

Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, Salud Para La Gente awarded mental health grants for hiring

By Jondi Gumz , Santa Cruz Sentinel

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SANTA CRUZ >> Two local nonprofits providing health care have each been awarded \$250,000 to expand and improve mental health services, which means they will be hiring therapists.

The Health Resources and Services Administration is providing the funding to [Santa Cruz Community Health Centers](#), which operates the East Cliff Family Health Center and the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center downtown, and to [Salud Para La Gente](#), which operates community clinics in the Beach Flats area of Santa Cruz and in the city of Watsonville. Both clinics offer some evening hours.

"For us it's primarily to add staff and build our program so we can provide more behavioral health services to more patients," said Leslie Conner, executive director of Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, citing new models like group visits and increased case management. "The mind and body are connected. There are tremendous opportunities right now to serve more people in better ways."

Holly Hughes, behavioral health director at Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, said, "Mental health and substance abuse issues play a tremendous role in undermining the quality of life and the physical health of our patients."

"Chronic conditions like diabetes often improve with the help of a behavioral health care provider who can support individuals to make healthy lifestyle changes," Hughes said.

At Salud, Dorian Seamster, chief of clinic operations, said there are 1.6 full time equivalents of therapists along with a full staff of doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants.

"We will be hiring two additional therapists and a part-time program director," she said. "We will also be doing training for our medical staff on behavioral health to expand their capacity to serve our patients."

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The grants are among 210 announced last month, part of a \$51.3 million investment in mental health services.

New support is coming in the wake of the Affordable Care Act making mental health and substance use disorder treatment one of the 10 essential health benefits.

One goal is to assist newly insured people addicted to drugs or alcohol get the help they need to become clean and sober.

Newly insured addicts and alcoholics showed up at the door seeking help getting clean and sober.

An overdose signals substance abuse, but could be an attempt at suicide, indicating a mental health problem.

Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24, according to the American Association of Suicidology.

According to a 2009 report from the National Institute for Healthcare Management, 75 percent of children with diagnosed mental health disorders are seen by primary care physicians, though they lack tools and

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resources to treat mental health problems effectively.

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