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Marin Community Foundation announces first round of

Sutter Health grants

By [Richard Halstead](#)

Poor Marin residents in need of dental care or specialized treatment for health problems such as mental illness and drug or alcohol abuse will be the beneficiaries of \$1.25 million in grants supplied by Sutter Health.

In January, Sutter announced it was establishing a \$10 million donor-advised fund with the Marin Community Foundation that would be spent over the next five years to support Marin County's community clinics and health care safety net. On Wednesday, the foundation announced its first round of grants from this fund.

The Marin Community Clinics will receive \$500,000 to boost adult dental care. Another \$500,000 will go to Marin Community Clinics, Ritter Center and the Coastal Health Alliance to hire specialized staff to care for patients whose mental illnesses, and sometimes accompanying drug and alcohol problems, complicate their treatment plans. In addition, \$250,000 will fund adult vaccinations for diseases such as whooping cough, infectious hepatitis, pneumonia and the virus that causes cervical cancer.

"Together, this first round of grants will have an immediate impact on both the short-term and long-term health of thousands of Marin residents who don't have adequate health insurance," said Thomas Peters, foundation president. "By focusing on these three areas of critical need, we will be helping people whose medical problems could easily become more severe without treatment." The dental care grant will allow the Marin Community Clinics to soon begin treating adults at its Novato clinic two days a week, said John Shen, the clinic's executive director. Currently, adult dental care is provided only one day a week at the clinics' San Rafael facility. State funding for all adult dental care was cut last July.

"Now," Shen said, "our patients need to make an appointment three months in advance. And in the meantime, they often seek treatment at hospital emergency rooms, which are neither clinically appropriate nor cost-effective for this type of care."

Shen said the clinics' three dentists treat an average of 22 patients every Monday, and the work is not easy.

"It's not cleanings," Shen said. "They have been neglecting their teeth for I don't know how many years, so it's a lot of restorative work."

Peters, who served as director of the county's Department of Health and Human Services before joining the foundation, said untreated oral health problems can contribute to other serious medical problems, including heart disease and diabetes.

"In Marin, our public health officials tell us that dental disease is the number one unmet health care need of uninsured and under-insured residents," Peters said.

Another \$500,000 will be spent to improve care to people who have overlapping physical and mental health issues. Peter said these concurrent health problems often result in individuals becoming sicker than they would otherwise and involve repeated emergency room visits.

"What we're going to do with part of that money is support Ritter House to hire appropriate staff - a psychiatrist, a psychiatric social worker - we're going to work out the details with them," Peters said.

Shen said the Marin Community Clinics will use its share of this money, about \$100,000, to increase psychiatric staff hours.

Larry Meredith, director of the county health and human services, said the grant should help get people the help they need sooner.

"This enables the providers to treat many whose condition may not rise to the level of severity that we customarily see in our practice - people with a wide range of mental health and substance abuse issues," Meredith said.

Last year, the state cut in half the funds it was providing the county for Medi-Cal recipients' mental-health services. In addition to \$650,000 in lost state funds, the county sacrificed the ability to use that money to qualify for matching federal funds.

The \$250,000 grant is expected to pay for at least 1,250 adult vaccinations. The injections will be administered by community health clinics throughout the county.

Martin Brotman, president of Sutter Health's West Bay region, said, "Everyone in the Sutter Health family is thrilled about this first round of grants. We are confident that the network of community-based health clinics will now be able to offer even more comprehensive treatment to the patients they serve."