In 1946 the World Health Organization, the public health arm of the United Nations, defined health as “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” As La Clinica looks to the future and to empowering patients to be at the center of their care, it is adopting an approach to health that goes beyond traditional medical care to support complete wellness for patients.

La Clinica already offers many outreach and clinical services not found in most other primary care settings—for example, outreach to schools, migrant and seasonal workers, and community groups, and clinical services such as group visits and health education. In 2015 those services will expand, and the organization will begin incorporating complementary health services into those already provided by its clinical teams.

This movement was born of the organization’s decision in 2014 to open a wellness-oriented health center that would provide new options for wellness care to low-income patients who do not have access to such services. It grew as staff studied potential services at the new center and realized that services designed to help patients improve their lives through healthy choices would be valuable additions to all La Clinica centers.

The center that started the discussion, La Clinica Wellness Center, will open in late summer 2015 at 730 Biddle Road in Medford and will be designed with the new approach in mind. It will include space for complementary health service providers, group space for classes, and a demonstration kitchen where patients will be able to learn about nutrition. La Clinica will employ a wellness program coordinator who will oversee scheduling of wellness services, classes, and groups at all health centers.

Patients are the main focus of the new approach, but La Clinica sees other potential as well, including opportunities to expand partnerships with community providers whose work aligns with La Clinica’s mission, vision, and purpose. This is also an opportunity to promote wellness among staff, who are at their best in caring for others when they are caring for themselves as well.