



Tuesday, March 31, 2009

Coastal Family Health Center gets healthy boost from stimulus grant

Money to be used for job creation and retention, plus increased demand for medical services

Tuesday, March 31, 2009



ALEX PAJUNAS — The Daily Astorian
Jim Coffee, executive director of Coastal Family Health Center, discusses the challenges of submitting annual reports with the clinic's current recordkeeping system. He said to determine how many prescriptions of a specific medication the clinic had issued during the year, staff would have to print out the entire list of prescriptions and count them individually. Department of Health and Human Services,

Coastal Family Health Center is the latest North Coast recipient of stimulus aid from the federal government.

Jim Coffee, the clinic's executive director, said it received almost \$139,000 in grants from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Friday.

A complex formula that takes into account how many unduplicated clients and also the number of uninsured clients a clinic has was used to determine how much money the clinic would receive.

The money is to be used for job creation and retention, or to cover increased demand for medical services.

Coffee said the announcement of the grant "is a great thing." And part of the money will be used to hire a new physician at the clinic and to retain employees.

"I can use the money for raises for staff," he said. "My staff hasn't had raises in two years."

One year ago, Coastal Family Health Center completed a move to the third floor of the Park Medical Building between Exchange Street and Marine Drive, overlooking the Columbia River. Its primary operating costs are paid through an annual grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which was refunded for another year on Feb. 20. That grant was for \$482,000.

As a community health center, Coastal Family provides service to uninsured and underinsured patients. It charges patients on a sliding scale, based on each patient's ability to pay. Payments for services often come nine months after the service is provided from the U.S. Office of Rural Health - a division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Coffee said the availability of the stimulus grant was announced March 9, the deadline to apply was March 16 and recipients were announced March 27. "I have never been involved with a grant process that went so quickly," Coffee said.

He said the Obama administration has demanded transparency in the grant programs. And the clinic typically has to report what it does with grant money annually, but with this grant it has to report quarterly.

There are to be three more rounds of applications over the next few months for grants for other purposes, Coffee said.

"We're looking at one or two," he said.

He would like to pursue a Health Information Technology (HIT) grant. The HIT grants are intended to get providers into the electronic age - particularly where documentation is concerned, Coffee said.

"We're going to go for one of those. We end up hand-counting a lot of things," he said. "It would allow us to go into a much bigger - much more robust computer system."

Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced Monday that \$5.2 million in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) will be going to 25 health clinics in 20 Oregon communities. ARRA provides \$2 billion in grants to community health centers. Of that, \$1.5 billion is to be used for construction, renovation and equipment - including health information technology systems.

There is also a component of the ARRA that supports increases in demands for services at community health centers. This component will provide one-time funding for two years at community health centers operating through grants. It is intended to cover increased demands in services because of spikes in the uninsured and underinsured population.

"Addressing our nation's health care crisis is an essential element in having a healthy nation and a healthy economy," Wyden said. "This money will be used to expand health care services throughout Oregon, including hiring new doctors and other health care providers, expanding hours of operations and increasing services." "President Obama's process was that this not get tied up in bureaucracy. It allows me to get out and get things done. It's a very exciting time for health centers."

Coffee said that as the economy declines, health centers gain clients.

"When the economy tanks, business is good," he said. "It's a really sad thing. We do a lot of walk-in business."

Coffee said some of the clinic's new clients can no longer afford to seek services where they did before, and Coastal Community Health receives people's records from where they were treated previously.

Related Links

Content © 2009 The Daily Astorian
Software © 1998-2009 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved