to purchase equipment for screening and initial inventory of glasses for children.

Valley Healthcare System, Inc. – Columbus, Georgia

Valley Healthcare System provides care to residents of Talbot County, Georgia, a rural area with a population of 6,865 residents and comprises 93.9% rural, nonfarm communities and 6.1% farming areas. The population is composed of 61.6% African American, 36% Caucasian and other minorities at less than 2%. Portable optometry equipment was purchased to run a flexible clinical model to promote eye health among all age groups within the county.