

# To Mark 40 Years, Health Center Unveils Primary Care Center

On May 14, a new, state-of-the-art facility in Middletown will open to patients, replaces three clinical buildings spread out on both sides of Main Street.

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The [Community Health Center](#), a state-wide primary care center specializing in the underserved and uninsured, celebrated its 40th anniversary on May 1. From its beginnings in a second-floor walk-up in Middletown in 1972, the Community Health Center has grown to serve more than 130,000 patients at over 200 locations across Connecticut, with medical, dental, and behavioral health care, with more than 500 staff and providers.

“In the early '70s, we were a group of Middletown activists and students from Wesleyan University, and we were inspired by the idea that ‘health care is a right, not a privilege’,” said Mark Masselli, founder and President/CEO of [CHC](#).

“It was a time when social change was sweeping the country, and we were part of that — the fact that we were able to grow from those early years as a free clinic to the CHC of today is due to the tremendous support and encouragement we received from the community. We always had some older and wiser folks helping us build an organization for the long-term.”

Within a few years of its opening in Middletown, CHC began to expand across Connecticut. As of 2012, CHC operates primary care centers in 13 cities, in addition to their school-based health centers, and community-based locations, including Meriden, New Britain, Groton, New London, Danbury, Waterbury, Norwalk, Stamford, Old Saybrook, Bristol, Enfield and Clinton.

CHC of Middletown originally started on College Street, then moved shortly after to its location in the city’s North End on Main Street. On May 14, a new, state-of-the-art facility located at 675 Main Street will open to patients; it replaces three outdated clinical buildings spread out on both sides of Main Street, with limited parking, no elevators and minimal handicap-accessibility.

The new center, designed to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, will bring all services under one roof, enabling CHC of Middletown to deliver fully integrated care to 50 percent more patients. The facility will reflect the quality of CHC’s providers, the high level of care and technology, and CHC’s attention to the patient experience.

“For CHC, the question has always been not just is there better access — the question is access to what?” said CHC’s Senior Vice President and Clinical Director Dr. Margaret Flinter. “Because we believe our patients are entitled to the highest standard in primary care, we focus on three

things: clinical excellence, research and innovation, and training of the next generation of health care professionals.

"It's a commitment to improvement — we were the first statewide primary care system to adopt electronic health records. And it's also about putting patients at the center of our actions." CHC's model of care has been recognized by two national accrediting organizations, the Joint Commission and the National Committee on Quality Assurance, who awarded the highest level of Patient Centered Medical Home to the agency.

More than 90 percent of CHC's patients are at or below (poverty rate), and many face chronic health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, depression, and cardio-vascular disease. To ensure the most up-to-date and data-based care, The Weitzman Center for Innovation, which CHC started in 2005, has forged research partnerships with a wide range of leading organizations such as Dartmouth Institute, General Electric and University of Connecticut.

"We believe that those who are engaged in primary care have a responsibility to improve it," said Flinter. The nation's first residency program for nurse practitioners started at CHC and is now expanding to several new states. The center also offers a residency for post-doc psychologists.

"The community surrounding us is important, too — primary care is only one piece of the puzzle," said Masselli. "People can't be healthy if their neighborhood isn't healthy." In its 40 years of operation, CHC has founded a number of community initiatives, such as [Vinnie's Jump & Jive](#), an alcohol-free dance hall in Middletown.

Masselli said, "There's a lot that we can do to encourage people to move more — whether it's dancing, exercise, or just getting out in their neighborhood."

CHC founded the [Recess Rocks](#) program, which encourages schools to incorporate movement into the classroom learning experience, has spread nationally as teachers use an online toolkit and download the theme song recorded by PBS Kids star SteveSongs.

CHC's Masselli said, "We will always be trying to move forward toward our goal of building a world-class primary care system for the folks who need it most. This 40th anniversary is a moment to pause and thank those on our staff and in our communities who have made this work possible, and it's also a moment to let our dreams take us one step closer to a future where health care is a right, not a privilege, for all."

As part of its 40th anniversary celebration, CHC's new primary care center on Main Street will be open to the public on Saturday for preview tours from noon to 2 p.m.

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