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## **Community-partnership allows for expansion of primary care services to Sarasota**

Through a community partnership, primary care services will be expanded to low-income and uninsured individuals in north Sarasota County through a New Access Point grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration. The grant, for \$595,833 per year through 2016, will help provide for the long-term sustainability of Sarasota County's health care safety net.

"There has been a community-wide concern for increasing access to health care for low-income and uninsured individuals, county-wide. The demand for primary care continues to increase as does the need to effectively manage patients living with chronic diseases," says Cord Mellor, a founding board member of the Community Health Center of North Port, Inc,

To that end, the Community Health Center of North Port, Inc., which oversees the North Port Health Center (a Federally Qualified Health Center or FQHC), in partnership with Sarasota County Health Department submitted a grant providing for the expansion of the North Port FQHC to north Sarasota, to include the Ringling (Sarasota) site of the Sarasota County Health Department. The new funding will allow for expanded hours and more health care providers to make these services more accessible to vulnerable populations.

Being an FQHC enhances our ability to provide improved access for low-income and uninsured clients. It also provides access to lower cost drugs, different payment structure and access to capital development funds. Because FQHCs manage primary health care, they have been shown to improve health care outcomes in the "high risk" individuals they serve.

This aligns with an ongoing collaboration between the Community Health Center of North Port, Inc. Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System, Senior Friendship Center and the Sarasota County Health Department with support from The Patterson Foundation. The project goal is to preserve and provide for the long-term sustainability of Sarasota County's health care safety net.

A health care safety net consists of private and public providers that deliver care in a variety of settings to patients who are otherwise unable to afford or access care. "The rise of the uninsured and underinsured people and the changing health care landscape creates challenges and opportunities that compel our community to find creative ways to help vulnerable populations. We want to ensure that those in need receive quality health services in the most cost-effective way possible in order to improve health outcomes," says Linda Stone, CEO of the North Port Health Center.

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