Bay Clinic’s Mobile Health Unit takes services to remote areas of the Big Island

Access to services of any kind can be difficult for residents living in the remote communities of East Hawai‘i Island. That’s particularly true when it comes to health care services.
Bay Clinic has rolled out a solution: the Bay Clinic Mobile Health Unit. Bay Clinic touts its medical van, put into service a little over a year ago, as the first of its kind in the state that expands health care access to areas that don’t have health care facilities.

“In these remote communities, it’s cost-prohibitive to build and operate a comprehensive site considering what it costs to run that type of operation,” says Bay Clinic CEO Harold Wallace. “The Mobile Health Unit provides us with the opportunity to lower that cost while still providing much-needed service to places such as Ocean View, Mountain View, and Volcano Village.”

Bay Clinic had a mobile unit that brought dental services to island residents for a number of years. Eventually, though, it was time to replace it.

“We decided that we needed a new mobile unit and, from there, we said if we’re going to get a new mobile unit, let’s increase medical access and make it medical and dental,” Wallace says. “So we took the old mobile unit and did something better.”

The current Mobile Health Unit provides medical services such as preventive care, treatment of routine illnesses, urgent care, immunizations, management of chronic diseases, and physical exams. Dental services include screenings, comprehensive exams, cleanings, and extractions. Bay Clinic maintains all medical record information, which can be shared with other health care agencies if there’s a need for specialty referrals or higher-level acute inpatient services.

Wallace says one of the special services the van provides is medication delivery for residents in the federal 340B Drug Discount Program through an agreement with Walgreens. “The pharmacy fills the prescriptions and we deliver them when we go out with the mobile unit. In Volcano Village, for example, people were driving to Hilo to get their medications, so this program is a big thing. That’s one service that people aren’t aware of.”

There were some obstacles that had to be overcome before the Mobile Health Unit could get on the road. The biggest obstacle was funding. “We had to raise all of the funds because we didn’t want to have monthly payments,” he says. “We wanted to purchase it free and clear.

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