

## A Smile Makes all the Difference

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When it comes from human resources, this saying works to encourage staff to present a friendly face. When it comes to healthcare, this saying shows just how vital dental care can be for those whose anterior dentition is jeopardized. The state of California has not provided restorative dental care for most of their welfare recipients for five years now. Those who have relied on the state are just beginning to experience very difficult choices, as the state dental plan only provides for the extraction of their deeply infected teeth. When those choices are necessary on front teeth, there are often desperate ef-

forts necessary to maintain a joyful smile. The Los Angeles Christian Health Center's Joshua House combines a grant from LA Care with FQHC resources to provide basic rudimentary replacement dentures for the homeless who have the least resources in the skid row district of downtown Los Angeles.

### **L.A. Care is the Largest Public Health Plan in America**

As the nation's largest public health plan, L.A. Care Health Plan is a community-accountable health plan that serves nearly 800,000 Los Angeles County residents through four free or low-cost health insurance programs: Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, L.A. Care's Healthy Kids and L.A. Care Health Plan Medicare Advantage HMO. L.A. Care Health Plan is governed by 13 board members, representing medical and health care professionals, as well as Medi-Cal consumers. Their plans have access to more than 10,000 providers — including doctors, specialists, hospitals and pharmacies — close to their homes, work, and schools. L.A. Care's Community Health Investment Fund (CHIF) was established in 2000 by our Board of Governors to support projects that strengthen community health and

fill gaps in health coverage for low-income individuals in Los Angeles County. Since then, L.A. Care has partnered with more than 100 public and community-based providers to increase services, improve community and public health, and expand health insurance coverage to underserved communities. In this program, L.A. Care Health Plan has been offering funds to address the oral health needs of low-income, uninsured children over the age of six and adults of all ages.

LACHC is a Federally Qualified Health Center with clinical service sites in Skid Row ("Hope Central"), East Los Angeles, and in 8 partner locations throughout South Los Angeles County. Since 1995, our mission is to show God's love by providing quality, comprehensive healthcare to the homeless and underserved. We now have 55 full-time & part-time staff members (20 licensed providers, 25 clinical support staff and 10 administrative staff) two clinics and eight satellite clinics.

Over 70 active volunteers volunteer their time monthly, including doctors, nurses, dentists, optometrists, and Western University dental students. By combining all these re-

sources we have been able to reduce all charges for the homeless for denture services. We have provided over 350 dentures in the last year, which have a value of approximately \$750 each. We use basic dental service encounters to prepare the patient to receive the dentures. We first eliminate chief complaints related to infectious teeth, then provide basic restorative services and oral hygiene. Once, the patient is adequately prepared we provide a four step impression, measurement, trial fitting and delivery visits for the denture services. Each of these steps can take from two weeks to a month to complete.

The resulting restoration of hope in the community has been wonderful. We have helped many of those in local recovery programs to get employment, housing and contribute generously back to the community. By working closely with the LA Mission, many of our patients complete their Equivalency Degrees and intern in work programs. As an FQHC we also provide social services and family counseling. The family counseling is especially popular and has surprisingly resolved many homeless triggers very early in the process of impoverishment.

While the results are important, our

mission is to show God's love by providing quality, comprehensive healthcare to the homeless and underserved. Despite the business approach of measuring results and participating in these full recovery programs, we also recognize the inherent dignity of those whose conditions may never change for reasons beyond their control. The encircling dimension of human limitations in the distribution curve of talents has always left some so disadvantaged as to historically ensnare whole communities of poverty together geographically. By providing basic relief for this highest "felt" need, we are restoring smiles as an end in itself.

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