

Connecticut Free Clinics

In Connecticut, there are eight free clinic groups currently operating. These clinics are essential in providing care to those who cannot otherwise afford it. Though health reform will help close the huge gap of 50 million uninsured Americansⁱ, there are still millions who will slip through the cracks, many of whom are in desperate need of care. Community clinics and free clinics are often referred to as the “safety nets” of health care – but the free clinics are the safety net of safety nets, and qualifying patients can gain access to care when there isn’t anywhere else to go.

According to the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, free clinics are “volunteer-based, safety net health care organizations that provide a range of medical, dental, and/or behavioral health services to economically disadvantaged individuals.” Free clinics “restrict eligibility for their services to individuals who are uninsured, underinsured and/or have limited or no access to primary, specialty or prescription health care.”ⁱⁱ Every state but Alaska has a free clinic.ⁱⁱⁱ The services offered and eligibility requirements vary by clinic, but a common mission is to provide high quality care to uninsured residents who otherwise would not receive care.

In 2010, Connecticut free clinics provided over \$7.3 million of services free to 5,898 patients in 15,296 separate visits. Connecticut’s free clinics operate between 12 and 38 hours/week providing care delivered by 602 volunteers, including 134 primary care providers.^{iv}

Eleven percent or 384,000 Connecticut residents were without insurance in 2010.^v With name of Connecticut’s uninsured residents seeking care at free clinics, demand for services is great. Of the free clinics researched within the state, the locations, hours of operation, and services provided do not come close to meeting the needs of uninsured patients in the same way physician’s offices can for patients with insurance.

Differences between Free Clinics and Federally Funded Health Centers

Federally funded health centers are exactly that; they receive funding from federal government block grants, Medicare, Medicaid reimbursement, insurers, and state grants as well as donations and payments from patients. Free clinics receive their funding from the private sector through donations, gifts, and grants. Free clinics serve the uninsured or underinsured, “usually up to 200% of Federal Poverty Level,” while federally funded health centers serve both uninsured and insured patients.^{vi}

Most of the care provided at free clinics is delivered by volunteer physicians, nurses and other medical professionals. Federally funded health centers charge based on insurer/government rates or sliding fee scales. Free clinics, on the other hand, offer services for free or at a reduced, minimal fee that may be waived when necessary. Free clinics can also give referrals to other health care providers who may not charge patients, or their volunteers may offer to provide specialty care or lab services for little to no cost to patients. Federally funded health centers have referral systems usually based on reimbursement.^{vii}

Connecticut Free Clinics

- AmeriCares
 - Bridgeport
 - Danbury
 - Norwalk
- Malta House of Care
 - Hartford
 - Waterbury
- UConn Migrant Farm Workers Clinic
- FaithCare – Hartford, Springfield MA
- Samaritan Health Center -- Danbury
- Kevin’s Community Center -- Newtown
- Haven Free Clinic – New Haven
- Community Health Care Van – New Haven

Patients

Patients of Connecticut free clinics must meet eligibility requirements to receive care. While some clinics serve patients of any age, most Connecticut clinics treat only adults. Connecticut free clinics only serve uninsured patients, generally with income restrictions. Many free clinics have residency requirements and only patients living in nearby covered municipalities may receive care.

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ⁱ US Census 2010

ⁱⁱ National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics

ⁱⁱⁱ Mitchell, Deborah, “Free Clinics Serve Nearly 2 Million without Health Insurance,” June 17, 2010, EmaxHealth

^{iv} CTHPP survey of CT free clinics, 2011

^v US Census CPS, September 2011

^{vi} National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, “Comparison of Safety Net Providers Free Clinics to Federally Funded Clinics”

^{vii} *ibid*