

Free medical, dental, vision clinic returns to LA with new services



This Sept. 11, 2014 staff file photo shows patients receiving dental care during a free healthcare clinic put on by Care Harbor at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. Staff File Photo

By [Susan Abram](#), Los Angeles Daily News

POSTED: 10/13/15, 7:46 PM PDT

UPDATED: ON 10/13/2015

Come Thursday, the nearly 17,000-seat Sports Arena will once again be transformed into a massive medical, dental and vision clinic, where hundreds of dentists, optometrists, nurses and other volunteers will offer free care for three days to those in need.

But the services offered will be different compared to six years ago, when [a similar event](#) was first held at the Los Angeles Forum. Back then, images of these megaclinics held nationwide and primarily in rural settings became symbolic of the fractured health care system before reform and the lengths many Americans would go to for much needed medical and dental care.

Now, as the provisions under the [Affordable Care Act](#) take hold and more people are insured for primary care, some services at the upcoming large-scale clinic have changed while others have been expanded, said [Don Manelli](#), the president and founder of [Care Harbor](#), a nonprofit organization that produces the event.

He said while millions of Los Angeles residents now have some kind of medical coverage, dental care and vision services remain out of reach for many people. Medi-Cal doesn't cover the cost of a new glasses, for example, he said.

"What stayed the same is dental and vision," Manelli said. "Dental is about 60 percent of what we do, and vision is 40 percent. We'll see more dental patients this year than we have before and we're doing more. We're offering partial dentures. They're going to be made overnight."

But this year's event also will promote prevention, he said. Data collected from last year's event shows that of the 2,265 people who were seen for basic care, 68 percent had prehypertension, or stage 1 or stage 2 of the disease. Also, many didn't know they were qualified for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. Even those who are undocumented are eligible for primary medical care in Los Angeles County through a program called [My Health LA](#), he said.

"The entire clinic is on an e-record system. It's kind of amazing," Manelli said. "We can track cases" and refer them to clinics for regular care.

What's also new this year is mental health services. Consultations will be offered and those who want can schedule appointments with nearby clinics for therapy, Manelli said. The clinic is also expanding vaccinations to include the [shingles](#) vaccine and offering more specialty care such as cardiology.

Last year, the clinic served 3,111 people, up slightly from 2013. Last year, services rendered cost \$2.3 million. Wristbands for those who are in need of services at the clinic have already been handed out.

Manelli said he'll know when the health and dental system has improved and everyone has some kind of coverage when no one shows up for wristbands for the free care.

"We'll be here until then," he said.



This Sept. 11, 2014 staff file photo shows Chelsea Brown administering a blood pressure test to Mark Elliott during a free healthcare clinic put on by Care Harbor at the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

Staff File Photo