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OAKLEY — After years of traveling to nearby towns, residents here will soon be able to find health care services in their own backyard.

La Clinica, an Oakland-based nonprofit group that works to make health care accessible to all, is preparing to sign a lease on a space in Cypress Square Plaza off Main Street by Big Break Road.

The city has agreed to guarantee the lease, and most area medical providers have made funding commitments.

"For someone of that quality to come in," said City Manager Bryan Montgomery, "that's a coup."

The clinic will offer an array of medical services, including prenatal care and referrals to specialists. Most important to organizers here, La Clinica will make special efforts to accommodate low-income residents. The clinic will help new patients access state and federal health care funds, and offer services on a sliding fee scale.

For more than five years, city leaders have worked with the county, area health care providers and the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO) to make health care services more accessible to uninsured residents and those with limited transportation.

In a community study conducted in 2007, CCISCO found that more than 15 percent of residents lacked health care, and about half of respondents had trouble accessing health care in their community.

Oakley has about 36,000 residents and no health care providers. Residents generally travel to neighboring Antioch or Brentwood for health services, CCISCO organizer Nancy Marquez said, but clinics for those in need often do not have the capacity to serve out-of-towners.

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She recalled the case of a fellow parishioner who volunteered to give a mother a ride to Brentwood clinic, only to be stuck there all day as the woman waited for her children to be seen.

Rural communities often lack doctors, Montgomery said, and the new clinic may help attract more physicians to the area.

The council first made a public commitment two years ago to bring a health care clinic to Oakley, but the project languished because of the state budget crisis and national recession.

"The clinic's viability is dependent on people having access to things like Medicare and Healthy Families," Marquez said, "so we had to pay attention to things that were happening at a national level."

Now, the project is entering its home stretch. La Clinica has settled on a property at Cypress Square Plaza near Raley's, and the city has pledged to guarantee rent if La Clinica, which has never broken a lease, terminates the lease after three years.

Former World War II nurse Elaine Wrigley lives near the planned location in an apartment complex for seniors. Her uninsured neighbors often ask her for medical advice, she said, which makes her uncomfortable. She hopes that her neighbors will soon be able to seek professional advice at the new clinic.

"I think it's really important for people to have health care," she said. "I'm glad that this is finally coming together because it's really getting bad with people here."

La Clinica stakeholders are wrapping up their fund-raising efforts. Organizers say the clinic will initially operate 20 hours a week, and will operate full time by its third year.

About a dozen CCISCO members have led the effort to bring this clinic to Oakley.

"It just goes to show that people working together and talking to the right folks can really change and improve things," Marquez said.

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