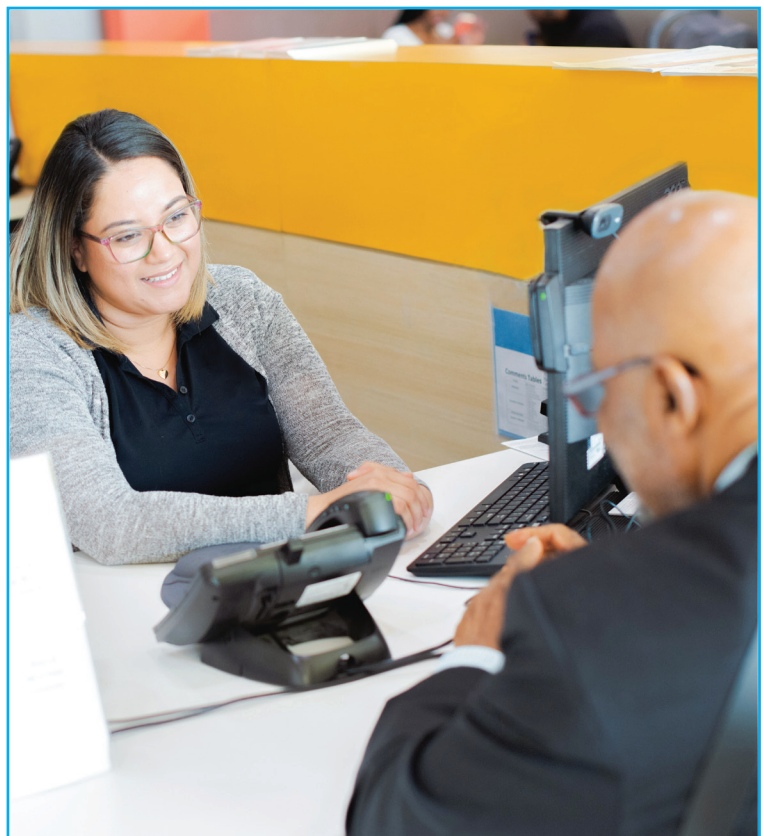




SPRING 2024

CONNECTIONS

IMPROVING ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL HEALTHCARE SERVICES



Learn more about Mary's Center's Open Enrollment and Cancer Navigation Programs.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO AND CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Dear Friends,

In 2023, Mary's Center celebrated 35 years of service in the DC region. The growth we achieved over this time has been made possible by supporters like you who are dedicated to lifting the mission of Mary's Center. With your partnership, we can address the rising needs of the diverse communities we serve, and bolster and adapt our services so that our participants can continue to count on us for care. For example, over the years, Mary's Center has seen an increase in the number of older adult participants. To ensure that we are meeting the needs of this important population, we hired a full-time geriatrician. Similarly, with the greater demand for pediatric dental care as well as individuals with disabilities, Mary's Center not only added a pediatric dentist but also additional resources to support all individuals coming to our clinics.

Your support is important in the delivery of our services and helping our incredibly talented staff members care for our participants. We are fortunate to have employees who are passionate about the mission of Mary's Center and are committed to helping our participants build healthier lives and thriving futures. Our diverse staff come from various countries across the globe, with many speaking more than one language, including Amharic, French, German, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Urdu, among others. Our providers, including physicians, therapists, psychiatrists, nurses, and physician associates have attended highly-acclaimed universities and completed residencies at institutions like Georgetown University Hospital, Children's National Medical Center, and Columbia University, just to name a few.

Through a combination of healthcare, social services, and education, our staff embrace an innovative and holistic multidisciplinary approach to care that we call the Social Change Model. Mary's Center providers recognize the value of being able to provide participants with warm hand-offs to other services and programs that we offer. Should someone who comes in for an annual medical exam exhibit signs of mental health challenges, providers can refer the individual internally and be rest-assured that their participant is getting access to treatment that will improve their wellbeing. This is not often the case with other healthcare systems.

In order to ensure that our staff can provide high-quality care that leads to the best possible health outcomes for our participants, Mary's Center encourages staff to further their knowledge and expertise by investing in their professional development and providing educational opportunities to advance their careers. Recently, our dental leadership team developed an upward mobility career path for Patient Care Navigators to become licensed dental assistants in DC and Maryland.

In this newsletter, you'll read about a few of the programs and services, including our Cancer Navigation Program and open enrollment initiatives, carried out by our dedicated teams of experts. You will learn that our healthcare community is not merely an assembly of professionals; it is a collective force that understands the importance of collaboration, empathy, and unwavering commitment to our shared mission. Your support as a donor and partner is crucial to ensuring each cog in our machine can function seamlessly and without worry.

Thank you for being an indispensable part of the Mary's Center community.

With gratitude,



Tollie B. Elliott, Sr., M.D.
Chief Executive Officer



Wendy Goldberg
Chair of the Board



Tollie B. Elliott, Sr., M.D.
Chief Executive Officer



Wendy Goldberg
Chair of the Board

NAME MARY'S CENTER IN YOUR WILL

Did you know planned gifts are a great way to care for the causes that matter most to you? Including Mary's Center in your estate plan will help ensure our life-changing work for generations to come.

Naming us in your will is simple. Here is some suggested language: "I give and devise to Mary's Center, located in Washington, DC, all (or state percentage) of the rest, residue, and the remainder of my estate, both real and personal, to be used for its general support (or for the support of a specific fund)."

Interested in learning more?
Contact Heather Morgan,
Executive Vice President of
Development, at (202) 579-6198 or
hmorgan@maryscenter.org.

EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH OPEN ENROLLMENT INITIATIVES

When participants come for their first appointment at Mary's Center, our staff must determine whether or not individuals and families have insurance. As a community health center, Mary's Center provides services to many under- and un-insured community members. While many participants may not have private insurance, they are often eligible for government insurance programs and are not always aware of their eligibility. We are committed to improving healthcare accessibility and ensuring that our participants receive the information and support they need to enroll in government insurance programs.

Our trained staff help participants navigate the complexities of open enrollment, particularly with Medicaid, DC Healthcare Alliance, and Qualified Health Plan programs. The employees first determine an individual's eligibility for Medicaid and if so, facilitate the enrollment or renewal process. In cases where Medicaid eligibility is not met, our staff direct participants to other city-offered plans, such as DC Healthcare Alliance and Qualified Health Plan programs. Individuals seeking health insurance coverage can access both telehealth and in-person services at four of our clinics: Adams Morgan, Petworth, Fort Totten, and Adelphi.

Additionally, our Bilingual Health Access Program (BHAP) offers assistance in Spanish, covering Medicaid and DC Healthcare Alliance, as well as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF. The BHAP team ensures that Spanish-speaking participants receive comprehensive support throughout the health insurance enrollment process by translating documents, letters, and



A participant family receives personalized guidance from Mary's Center staff during open enrollment.

website content. Veronica Hernandez, Mary's Center's Entitlement Manager, shared, "Sometimes clients don't know what they qualify for, or they don't apply for a benefit because they don't think they are eligible. When they come to us, we provide information and resources to see what benefits they qualify for."

Mary's Center also employs dedicated In-Person Assisters and Navigators to guide participants through the enrollment process. At our Petworth clinic, two Mary's Center In-Person Assisters administer services through DC Health Link, which is funded by the DC Health Benefit Exchange Program. They offer essential support with health literacy as well as benefits status. Whether in waiting rooms or during appointments, each In-Person Assister guides individuals through the account creation process on the DC Health Link website, helping to verify and renew affordable care plans.

At Prince George's County Department of Social Services offices in Hyattsville and Landover, six Navigators from Mary's Center assist in enrolling eligible Maryland residents

in government-assisted insurance plans. Supported by funding from the Prince George's County Department of Social Services, the Prince George's County Health Connect team serves an average of 50 individuals daily, offering services Monday through Friday at both locations. By the close of open enrollment on January 15, 2024, the six-person Navigator team had provided hands-on support to 2,997 households.

By providing crucial support, education, and outreach, Mary's Center strives to make the enrollment process seamless and accessible for all. For us, open enrollment isn't just about insurance—it's about empowering individuals to take control of their health and well-being. We are grateful for our partnership with DC Health Link and Prince George's County Health Connect, in addition to Mary's Center's dedicated BHAP team, In-Person Assisters and Navigators for their support in making open enrollment accessible to those we serve. Veronica emphasized, "We ensure that we go above and beyond with our participants because navigating the system is not easy."

MARY'S CENTER'S LIVING HISTORY: ELLEN FARRIOR'S STORY

A little over 35 years ago, Mary's Center was launched by Maria Gomez and a group of health advocates to provide prenatal care to immigrant women fleeing war and poverty in Central America. This small group of health advocates, who are often referred to as the Founding Mothers of Mary's Center, was made up of dedicated nurses, social workers, and midwives who were passionate about providing culturally competent and accessible care to women in need.

Founding Mother Ellen Farrior worked as a social worker at Mary's Center from its inception until 1995. Even today, she continues to provide philanthropic support to the organization, cherishing the memories from her time working at Mary's Center. She fondly recalled, "it was my favorite place I ever worked."

Prior to working at Mary's Center, Ellen had plenty of experience working with women and families from various countries and of different cultural backgrounds throughout her career. Ellen and her late husband Hugh, an OBGYN, were appointed as Presbyterian Missionaries to the Belgian Congo in 1957 and were stationed there until the early 1970s. Ellen taught English, French, and sociology to nurses, while Hugh provided training to medical personnel.

Ellen came to Washington, DC in the early 1980s for a job as a social worker at Columbia Road Health Services in Adams Morgan. While working there, Ellen supported patients from different countries in Latin America and Africa. In her role, she would provide counseling to entire families and expectant mothers, including pregnant teens. The patient load at Columbia Road Health Services grew and there was an apparent need for prenatal services for immigrant women, many of whom were from Latin America. In 1988, with funding from the DC Mayor's Office of Latino Affairs,



Ellen Farrior stands in front of Mary's Center's first location with her colleagues in the late 1980s.

“ Ellen said she valued “working with staff who were deeply committed to learning Spanish and who appreciated the culture and lives of their patients.” ”

Maria Gomez, with assistance from the Founding Mothers, established Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc.

To effectively communicate with her patients, Ellen took a six-month intensive Spanish course when she began working at Mary's Center. Ellen said she valued “working with staff who were deeply committed to learning Spanish and who appreciated the culture and lives of their patients.”

Ellen was responsible for conducting intake for each patient, some of whom had endured traumatic experiences when leaving their countries. The staff “recognized the loneliness of being in a new country, having to learn a new language, and being in need of medical care,” said Ellen.

During her time at Mary's Center, Ellen formed close bonds with fellow staff members and the patients she served. When she retired in 1995, the staff and patients presented her with a scrapbook of letters, photos, as well as drawings from some of her pediatric patients, expressing their appreciation for all she did during her time at Mary's Center. She still has this scrapbook and enjoys flipping through it as she reflects on her fond memories of working at the clinic.

Even nearly 30 years after retiring from Mary's Center, she remains in contact with some of her former colleagues and participants. She recently wrote a recommendation letter for a former participant who is applying for US citizenship.

Ellen is pleased with the growth and expansion of Mary's Center's service offerings over the years. She is grateful for Maria's past and Dr. Elliott's current leadership of an organization that makes such an impactful difference for the lives of so many.

EMPOWERING PATIENTS THROUGH THE CANCER NAVIGATION PROGRAM

A cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming, not only for patients, but also for their families. There are significant barriers to preventative care, including lack of awareness, financial constraints, and limited access to healthcare services. Recognizing the importance of preventative cancer screening and the need to support individuals facing such diagnoses, Mary's Center established the Cancer Navigation Program.

The program aims to educate participants about the significance of cancer screenings and provide the support they need from the moment of diagnosis throughout their treatment journey. With an emphasis on prevention, the program aims to promote preventative behaviors and regular screenings among Mary's Center participants. Through strategic partnerships with healthcare providers and community organizations, Mary's Center ensures that individuals receive timely and affordable screenings, particularly for breast and colorectal cancers. By encouraging early detection and routine screenings, the program strives to minimize the impact of cancer-related illnesses within the community.

In an effort to address disparities in prostate cancer among Black men in Washington, DC and Montgomery County, Maryland, the Cancer Navigation Program implemented a community-based prostate cancer initiative in 2023. This pilot initiative was designed to increase awareness and facilitate early detection of prostate cancer among communities with the highest rate of Black male residents.

One of the key components of the program is its emphasis on education and outreach. Cancer Navigation Coordinator Ana Alvarez plays a pivotal role in providing participants with essential information about screenings, addressing myths and misconceptions, and alleviating fears associated with cancer screenings and treatment. In addition to scheduling appointments, Ana conducts educational calls, assesses participants' needs, and even coordinates transportation services to ensure accessibility



Ana Alvarez, Cancer Navigation Coordinator, promotes cervical cancer awareness and Mary's Center services at a local outreach event.

to care. "I call patients to remind them about their appointments and provide them with information about their screening. I also provide healthy lifestyle education and the importance of that on their daily lives," Ana said.

Another critical aspect of the program is its commitment to supporting participants throughout their cancer journey. From navigating follow-up care for abnormal screenings to providing guidance and emotional support after

a cancer diagnosis, Mary's Center aims to empower individuals to make informed decisions about their health. When needed, participants are provided a warm hand-off to Mary's Center's behavioral health and social services, as well as to partner agencies.

Ana highlights that one of the biggest challenges to accessing this care is often a language barrier, particularly for Spanish speakers. Her role as a bilingual liaison significantly enhances the accessibility and effectiveness of the program for Spanish-speaking individuals. She serves as a translator not only for language but also for medical jargon and medical forms, ensuring that participants fully understand their healthcare journey and can navigate it effectively. According to Ana, "most of the participants I connect with are going through very difficult situations, and just letting them know I am here to support makes them feel they are not alone."

The Cancer Navigation Program at Mary's Center embodies the organization's commitment to comprehensive, participant-centered care, guiding participants through the challenges of cancer and empowering them to live healthier, more fulfilling lives beyond diagnosis. As the program evolves, its impact on the community remains profound, with Mary's Center improving outcomes for individuals affected by cancer through collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to equity in healthcare access.



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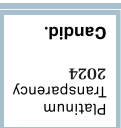
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ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE PAPER



Social Services



Education



Behavioral Health



Dental



Medical



MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS – MIRIAM SZUBIN AND DAVID CUSANO

Miriam is the Director of Children and Family Programming at the Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center and runs programs that provide enriching opportunities for learning and community building for children, parents, and parents-to-be. Before joining the Mary's Center board, Miriam served on the Community Engagement Council. Miriam's three children are pediatric participants at Mary's Center.

David is the Manager for the CMS Coverage, Payment, & Equity Department at MITRE, responsible for managing work shaping, engagement, and end-to-end delivery for the Health FFRDC's CMS Portfolio across key components of Medicaid, Medicare, and the private insurance markets. He has a background in both nursing and law.

To learn more about the Mary's Center Board of Directors, visit www.maryscenter.org/about-us/board/



Miriam Szubin



David Cusano, JD, RN

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