



Doors Open and Lights On

Providing Services When the Community Needs it Most

Health centers found themselves at, or above, capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increased demand for services and care. This was the case for Eastport Health Care, a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that provides essential health care services to around 5,400 patients in Washington County, with service locations in Eastport and Machias, Maine.

In her prior experience, Ellen Krajewski, MPH, CEO of Eastport Health Care, always worked at health centers that worked directly with large tertiary hospitals and independent providers, as well as a safety net provider network.

“Here in Downeast Maine, it’s not like that,” she said. “It’s health centers and the hospital. There are not many independent providers, or other kinds of clinics, so we are an essential safety net health care provider as well as the primary care provider.”

That role in the community was magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic. “We stepped up to the best of our ability. It was a challenge because we can’t abandon primary care, but we had to figure out how to be a resource in this emergency for our entire community, not just our patients, but also for other community organizations,” recalled Ellen.

Over time, Eastport Health Care recognized the increasing demand for its services and the need for larger, more modern facilities. It’s working on meeting that need with its newly renovated clinic located in Machias, where EHC is accepting children and all ages who need a primary care provider.

“Our pediatric providers are fantastic, and they see 20 to 30 kids a day. They recognize that if there’s a kid in need, we’ll do whatever we need to do to get them in and see a provider,” said Kelly Forfa, operations manager for Eastport Health Care.



CEO Ellen Krajewski presents one of EHC’s vaccine refrigerators at their facility in Eastport, Maine.

Top photo: Operations Manager Kelly Forfa and Facilities Director Rod Tirrell stand outside EHC’s facility in Machias, Maine.





With grants secured from U.S. Senator Susan Collins and the U.S. Department of Agriculture totaling more than \$5 million, Eastport Health Care is now embarking on a project to build a new facility in Eastport to expand its services and capacity.

The expansion plans are designed to accommodate the patient population who need access to primary care and enhance care quality. The new facility, expected to be about 18,000 square feet, will include primary care, behavioral health, and dental care services, meeting spaces, and, potentially, an in-house pharmacy, addressing not only the needs of patients, but also providing additional community resources.

In planning for this expansion and to ensure uninterrupted services, such as during emergencies or power outages, Eastport Health Care received grant funding toward purchasing generators. These federal funds, administered by the Downeast District Public Health Council, were dedicated to addressing gaps in the public health system that contributed to health inequities and disparities uncovered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In remote Downeast Maine, power can be less predictable. When it goes off, backup power is a problem. We have many medications and vaccines that require refrigeration, and we want to be able to keep seeing patients. A good generator enables us to be a resource during these outages, rather than part of the problem,” said Ellen.

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Ellen recalled a recent storm with high winds and power outages. “We had to close one day this past winter due to weather conditions. Keeping our lights on and doors open for patients and our medications and vaccines in safe temperatures is so important. That time, we couldn’t keep our doors open, but with a lot of effort and luck, we saved our vaccines.”

With the pandemic and extreme weather events fresh in mind, the new facility's design will incorporate additional features to enhance emergency preparedness, such as a designated triage area at the entrance. This proactive approach underscores Eastport Health Care’s role as an essential resource in times of public health emergencies.

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