

# **New health facility set to give the underserved the care they deserve**

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The City of Buffalo's newest health care center held a grand opening Monday with a promise of making high-quality care available to a community of people who are medically underserved.

The Community Health Center of Buffalo, which took three years to develop, provides medical services, including family medicine, OB/GYN, pediatrics, dentistry, family planning, HIV testing, radiology, laboratory, pharmacy and diagnostic testing. Psychotherapy and social services are available.

As a federally qualified health center, the new facility provides basic services regardless of a patient's ability to pay.

The goal is for patients to use the center, instead of a hospital emergency room, as their first choice for medical care.

About 150 people attended Monday's event.

"We take our commitment to each patient seriously," said LaVonne E. Ansari, Ph. D., the center's chief executive officer. "The new facility was designed with our patients in mind."

The center, at 34 Benwood Ave. near Main Street, is in the former St. Francis Nursing Home, which closed in April. It is in a community where high rates of diabetes, asthma, hypertension and other chronic diseases are prevalent.

The 66,000-square-foot building has four stories, but the fourth floor remains under renovation. The center has 22 examination rooms and 12 dental rooms. There is additional space for outreach programs, such as a multipurpose room for exercise and wellness programs, a kitchen for healthy-eating classes and conference room space for community and health educational activities.

Twenty-three permanent jobs were created. Many of the employees live in the neighborhood.

The center is situated on a residential street, with occupied homes next door and across the street. A covered pedestrian bridge connects it to the St. Clare Apartments for senior citizens, and it is accessible by public transportation.

“All I can say is wow,” said Kameron Wells, vice president of Clinical Initiatives for the Community Health Care Association of New York State. “To see what [Ansari’s] staff has done here is awe-inspiring and amazing.”

William V. Corr, deputy secretary of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, also gave remarks.

“This center is so important to this community. This is what community health care centers are all about,” he said. “We’ll be coming back to help you celebrate the first anniversary.”

The new center is the health partner in the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood redevelopment initiative to help residents from cradle through college. The five-year plan also calls for a new early childhood center, home rehabilitation and improved accessibility to social and health services in the 14215 ZIP code. In December, the federal government awarded \$6 million to the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood to implement the strategy.

Other guest speakers included Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, D-Fairport, and Mayor Byron W. Brown. Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes, D-Buffalo, spoke by video.

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