

SCGOVNEWS

Sarasota County Communications
scgov.net | 941-861-5000



NEWSROOM

PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

MEETINGS AND AGENDAS

E-NEWSLETTER

EVENT CALENDAR

Sept. 27, 2012

Media contact: Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852; cell 941-302-1058; Dianne_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us

Expanded health care services are now available for low-income families in Sarasota

The Sarasota County Health Department, under a partnership with the Community Health Center of North Port Inc., a not-for-profit 501c(3), will offer additional services and expanded hours at the Health Department's Ringling location, 2200 Ringling Blvd., beginning Friday, Oct. 12.

This expansion is the result of New Access Point satellite funding -- \$650,000 per year through 2016 --- granted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Services and Resource Administration (HRSA) Bureau of Primary Care to the Sarasota County Health Department on behalf of the co-entities. In addition to the funding, this grant placed the Ringling site under the North Port Health Center's Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) umbrella. In June, the Health Department's Children's Health Center also was granted FQHC status by HRSA.

"Having all of our Health Department sites designated as FQHCs is positive for the community because FQHCs and local health departments share a common mission to improve community health," said Sarasota County Health and Human Services Director Chuck Henry. "It also enhances our ability to provide improved access for low-income and uninsured clients while allowing access to lower cost medications, different reimbursement options and potential access to capital development funds."

The weekday hours for adult and children's primary care, behavioral health, dental and immunization services at the Ringling site are from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. Primary care and dental services are provided by appointment during the week. Saturday hours, for child and adult primary care only, will be from 8 a.m.-noon.

Immunization services at the Ringling site are available on a walk-in basis, although appointments are encouraged for adult and travel vaccinations. Health officials say that the services at the Children's Health Center at 17th Street, as well as the following services at the Ringling site, will remain unchanged: WIC, Healthy Start and Women's Health.

The Ringling Health Center recently underwent renovations to accommodate the expansion of services for families across all age groups. A full-time family practice physician and pediatrician are being added to the current mix of medical staff, bringing the number from three to five.

Health officials say that existing and new clients who work will now have more opportunities for appointments through the expanded hours.

Under the new structure, no one is refused health care. However, anyone seeking these services must participate in an eligibility screening process and pay their fair share on a sliding fee scale based on income and family size. Families are advised that proof of Sarasota County residency is required by certain facilities that handle referrals from primary care providers.

"Overall, we expect to provide medical, mental health and dental care for approximately 23,000 patients when we reach full capacity at the Ringling site in two years," said Henry. "This is up from the current number of 19,445."

“The expansion helps to address communitywide concern for making quality, affordable primary health care accessible to the growing number of low-income and uninsured individuals countywide who are living with chronic diseases,” said Cord Mellor, a founding board member of the Community Health Center of North Port Inc.

This aligns with an ongoing Safety-net System of Care collaboration between the Community Health Center of North Port Inc., Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System, Senior Friendship Center, Sarasota County government 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,” said Linda Stone, CEO of the Community Health Center of North Port. “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.”

For more information or to make an appointment for services at the Ringling site, call 941-861-2859 or visit www.sarasotahealth.org.