

Hispanic Outreach Boosts Kids' Health

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The Tulane Children's Health Project is offering its free mobile pediatric clinic services to residents of New Orleans' Mid-City neighborhood thanks to a \$300,000 grant from Baptist Community Ministries of New Orleans.



Dr. Jaya Aysola, an assistant professor of pediatrics at Tulane, is director of the Children's Health Project that brings health care to children in their own neighborhoods. (Photo by Tricia Travis)

The clinic on wheels is open every Tuesday at Esperanza Charter School on Carrollton Avenue. The new location is a key part of a new Hispanic Outreach Initiative, according to Dr. Jaya Aysola, assistant professor of pediatrics at Tulane.

The clinic's partnership with Esperanza School is a crucial component of the Children's Health Project's Hispanic Outreach Initiative. "It is the school in the area that has the most Hispanic children in it — about 66 percent," says Aysola, who directs the Children's Health Project.

The number of Hispanics moving into the greater New Orleans area jumped after Hurricane Katrina due in part to the spike in demand for construction workers. This growing population has experienced difficulty getting medical attention because of language, insurance and documentation issues, in addition to the lack of medical infrastructure.

"We began the New Orleans Children's Health Project two weeks after Katrina," says Aysola. "Our mission was to bridge the gaps in health care that existed for children and families here in the Gulf Coast area. Our project in the greater New Orleans area, in particular, was vital because communities here were devastated and there was a lack of health care infrastructure."

Administered by the Department of Pediatrics of the School of Medicine, the project's [mobile clinic](#) has been bringing much-needed medical and mental health care and community support services to underserved populations in neighborhoods in New Orleans and Chalmette four days a week. The program includes two mobile units — a medical unit for physical exams and a mental health unit for interviews and therapy.

"We wanted to bridge the gap in health care by providing comprehensive services just as you would see at any regular clinic for children and their families," says Aysola. "We were well aware that there were always communities that were disenfranchised from health care at large predating the storm, so we assumed that even as the health care infrastructure regained itself and grew back in

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the community, that we would still have a role to play in terms of addressing the healthcare needs of certain communities.”

The clinic provides services to patients from infancy to 24, as well as older adults if their health affects the well being of the children, Aysola says.

The Children's Health Project has also partnered with the Archdiocese of New Orleans' Hispanic Apostolate to spread the word among Spanish-speaking residents of the area that it is ready to provide health care for families and children with minimal resources.

The Baptist Campus Ministries grant provides \$100,000 per year for three years to the New Orleans Children's Health Project.

“The project is supported by a number of different grants, and this grant really funds our Hispanic Outreach Initiative,” says Aysola. “It covers our bilingual therapist and our bilingual case manager, who is our main translator. It also covers some of our other operational expenses, but it really hones in on the key elements of our program that are essential to allow us to offer our services in two languages.”