

LOCAL

'Makes a difference': Why MetroWest Free Medical Program's new Marlborough clinic matters

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MARLBOROUGH - After years of searching for a permanent home, the [MetroWest Free Medical Program](#) has brought its free community services to Marlborough, opening up its permanent location at 246 Maple St. The [clinic provides free medical care](#) for uninsured and underinsured residents of MetroWest. Funded by grants and individual donations and reliant on volunteers and a few key staff members, the [clinic has basic](#)

[medical services](#) that it provides to residents that would otherwise largely go without medical care.

"We generally see a lot of people with high blood pressure, diabetes, hypertension, anxiety and depression; some of them know that they have something, some we diagnose right here," [Dr. Wendy Parker](#), a retired physician who volunteers at the clinic. "People are so grateful to get medical care, some of these people have not seen a doctor in years."



Womens health physician Katy Herz at the MetroWest Free Medical Program at its new location at 246 Maple St., in Marlborough, May 25, 2023. *Daily News And Wicked Local Staff Photo/Art Illman*

How can you get an appointment at the MetroWest Free Medical Clinic

The demand for the services has been enormous, with the clinic seeing more than a thousand patients last year.

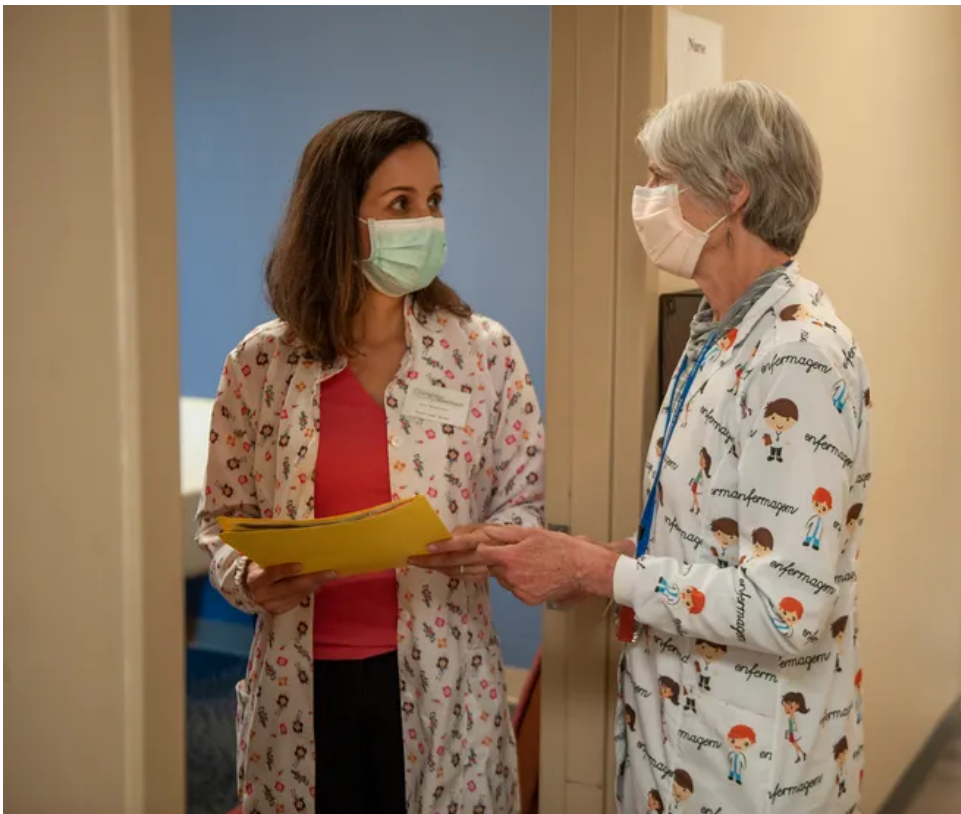
The clinic provides adult and general medicine care on Tuesday from 6 to 8 p.m., and women's health services on Thursday evenings from the same time. The clinic used to use a drop-in method but now requires appointments to be made, which can be done by calling 508-656-0740. The clinic also provides optometry appointments on Monday evenings, through Lexington Eye Associates in Sudbury.

"We haven't even been able to advertise for years because we are overwhelmed with the number of people we are getting," Fran Green, who co-chairs the clinic's board, said.

The clinic started at Temple Beth El in Sudbury and grew

The clinic started in 2004 and was originally located at Temple Beth El in Sudbury. The temple would be pulled apart each week and set up with medical screens so that doctors could talk to patients and see them in a modicum of privacy. Throughout the years, the program has found different homes, including at First Parish in Framingham and most recently at the [Edward Kennedy Community Health Center in Framingham](#).

"It was a group of people who decided that we needed to provide healthcare to people who did not have insurance and did not have access to quality healthcare," Green said. "We thought we would go out of business pretty quickly, because Massachusetts provides a lot of healthcare to residents, but in the 18 years we have been around, that hasn't been the case."



Green said that while they were grateful to find a spot at the Edward Kennedy Center, the space was inadequate for the demand that the clinic was seeing, providing only two rooms and little privacy for patients. The new location in Marlborough is much more suitable for meeting the requirements of patients. "We had been looking for spots and one of our board members recommended Marlborough as a potential space and I came across it on Craigslist," Green said. "The space was previously, I believe, a dialysis center, so it is a medical building. We have four exam rooms, we have two

MetroWest Free Medical Program registered nurse Glau Barcelos, left, confers with physician Jo Seibel at its new location at 246 Maple St., in Marlborough, May 25, 2023. *Daily News And Wicked Local Staff Photo/Art Illman*

bathroom. In the past, we had to set up and tear down every time, and we don't have to do that anymore." conference rooms, a reception area, a waiting room and a

"The new space really makes a difference," Karin Segal, a volunteer nurse who has been with the program since its inception in 2004. "We don't need to set everything up and then take it down, we used to be here until late at night doing that and it was something you just got used to."

Who can be a patient at the MetroWest Free Medical Center

Isabel Andreadis first came to the clinic more than a decade ago as a patient. As an immigrant with little resources for medical care, she came to the clinic and was treated for illness, and since then has been paying it back by volunteering each week, working as a greeter and interpreter for other guests.

"I had nowhere to go, and I had a really severe case of high blood pressure and high cholesterol, and they took me in and helped me in every way," Andreadis said. "They sent me to Worcester for treatment and kept checking on me. It feels great to help people that were like me, when I go home and think about how I was able to help people, it is the best. People are so grateful, they will come back to us when they are feeling better and they hug you like a family member."

Moving from Framingham to Marlborough can cause transportation issues

With the clinic moving from Framingham to Marlborough, while it makes access to the clinic easier for residents of Marlborough, it leaves Framingham residents who may struggle to find transportation to Marlborough without the ability to get to the medical clinic. Green said that people do find a way to get to the clinic, but in the long term, finding ways to transport high-need patients from surrounding towns is a goal of the clinic.



MetroWest Free Medical Program nurse manager Sandra Dickie, a nurse practitioner and volunteer since 2010, meets with the staff ahead of patients arriving at its new location at 246 Maple St., in Marlborough, Aug. 8, 2023. *Daily News And Wicked Local Staff Photo/Art Illman*

"We had a needs assessment survey that said that 80% of people who came to the clinic either drove them

elves or were driven by friends or family, so people are able to get to the clinic," Green said. "We need to figure out how to get funding, maybe be able to get Uber or rides of some sort for the people that can't get here."

Why have a free medical clinic in the Massachusetts suburbs

Green pointed out that a benefit of the clinic is that since it serves an underinsured population, it keeps patients who would have otherwise gone to the emergency room for non-emergency medical issues out of those spaces.

"48% of respondents on our assessment survey said they would have gone to the emergency room if not for the clinic. This is about our healthcare system, and how our emergency rooms are being incorrectly used because people who don't have insurance have nowhere else to go for treatment," Green said.

The clinic is in [further need of volunteers](#) in all phases, including medical professionals, office staff and translators.

Illene Hofrenning, a nurse practitioner who was formerly the Director of the Health Center at Framingham State University, has been a volunteer since 2008, and said she continues to put in the time at the clinic because the people she is helping are in real need of medical care.

"I feel like healthcare should be a right, and we have so many people that either don't have insurance or don't have access and to me, it's very important to provide that kind of access. We are seeing people who haven't had medical care in years," Hofrenning said. "We had a woman come in recently who needed a mammogram; it turned out that she has breast cancer. Hopefully, we caught it early enough, but if she didn't come here, who knows when she would have found out."