

West County Facilities Receive Federal Infusion

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Brookside Community Health Center, a lifeline for uninsured and underinsured mostly low-income people in West Contra Costa, will receive more than \$320,000 in federal economic stimulus funds over the next two years.

The money, authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 passed by Congress and signed by President Barack Obama in February, will enable the center to add space, expand services and hire more health care providers just when the ailing economy is driving more people to seek medical attention at its two clinics, officials said.

Many of Brookside's new patients - about 5,000 since the beginning of the year - recently lost their jobs; others are former [Kaiser Permanente](#) patients whose employers switched to Blue Cross, said Brookside clinics's executive director, Cheryl Johnson. Under Blue Cross, patients must go to different places for lab tests, X-rays and primary care, something of a "culture shock" for those used to a more one-stop approach, Johnson said.

"It's been a lot of hand-holding," she said.

Brookside, at 2023 Vale Road in San Pablo and 1030 Nevin Ave. in Richmond, is part of a network of six public and nonprofit primary care clinics in West Contra Costa. The two Brookside clinics combined expect about 54,000 patient visits this year, said Chief Financial Officer Joseph Lapid. The annual operating budget is about \$7 million, Johnson said.

"If we're really going to address the health status (of the American population), the community clinics clearly have to be a big part of the health care system," U.S. Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, said Tuesday during a tour of the San Pablo clinic.

Dr. Norman Banks, Brookside's medical director, said the services most in need of enhancement are gynecology, dentistry, integrative mental health care and specialty care in general. He and Johnson said they hope to apply for future stimulus funds to computerize patient records.

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