

## Community Health Center to boost Butte Falls site after grant

By John Darling for the Mail Tribune

A \$499,000 federal grant will allow the Community Health Center to expand its small Butte Falls site, taking it from three to 10 rooms, including new mental health, dental, radiology, pharmacy, group education and lab suites.

The center is expected to be built and open in the Butte Falls School District building before the end of the year.

The Butte Falls region qualified for the funding under the Obama administration's Affordable Care Act because of its remote location, low-income population and high unemployment brought on by a decline in the timber industry, said Karen Elliott, CHC marketing director.

The grant is from the Health Resources and Services Administration.

"It qualified under the Obama plan because it's an area of disparity, where 25 percent of students could be classified as homeless and from low-income families," said Elliott. "Timber was the backbone of their economy and that's gone. They lack income, transportation and quality health care. They're challenged to get to Eagle Point or Medford and to pay for health care services when they get there."

The community, CHC board and school administrators joined in getting the sizeable grant, said Elliott.

It only covers construction and infrastructure, so fundraising is needed to furnish it. "It's in an old building with lots of deferred maintenance in an isolated area with high need," says Elliott, noting the expansion is using space considered "presently unusable" by the school district.

The clinic's operation will not be interrupted by the construction, which adds 2,723 square feet, about twice the current clinic size.

The grant is part of \$7 million awarded in Oregon to clinics that will serve 6,500 people — with nearly \$3.5 million going to the Siskiyou Community Health Center in Grants Pass. Those funds will be used to double the size of a Cave Junction clinic to 20,000 square feet, adding new medical, mental health, pharmacy and dental suites. A Baby Check house also will be completed to teach parenting and nutrition and to provide a safe house for those threatened by domestic violence, said Kurt Higuera, the center's chief executive officer.

According to a news release from Health & Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, grants of \$728 million went to clinics nationwide for renovation and construction projects. That is part of \$9.5 billion to expand services over five years and \$1.5 billion to support major construction and renovation projects at community health centers, Sebelius said.

Funds distributed through the health care act already have supported construction and renovation of 190 health center sites and led to the creation of 67 new health center sites across the country, Sebelius said, and will support the construction and renovation of more than 485 health center sites and the creation of 245 new health center sites over the next two years. The Community Health Center has clinics in Medford, Ashland, White City and Butte Falls.

John Darling is a freelance writer living in Ashland. E-mail him at [jdarling@jeffnet.org](mailto:jdarling@jeffnet.org).