

## **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 42 million uninsured Americans, 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 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 who are predominately uninsured.”<sup>i</sup> Every state but Alaska has a free clinic.<sup>ii</sup> 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.<sup>iii</sup>

Twelve percent, or 418,000, Connecticut residents were without insurance in 2009.<sup>iv</sup> With many 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 the federal government block grant, Medicare, Medicaid reimbursement, Insurance payers, and both public and private gifts, grants, and self pay.<sup>v</sup> Free clinics receive their funding from the private sector from donations, grants, etc.<sup>vi</sup> Free clinics serve the uninsured or the underserved, “usually up to 200% of Federal Poverty Level,” while federally funded health centers serve the uninsured and insured.<sup>vii</sup>

Most of the care provided at free clinics is provided by volunteer physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals. Federally funded health centers charge based on third party payers 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.<sup>viii</sup> Free clinics can also give referrals to other health care providers, or their volunteers may offer to provide specialty care or lab services for usually little to no cost to the patient. Federally funded health centers have referral systems based on reimbursement.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Connecticut Free Clinics**

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

## Patients

Patients of the free clinics must meet eligibility requirements to receive care. While some clinics serve patients of any age, others serve only adults. Connecticut free clinics serve those only uninsured patients with income restrictions as well. Many of the clinics have residency restrictions, and only patients from those cities or areas covered may receive care.

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<sup>i</sup> National Association of Free Clinics, <http://www.freeclinics.us/>, 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> Mitchell, Deborah, “Free Clinics Serve Nearly 2 Million without Health Insurance,” June 17, 2010, EmaxHealth, <http://www.emaxhealth.com/1275/free-clinics-serve-nearly-2-million-without-health-insurance>.

<sup>iii</sup> CTHPP survey of CT free clinics, 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> US Census CPS, September 2010.

<sup>v</sup> The National Association of FreeClinics, “Comparison of Safety Net Providers Free Clinics to Federally Funded Clinics”

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