

Star Community Health Vans Deliver Reduced-Cost Care to People in Need

By Sam Kennedy, Corporate Communications Director

On a rainy morning in June, a smiling preteen girl dressed in blue emerged from the white and blue Star Community Health dental van parked behind Trexler Middle School, Allentown. She received a dental exam, x-ray, cleaning and a fluoride application, procedures often neglected due to their high cost. Patients of Star are charged on a sliding scale depending on their income or insurance coverage; a visit can cost as little as \$10.

Asked through an interpreter if she was pleased with her experience, the girl replied, “Si, gracias!” and flashed her pearly whites at her two siblings and father who were awaiting their turns.

Star Community Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center (“FQHC”) affiliated with St. Luke’s University Health Network, has been providing mobile oral health services to the underserved communities throughout its service area for 20 years.

“We create healthy smiles,” said a beaming Marilyn Santiago, operations manager for Star’s mobile health program. She added that the mobile health vans alone treat about 2,200 patients per year throughout six counties and 14 School Districts in Pennsylvania.

The caregivers in the fleet of four, 38-foot vehicles will soon expand their clinical offerings to include primary medical and mental health services as well as vaccinations. Over the course of a year, they visit a total of 46 schools, along with health fairs, parades and other community events, providing free screenings, health education and hard-to-access, reduced-cost care to kids and adults, who are uninsured or underinsured.

Some of the Star vans have been generously funded by grants from U.S. Senators and Northampton County. Star’s operational costs also are supported through generous grants from St. Luke’s and other public and private sources. St. Luke’s University Health Network earned an “A” grade on the 2026-27 Low Hospitals Index for Social Responsibility, placing it among the top health systems nationally for overall commitment to health equity, value and outcomes.

Star Community Health delivers primary care health services to more than 53,170 patients yearly at 16 locations in Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton, Lansford, Ringtown, Tamaqua and Phillipsburg (NJ). In addition to dental care, services include primary/family medicine, women’s health, pediatrics, mental health and specialty care, including chiropractic care. Patients also can be referred to food banks, helped find transportation and access other community services that address the social determinants of health.

In addition to the preventive and protective oral care, the vans’ dental teams—dental hygienist, dental assistant and dentist—many of whom are bilingual, fill cavities, extract baby teeth and patch chipped teeth in the rolling dental suite, each treating about 20 patients a day, explained Santiago. Appointments are made through schools where they park, and the van’s driver registers each patient before their treatment and schedules follow-ups if needed. Each van is outfitted with two treatment areas, an x-ray unit, and all the necessary instruments and supplies found in a typical dental office. If more extensive care is needed, the patient is referred to one of the Star centers in Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton or Tamaqua.

Starting in August, in preparation for the upcoming school year, a physician, nurse and nurse assistant on the vans will offer school and sports physicals. Mental health professionals will screen for anxiety, depression and other childhood conditions.

“Star Community Health, in collaboration with St. Luke’s, is proud of our decades-long history of providing access to vital and affordable dental and medical care to people who otherwise would struggle to obtain them,” added Santiago.



MusicFest

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role of poster artist due to the pandemic.

“My poster is a play on the great seal of the United States, but with a unity theme centered around the topic of music,” commented Boehm. “The theme this year is ‘Music Unites,’ and that message couldn’t be more needed right now. Let’s be real: we’re a little divided as a country. But when the music starts? Suddenly, we’re all singing the same song, dancing in the same street and feeling the same good vibes. That’s what I wanted the poster to capture—joy, energy and the power of music to bring us all together, no matter who we are or where we come from.”

The artwork carries special meaning as the country looks ahead to America’s 250th, the nation’s semi-quintcentennial celebration. Boehm’s design captures both the festive spirit of Musikfest and the way music brings people together during this milestone moment.

