

Free and Charitable Clinics receive first ever funding from state to provide care to uninsured and underinsured Illinois residents

On Saturday, March 25, the Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics received its first grant from the state of Illinois, hand-delivered by Comptroller Susana Mendoza at Aurora Christian Health Center, 615 S. Broadway, Aurora, Ill., at 9:30 a.m.

Free and Charitable Clinic advocates and supporters, Senator Karina Villa, Representative Theresa Mah, Representative Dagmara Avelar, Representative Matt Hanson, and Representative Barbara Hernandez, were all in attendance and spoke on behalf of the importance of these funds.

Free and Charitable Clinics are a vital pillar in the safety net health care system and offer quality health care for those who wouldn't otherwise have access. The clinics provide primary care, specialty care, dental care, behavioral health care, prescription medicines, health education, testing and vaccinations for respiratory illnesses like COVID-19, and support in accessing social services and government programs.

Now is a critical time for the health care safety net in Illinois. With the return of Medicaid redetermination, the end of the Public Health Emergency, and the influx of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Illinois, the need for access to quality health care for those under- and uninsured is more important than ever.

An IAFCC Clinic in Need

Aurora Christian Healthcare (ACH, formerly known as Mission Possible), located at 61 S. Broadway in Aurora, Ill. As a volunteer-driven clinic with few resources, Mission Possible was forced to close its doors as a result of the pandemic in 2020, eliminating an access point for care to some of the hardest hit communities just as COVID-19 was taking hold. The clinic reopened as Aurora Christian Healthcare the following year. Since then, they have been rebuilding their volunteer base and seeing as many patients as they can. They will be one of the clinics to receive funding through this grant, which will further the resources they can offer the uninsured and underinsured residents of Aurora and Kane County. President and former patient of ACH stated during the press conference, "I would like to say to all representatives.... that every dollar that is given, will be used for the patients. We would like to continue with this mission".

ACH hosted the check presentation event on Saturday, March 25, on behalf of Illinois Free and Charitable Clinics. Sen. Karina Villa, who governs the 25th district of Illinois where ACHC and many of their patients reside, was present to thank the ACHC board and volunteer providers for the important work they are doing in her district. Senator Villa is a champion for Illinois Free and Charitable Clinics, and played a key role in securing this funding.

ACH is in need of more providers to help continue this mission – dentists, hygienists, medical assistants, physical therapists, and more! If you are interested in sharing your talents and advancing this mission, contact the clinic at 630-586-6392. To learn more about the clinic you can also visit their page: <https://www.facebook.com/AuroraChristianHealthcare>

Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics Facts

The patients of free and charitable clinics are those who face the largest inequities and barriers to the health care system. Many do not trust traditional health care systems and have untreated health conditions.

- Most recent data from IAFCC Clinics report that 38% of patients live below the federal poverty level (FPL), which is \$14,580, per year for an individual. 36.6 % of patients are between 100%-200% of the FPL.
- 78 percent of patients of free and charitable clinics are from underrepresented communities, and clinics offer language interpretation services for more than 20 native languages spoken by patients.
- Hypertension and diabetes are two of the most common diagnoses in these clinics, and many also offer critical cancer screenings.
- Clinics provide free medications, with more than 7,000 prescriptions dispensed per month.
- A hallmark of the Free and Charitable Clinic sector is its volunteer base. Clinic volunteers include doctors, dentists, mental health providers, and more.
- In one year, clinic volunteers provided over 67,000 hours of medical care with a conservative estimated value of over \$20.6M in health care services. In addition, the existence of Illinois Free and Charitable Clinics has diverted at least 40,000 emergency department visits, saving the health care system over \$35M.

Saturday's check presentation marked the release of the first half of the \$9,000,000 granted to the Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics which is to be dispersed among clinics across the state of Illinois. Comptroller Mendoza led the discussion and ended the remarks in reassuring, "Every penny of this is going to be invested in people...every penny we spend on these Illinoisans is going to keep them out of the emergency room which means that this is truly an investment, not just in the people that [free and charitable clinics] serve, but the taxpayers... I can attest, as the Comptroller, that this is truly a wise investment".

Melissa Maguire, Executive Director of Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics stated, "On behalf of the Illinois Free and Charitable Clinics, I would like to thank Comptroller Mendoza and her office for ensuring these important funds get to our clinics so they can continue to address the needs of the uninsured and underinsured residents of Illinois. Championed by Senator Karina Villa and Representative Theresa Mah, these funds are needed now more than ever after COVID devastated the healthcare systems. As our patient population grows and their healthcare needs continue to become more complex, these funds demonstrate that the Free and Charitable Clinics are a pillar of Illinois' Health Safety net System".

To learn more about The Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, visit illinoisfreeclinics.org or contact Melissa Maguire at executivedirector@illinoisfreeclinics.org