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\$2 million grant will allow Coastal Family Health Center to serve the needy, uninsured

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By The Daily Astorian

Medicare patients offered discount prescription service

Coastal Family Health Center has received a \$2 million federal grant that will allow the Astoria clinic to continue serving low-income and uninsured patients.

The five-year grant is the longest-term available under the federal program, said Coastal Family administrator Jim Coffee.

The clinic was established in January 2003 with the mission of serving the uninsured and underinsured in Northwest Oregon and Southwest Washington. It was set up with help from Columbia Memorial Hospital which secured an \$800,000 federal grant, in part in response to the closure of the PeaceHealth clinic in Astoria, which had served a large number of needy patients.

During its first year of operation, the Coastal Family Center served 2,400 patients in 7,000 visits – the target that the clinic hoped to hit after its second year, Coffee said. The clinic provides medical, dental, mental-health and substance-abuse care through its medical staff of four – doctors Scott Ashley and Vince Thompson and physicians assistants Sandy Kosik and Tony Leonardo.

The clinic leases space in Columbia Memorial Hospital but is an independent entity with its own administration, staff and board of directors.

About a third of the clinic's patients are uninsured, and half have Medicare or Medicaid coverage, with the remainder covered by private insurance. The center hopes to increase the number of patients with private federal coverage to boost revenue and ensure the facility's financial stability, Coffee said, "especially with the cuts from Measure 30."

State budget cuts planned in response to the failure of January's income tax initiative are set to reduce benefits under the Oregon Health Plan and could cost half of the clinic's Medicaid patients their coverage, Coffee said.

The clinic staff is "guardedly optimistic it will weather the budget crisis, but it is working on ways to increase efficiency and bring in more clients. In the next few weeks, the center hopes to begin a campaign to lure Medicare patients who could take advantage of the clinic's discount prescription drug service.