

Lisa Safaeinili, long-time executive director of the program, sees the Oxnard clinic as a training ground for a generation of health care professionals who will work close to home.

"We are helping the children of our patients' families," she said, noting that many of the interns face economic challenges. "We're empowering them to help their community."

The grant from the Ventura County Board of Supervisors lasts three years and is designed to give the clinic time to establish its own funding through donations.

In Thousand Oaks, the Westminster Free Clinic draws patients who line up for care hours before the site's Wednesday night clinics. Some people are turned away and asked to return the next week.

The need may be greater in Oxnard. U.S. Census estimates based on data from 2014 to 2018 showed 17.3% of the city's residents were believed to be uninsured. That's more than three times higher than the estimated 5% of Thousand Oaks residents who lack insurance.

The need is real, said Yesenia Sanchez of the Oxnard/Port Hueneme Corps of the Salvation Army that once offered a free medical clinic and still offers free dental care.

"I think it really helps," said Sanchez, who coordinates the dental clinic that currently sees patients two days a week. "I have a lot of people coming in here and asking for doctors and stuff."

The Westminster Free Clinic is aimed primarily at people in low-paying jobs who may not qualify for Medi-Cal but say the high cost of housing means they can't afford health insurance even with government subsidies. They may put off care for symptoms of chronic conditions like diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure and even cancer.

"A lot of them are farmworkers," said Safaeinili, noting the clinic provides care but also connects patients with other free or low-cost health care programs. "Our whole goal is to give people easy access and to be a bridge."

Prospective patients also go through a screening process to help determine if they qualify for government-funded Medi-Cal care. A new California law means undocumented people younger than 26 can receive Medi-Cal if they meet other eligibility requirements.

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Student interns train at the new Westminster Free Clinic at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Oxnard. (Photo: TOM KISKEN/THE STAR)

Tuesday served as sort of a dry run for a launch planned for the last Tuesday in January. About 40 student interns trained on taking a patient's temperature, pulse and weight. With the help of nurses, they'll gather patient's medical histories to present to doctors who serve as their mentors.

A handful of physicians have been recruited as volunteers but more are needed with malpractice insurance provided by the clinic. Dentists, physical therapists, chiropractors, podiatrists, pharmacists and other adult volunteers are needed as well.

Uninsured adults also registered as patients on Tuesday, some of them browsing through toys and clothes laid out in the church's fellowship hall for their families.

The clinic will provide medical care to people with untreated conditions. Many of their children will serve as the clinic's interns.

To Saefinili, that family connection is vital — a chance to help high school students realize dreams of college and careers that could change their family's lives.

"We're helping to break the cycle of poverty and helping youth be the solution," she said.

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How to get care

New clinic hours: 5 p.m. to as late as 10 p.m. Tuesdays. Clinic may close early in its first few weeks.

Expected opening: Jan. 28

Where: St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 1800 S. C St., Oxnard

How to register: Low-income uninsured people can register at the church on Tuesday nights including Jan. 21 starting at 5 p.m.

To volunteer or for more information: Call 805-241-8366 or go to [http://westminsterclinic.org \(http://westminsterclinic.org/\)](http://westminsterclinic.org)

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