

NEWS

Star Community Health Dental Clinic Expansion Bringing Smiles to Underserved Patients

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The recent expansion of the Star Community Health Dental Clinic at the Sigal Center in downtown Allentown is sure to elicit smiles from the patients and the dentists, dental residents and dental hygienists who treat the underserved population who come there from near and far.

A ribbon-cutting was held on January 25 to celebrate the opening of the renovated space at 450 West Chew St., Allentown, located directly across from St. Luke's Sacred Heart Campus. Dental professionals, donors, administrators and staff joined in this much-anticipated event.

Thanks to several generous donors, three dental chairs and associated x-ray and treatment technology and supplies were added to the five existing "operatories" at the Sigal Center. The expanded eight-chair, 2,600 square-foot clinic will re-open on February 4.

Dental professionals at the clinic clean and examine teeth, take x-rays, apply sealants, fill cavities and perform restorative procedures. With the added space and chairs, more than 12,000 patient visits can be provided each year, an increase of more than 50%. Currently, there is a six-month wait for a new patient to receive care at the clinic because of the demand for these vital services, which are often overlooked due to economic reasons. Patients with insurance are charged for this care on a sliding-fee scale or receive it free of charge, depending on their financial ability. Many, though, never seek the dental care they need.

"People often don't pay attention to their oral health because of cost, which can lead to tooth decay and pain but also diabetes or heart disease," says Stacie Cuda, regional dental manager for Star Community Health. "The larger clinic will improve our patients' access to dental services." Neglected oral health care is sadly common among Pennsylvanians because of access barriers like cost, lack of transportation and insurance.

Funding to finance this project began with a significant challenge match from an anonymous donor, which encouraged other community leaders to give the capital needed to expedite the expansion. The following benefactors stepped forward to do just that: The Donald B. and Dorothy L. Stabler Foundation, Highmark Foundation, The Yurconic Agency, Mr. Randall A. Weston & Dr. Joanne M. Regina, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Farr, Mr. and Mrs. Lee A. Butz, Judge and Mrs. William M. D'Annunzio, Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Black, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Sorgi, Davison & McCarthy, PC, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick J. Bower and Mr. and Mrs. Mark S. Chando.

According to the donor who wishes to remain anonymous, "Providing health care access for the underserved is an important family tenet for us. All members of our community deserve to live each day to the fullest without concern for their well-being. This is a challenge if basic health care is not available. Oral care provided at the Sigal Center will provide one less concern for its patients who, as a result, will have the opportunity to enjoy a more meaningful life."

"All of our generous funders understand just how critical dental care is to the health of individuals of all ages," Mohammed Qahash, DDS, Star Community Health Dental Program Director. "With their help to expand our dental space, we'll be able to accelerate the growth of our dental program and transform the care given to the most underprivileged."

Jane Brooks, Community Affairs Regional Director for Highmark Foundation, echoed Dr. Qahash's sentiments. "We know that our investment in Star Community Health's dental infrastructure will alleviate limitations and barriers that families may have encountered before and that their health and dental needs will not go untreated." She added, "We are proud to support the expansion as it is sure to improve the health equity and outcomes for everyone in the community."

Dr. Qahash noted, "A building is only as good as the people who occupy it; I have no doubt that we have the best team to deliver the best care to our patients."

During the ribbon cutting, Cuda shared heartfelt thanks to Brooks, Highmark Foundation, and to all of the donors who helped make this expansion project possible. "We have struggled the past few years to keep up with community requests. Not being able to fully deliver on the needs has been a challenge, so watching construction progress has been like watching a dream become reality. I have no doubt that every team member that works here will also value and appreciate the new technology and expanded services to help give better care for those in our neighborhoods. We are all so appreciative."

In addition to the dental clinic in Allentown, Star Community Health operates six other dental facilities in the Lehigh Valley and three vans that provide services to students across 40 schools in six counties. A \$1.5 million capital campaign is under way to raise funds to replace the aging mobile fleet, which requires more frequent maintenance and costly repairs. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Patients make more than 22,000 annual visits to these community resources. In addition to dental services, Star Community Health at the Sigal Center offers comprehensive, compassionate well and sick primary care, OB/GYN and pediatric health services to the surrounding communities and medically underserved. Its staff supports the health and wellness goals of local residents and specializes in providing improved access, coordinated care and enhanced patient/family involvement.