Helping La Clinica’s low-income and uninsured patients access specialty care just got a little easier thanks to the generosity of Volunteers for Patient Access to Consultation and Treatment, or VOLPact. VOLPact links specialty physicians and hospitals with uninsured patients served by La Clinica and another local community health center, Rogue Community Health. Participating physicians and hospitals address conditions that cannot be treated in the primary care setting. Volunteers provide free care for people who simply cannot afford specialty care while preventing the high financial and societal costs associated with delayed care.

This spring, the VOLPact board voted to expand access to this program by increasing the program’s eligibility income level to 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline (about $23,540 annually for a single person) and opening up the program to low-income individuals with private insurance who have out-of-pocket costs of $3,000 or greater.

“La Clinica is extremely grateful to Dr. Kendall Michels, president of VOLPact’s board, and the rest of the VOLPact leadership team for their vision and generous support,” said Dr. Ken Rhee, La Clinica chief medical officer. “This approach will allow us to reach many more people without the expense of opening new health centers.”

Now, even more low-income patients will have access to specialty care
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“La Clinica is extremely grateful to Dr. Kendall Michels, president of VOLPact’s board, and the rest of the VOLPact leadership team for their vision and generous support,” said Dr. Ken Rhee, La Clinica chief medical officer. “These changes will make a huge difference in the lives of our most vulnerable patients.”

A major expansion of La Clinica’s dental program over the next three years will help meet Jackson County’s need for dental care for low-income residents.

La Clinica expects to serve 28,476 dental patients, almost three times as many as today, by 2018. This is an estimated 48 percent of the community’s need.

La Clinica will not build new health centers to serve these patients but instead will beef up dentist staffing at East Medford Dental Clinic and Central Point Health Center while sending hygienists with expanded-practice permits outside clinic walls to do some work.

The hygienists will visit La Clinica’s other health centers, schools, and community organizations and offer hygiene services such as education, cleanings, and screenings. Extra training allows expanded-practice hygienists to work at outreach sites in a collaboration with a dentist.

“We’ve known for awhile that we’re just scratching the surface in terms of being able to serve this community’s dental care need,” said CEO Brenda Johnson. “This approach will allow us to reach many more people without the expense of opening new health centers.”

Understanding community need
La Clinica estimates 92,000 residents, almost half of Jackson County’s population, have an unmet need for dental care. We estimate 59,901 people, or 65 percent, would use dental services if they had access to them.

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New money helps La Clinica welcome more patients

New money coming La Clinica’s way thanks to the Affordable Care Act is allowing the organization to help very low income patients afford care more easily.

La Clinica is using the additional money to reduce its sliding scale fees and to hire health-care providers to serve unmet need. It is also supporting operations at its new wellness center and beefing up information technology systems.

“This is allowing us to create a more stable base and at the same time help the patients who need it most,” said Angelica Ruppe, chief financial officer. “We are grateful for this change.”

La Clinica and others benefited financially when the Affordable Care Act became law at the beginning of 2014 because many Oregonians immediately became eligible for state-funded health insurance. Insured patients are able to access care more consistently than the beginning of 2014 because many Oregonians immediately became eligible for state-funded health insurance. Insured patients are able to access care more consistently than uninsured patients.

More than 50 percent of La Clinica’s patients were uninsured in 2013; that number had dropped to 28 percent by the end of 2014.

Unusual partnership is behind Birch Grove

Birch Grove Health Center is a primary care home like no other in Jackson County.

The center inside Jackson County’s new Health & Human Services building is a partnership between Jackson County Health & Human Services, addictions recovery providers Addictions Recovery Center and OnTrack Inc., La Clinica, and coordinated care organizations AllCare and Jackson Care Connect.

The approach is proving successful. The center’s patient load doubled between January and June of this year.

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