



**LA MAESTRA**  
**COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS**  
 City Heights • El Cajon • National City • Lemon Grove



# Heart of the Community Newsletter

Summer 2011

## Dear Friends,

Summer is here and we have so much to be excited about at La Maestra. We recently celebrated the grand opening of a new site in National City: La Maestra Paradise Valley Clinic. We truly appreciate being invited to collaborate with Paradise Valley Hospital and their generous support to bring much needed services to the community.

We also look forward to improving health for local students and their families with school-based health centers this fall, in addition to our clinics at Hoover High and Central Elementary. August is Children's Eye Health month and Immunizations Awareness month, and we encourage you to make appointments soon for your children to have an eye exam and school physical before the new year starts.

Please enjoy reading below about our innovative programs that are helping the community to fight against increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, depression and related health problems by integrating primary care with education, counseling, physical activity, arts, economic development and access to nutritious, fresh foods.

Remember, your continued support makes these new health centers and programs possible. You can make a difference by sponsoring and participating in our annual fundraisers like Casino Night, Golf Tournament, Sail Day and our Holiday Toy Drive, making donations or a long-term pledge, volunteering your time, and [advocating for health centers](#).

Enjoy the summer and make sure to get some exercise outdoors in the sunshine!

Healthy Regards,

Zara Marselian, President and CEO  
 La Maestra Community Health Centers  
 & La Maestra Foundation

## In This Issue

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[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

## Upcoming Events

July 22:  
 Kids Afloat Sail Day  
[Event & Sponsor Information](#)



August 7-13:  
 National Health Center Week  
[Event Information](#)

September 9:  
 Golf Tournament at Riverwalk  
[Registration and Sponsorship](#)

December:  
 Holiday Toy Drive  
 Tree and Poinsettia Fundraiser

## Striving to be "Patients' #1 Medical Home"

La Maestra Community Health Centers is embarking on a new and exciting journey to truly exemplify its dedication to promoting healthier communities and becoming patients' #1 medical home of choice. La Maestra, with the support of our board of directors, executive team and all employees, has decided to seek certification as a Patient Centered Medical Home. Driven by La Maestra's passionate staff, Circle of Care philosophy and mission, patients will become more engaged with La Maestra's services, which will improve overall health and wellbeing for individuals and families. This is one of the many endeavors La Maestra is pursuing to improve care in our commitment to the communities we serve.

## La Maestra and National City Community Celebrate Opening of Paradise Valley Clinic



Executives from La Maestra Community Health Centers, Paradise Valley Hospital and the National City Chamber of Commerce were joined by National City Mayor Ron Morrison, Councilmembers Luis "Louie" Natividad, Mona Rios and Rosalie Zarate, and City Treasurer Mitch Beauchamp for a joyous ribbon cutting celebration on Tuesday, June 28. Also in attendance was Barbara Avalos, member of the National School District Board, and numerous community partners. La Maestra's new Paradise Valley Clinic, located at 2345 E. 8th Street in National City, southwest of Paradise Valley Hospital, opened part-time in May to address the need for health services for more than 53% of the population in National City who live in public housing. Prime Healthcare Foundation, a non-profit public charity founded by Dr. Prem Reddy, has leased space from Paradise Valley Hospital for use as a clinic by La Maestra to offer primary care, pediatric care, OB/GYN and behavioral health services. La Maestra

patients also have access to Paradise Valley Hospital's facilities for deliveries, acute and inpatient behavioral health services, and other specialties. For more information, please call 619-779-7905.

## Friends of La Maestra Try their Luck to Raise some Bucks

Thank you to everyone who joined us for our *Carnaval*-style Casino Night fundraiser on May 20 at our new home in City Heights. It was an exciting evening full of casino games, dancing and laughter. Friends and staff contributed almost \$24,000 to support La Maestra's services for the underserved. [Click here](#) to see the event program with a list of our sponsors. We hope you will all participate in the fun next year!

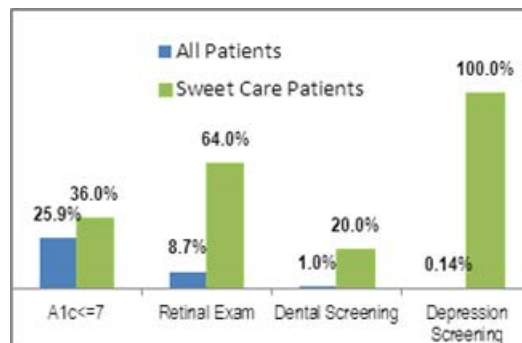


## Sweet Care Program Helps Diabetic Patients Improve Health through Integration of Care

La Maestra's Health Education team is excited to report successful patient health outcomes through its *Sweet Care* program, an eight-month pilot program launched in October 2010 that focused on the prevention of diabetes-related complications.

Without proper management including exercise, healthy diet, regular screening and medication, diabetes can lead to serious health complications. High blood sugar levels can lead to periodontal disease, tooth loss and other oral health problems, as well as damage to the heart, kidneys, and circulatory system. Diabetic retinopathy is the major cause of blindness in Americans 60 years and older. However, early detection and treatment can reduce the risk of blindness by 90 percent according to the American Diabetes Association.

*Sweet Care* aimed to improve management and early detection of these complications in patients with diabetes by integrating all necessary health care under a program, combined with case management and education to provide the patient with the tools to improve their own health. *Sweet Care* patients agreed to actively participate in their well-being and to attend all health education workshops, provider appointments, and referral visits. A Health Coach coordinated with La Maestra medical, dental, optometry and mental health providers, as well as outside agencies, to help patients create individualized action plans to manage their diabetes and prevent complications.



In 2009, before the *Sweet Care* program was implemented, only 1% of the total 740 diabetic patients received an annual dental visit; fewer than 1% received a depression screening; and 8.7% received an annual retinal exam. *Sweet Care* patients showed better outcomes than patients not enrolled in the program, with higher annual screening rates (shown in the bar graph above) as well as better control of their diabetes. 36% of the 50 patients enrolled in *Sweet Care* had controlled glucose levels, compared to 25.9% of all other patients. In addition, 58% reduced their A1C glucose levels, by an average of 1.9 points. Every percentage point drop in A1C can reduce the risk of eye, kidney, and nerve disease complications by 40%.

According to Program Manager Myrna Torresdey, this pilot shows that patients with diabetes can gain the tools and confidence to become active participants in their health care, no matter their economic or educational background. Myrna led the Health Education team in planning, implementing and evaluating the *Sweet Care* program as her project for the Blue Shield of California Foundation's **Clinic Leadership Institute** (CLI), an 18-month program designed to create a new generation of leaders who can manage and strengthen community clinics in the future. Myrna was one of six participants selected from the class of 25 to present their projects at the last session of the CLI, based on the successful impact of *Sweet Care*.

### "Garden of Life" Thrives and Changes Lives in the Heart of City Heights

A block away from La Maestra's green health center, a long abandoned yard has been transformed into a vibrant green space where community families grow and gather their own nutritious, fresh vegetables, flavorful herbs, and cheerful flowers. La Maestra's community garden, dubbed "The Garden of Life", took root in July 2010, with help from a Tides Foundation grant and the handiwork of volunteers from a handful of organizations who helped microcredit participants to clear the yard, design and build raised beds, shovel compost, and install an irrigation system.

The garden is part of an innovative program designed by the staff and participants of La Maestra Community Health Centers' Healthy Choices program and La Maestra Foundation's Microcredit Program for Women. The goal is to educate and empower women to be financially self-sufficient and maintain their cultural traditions while improving the health of their children and communities. In addition to cultivating their plots, these women participate in educational workshops where they share traditional recipes and utilize what they learn about nutrition to modify recipes into healthier versions. A cookbook full of the revised recipes will be created as part of the program. Children also reap the benefits, through working in the garden, eating healthier meals and learning about vegetables.



*Rosa has harvested almost 150 pounds of produce over the last nine months. Growers sell their produce at local farmers' markets.*



*Ana and her children love working in the garden and creating new recipes with their harvests. Ana's garden has been one of the most productive so she was asked to participate in the "Cut Flower Garden Project" where flowers will be planted and sold to La Maestra Blossoms flowershop, one of the La Maestra Foundation's microenterprise programs.*

In their weekly meetings, women in the Foundation's Microcredit program had discussed the need to adapt some of their cultural beliefs about food and incorporate healthier cooking habits for the well being of their families. Microcredit participants, like Ana and Rosa, also talked about how they missed working in their gardens in their native countries and the exercise that their children got from helping to plant, water and weed. In their small urban homes, there are few spaces to start a garden, and they longed for a place to grow vegetables that are too expensive or hard to find in nearby markets.

According to health center *promotoras*, several factors contribute to high rates of obesity and related health problems in the communities La Maestra serves: prior to coming to the US, many families suffer from food deprivation living in refugee camps or severe poverty, and many have cultural beliefs and eating behaviors that negatively affect their health. Acculturation into American society brings the introduction of unhealthy fast foods, processed foods, and high sugar drinks.

Urban environments with few outdoor spaces, combined with the need to work long hours to support a family, compound the risk of obesity by limiting opportunities for regular exercise. So for those who can't work in the garden, La Maestra began to offer zumba classes three evenings a week in the health center lobby or parking lot.



We would like to thank our partners who have helped the Garden of Life flourish: Price Charities, MAAC Project YouthBuild, Sophia Circle, residents at I Choose Recovery! transitional living home, and UCSD Epteam (check out their [YouTube video](#) about the garden!).

*Over 40 people get their bodies moving and hearts pumping at each zumba session.*

**Let us know** if you would like to volunteer in future garden projects, donate seeds, plants or gardening tools, or learn more about starting your own urban garden!

[Forward to a Friend!](#)



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