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Cleveland County Health Department to Open Primary Care Clinic

No Health Insurance? No Problem.

SHELBY, NC – The Cleveland County Health Department is excited to announce the opening of Care for Cleveland, a primary care clinic onsite at the health department located at 200 S. Post Rd, Shelby. The clinic is slated to begin taking appointments on May 1, 2023, with the first appointments available beginning May 15, 2023. Thanks, in part, to a \$5 million grant from the North Carolina General Assembly, Care for Cleveland will be open to all Cleveland County residents, including those without health insurance.

The clinic will accept private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid, and will offer services to uninsured individuals on a sliding fee scale based on household income and number of people living in the household. The Care for Cleveland Clinic, in addition to Atrium’s recently announced weekly mobile primary care unit, will be impactful for creating access to care for the nearly 14,000 uninsured residents in Cleveland County.

“Cleveland County continues to rank in the bottom quartile of least healthy counties in North Carolina,” said Tiffany Hansen, Health Director. “Our premature death rate is one of the primary health outcomes contributing to our low health ranking. We know that eight of our ten leading causes of death in Cleveland County can be impacted or prevented by access to primary care and early detection. Therefore, we believe that improving access to healthcare through our Care for Cleveland Clinic could help improve our county’s overall health.”

In Cleveland County, 10,900 years of life per 100,000 people were lost to deaths of people under age 75, compared to 8,000 per 100,000 population for NC. Of the leading causes of death, diseases of the heart and diabetes were among the top five, both of which can be prevented or reduced by early diagnosis and access to healthcare. Chronic lower respiratory disease was the

4th leading cause of death in Cleveland County residents under the age of seventy-five. The years of data used were 2018-2020, which means this is the first year COVID-19 deaths were included in chronic lower respiratory disease death rates.

Cleveland County's ratio of primary care physicians to residents continues to be worse than the state's ratio with 2,150 residents per primary care physician in our county compared to 1,410 residents per primary care physician in NC. Similarly, our county's ratio of residents to dentists is 2,180:1 compared to NC at 1,660:1. The percent of Cleveland County residents who do not have health insurance remained the same from last year at 14% compared to 13% for NC.

Other health factors contributing to the county's lower health ranking are adult smoking, adult obesity, and sexually transmitted infections. All of these health factors are considered health "behaviors" or things that can be impacted by changes in personal choices and lifestyles.

The Care for Cleveland Clinic, onsite at the health department, is the first phase of a three-phase approach to improve access to healthcare in Cleveland County. The second phase entails a mobile screening bus that will travel to underserved areas of the county to perform preventive screenings such as blood pressure, A1c (blood sugar), and cholesterol. Individuals who need follow-up care based on their results can be referred to primary care at the Care for Cleveland Clinic.

"We recognize that lack of transportation is a major barrier to accessing healthcare in our county," said Hansen. "We hope that bringing preventive screening services to people, rather than expecting them to come to us will result in more people getting screened and identifying chronic conditions early on so they can get the help they need to manage it."

The health department plans to begin working with community partners to identify potential locations for the mobile screening unit in the coming months.

The last phase of this three-phase approach to improve access to healthcare in our county is to establish a mobile pediatric dental unit that will provide onsite dental screening and treatment to students at Cleveland County Schools. This service is anticipated to start in Spring 2024.

The Cleveland County Health Department believes your income or zip code should not determine your ability to be healthy. Efforts to adequately support public health and the prevention of disease can transform a health system focused on just treating illness into a health system focused on preventing disease and injury and promoting wellness. We hope this three-phased approach will provide our community with better access to prevention, detection and treatment that is desperately needed.

For updates and information on the Cleveland County Health Department's services, please visit our website at www.clevelandcountyhdnc.com or follow us on Facebook @clevelandcountyhealthdeptnc.

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