

THE ITEM

Community groups benefit from grants based on Clinton Hospital capital improvements

Community Content

Published 2:40 a.m. ET July 19, 2021

CLINTON – UMass Memorial Health- HealthAlliance Clinton Hospital recently invested \$717,000 to fund community-based initiatives aimed at tackling the urgent health challenges of food insecurity, substance abuse, and workforce development. To date, the hospital has committed more than \$820,000 in resources, including emergency COVID response funding.

This funding was made available by the Mass. Determination of Need (DoN) process regulating community investment as hospital capital improvement projects are approved. As a result of HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital's new Emergency Department, the hospital agreed to invest more than \$2 million over a five-year period.

Once the hospital completes an updated community needs assessment this fall, another round of funding will be made available to address health equity using a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens.

In this most recent round, 10 proposals were chosen which feature a wide range of programmatic investments, upstream policy and systems change approaches addressing the social determinants of health, including several based in Clinton.

Those investments included a local Tier 2 project (one-time award up to \$25,000):

Growing Places and WHEAT Community Connections were recently awarded \$22,560 to continue their work helping the most vulnerable residents in North Central Massachusetts (NCMA) access healthy food and identify a more sustainable food system through collaboration, inclusiveness and outreach and education.

"Food security means that all people at all times have physical and economic access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate foods," said Ayn Yeagle,

executive director of Growing Places. "Those foods are produced in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner, and people can make informed decisions about their food choices. This is not the case for many NCMA residents, especially in low-income, low-access areas."

This grant will fund a healthy food access assessment to better understand needs and assets around healthy eating and access; introduction and expansion of Growing Places' Mobile Fresh Food Pantry to include fresh fruits and vegetables, meal kits and groceries from WHEAT's food pantry; on-site case management to connect residents to support systems that will set them up for success; and nutrition education by Cooking Matters to address meal preparation gaps and promote healthy fresh food through cooking classes aimed at parents and caregivers.

"I am thrilled that WHEAT will be working with Ayn and our friends at Cooking Matters to develop policies and systems that will incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion into the local food system to move vulnerable populations from dependence to self-sufficiency," said WHEAT's Jodi Breidel.

Receiving Tier 3 awards (multi-year awards up to \$100,000 annually) include:

- Clinton Public Schools: Awarded \$100,000 to open a Family Welcome Center in the Central Office. The funds will be used to hire a family outreach coordinator to assist families as they navigate the school system and help them to access community resources such as food and housing assistance.

According to Clinton School Superintendent Steven Meyer, with the grant delayed by COVID-19, the school system was able to start the position mid-year, hiring Guadalupe Puim with federal funds, but this grant allows the schools to sustain the position going forward.

"We are very appreciative of the grant from the Health-Alliance Clinton Hospital to support our family outreach coordinator and further develop our family welcome center. Now, more than ever, we know that our families need this extra support," Meyer said.

- Germinemos and SproutChange (Somerville Hispanic Assoc. for Community Development, Inc.): Awarded \$127,660 to offer three health-building products and services.

SHACD is the nonprofit entity that is contracting with two Clinton based private entities - Germinemos and Sprout Change - to conduct the work locally.

"I am excited to share with you that my mom's business, Germinemos (Let's Sprout in Spanish) and SproutChange will be providing free, multilingual Spanish/Haitian Creole/French/English educational programming on no-dig gardening, healing foods, natural remedies and herbs in the North Central Massachusetts region underwritten by UMass Memorial Health - HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital," said Priscila Espinosa of SproutChange.

Germinemos is a plant-based healing foods culinary institute where students learn step-by-step how to improve or reverse lifestyle illnesses. SproutChange is a social enterprise that assists customers change their lives using food as medicine, natural remedies, and herbs.

For program updates, visit www.mysproutchange.com.

Tier 1: Since October of 2019, Health-Alliance Clinton Hospital has awarded 29 local organizations with Tier 1 awards (up to \$5,000 grants) totaling more than \$100,000 in resources to address local community need. The awards have a rolling application process.

Priorities were determined by the community-driven process outlined in the 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Plan, which highlighted "the lack of affordable housing, training opportunities, youth services and access to healthy food options disproportionately affect many of our local neighborhoods, particularly communities of color, leading to increased health disparities," said Steve Roach, CEO of HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital.

"We thank our Community Advisory Board and Allocation Committee for their dedication, and mindful approach to equitable investment to help make sustainable, long term investments to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities," Roach added.