

# HealthLink Dental Clinic reopens

*The Southampton-based clinic provides free dental services for low-wage-earning adults*

By **Lower Bucks Times** - July 13, 2020



Whether relieving a toothache or putting the polishing touches to make a smile sparkle, HealthLink Dental Clinic is again open for those in need of its services, with a number of safety measures in place.

You will be screened by phone before your appointment; you must call from the parking lot when you arrive; you must wait for HealthLink's call to enter through the new entrance; masks are required for entry; staff will take your temperature and oxygen level when you enter the clinic; and only those with appointments may enter the building.

Since 2001, HealthLink has offered free dental services to low-wage-earning adults and military veterans age 18 and older in Bucks and Montgomery counties who are without dental insurance.

In 2017, the National Association of Dental Plans reported an estimated 74 million Americans did not have dental health insurance coverage. Medicare provides health insurance for those aged 65 and older, but not dental insurance coverage. Individuals may also elect to buy dental insurance through supplemental Medicare Advantage plans offering it.

Some individuals covered under Medicaid may or may not have access to dental coverage. Yet COVID-19 has struck another blow to people who don't have money to pay for dental services.

While states are required to provide dental and health care coverage to income-qualifying children, coverage for adults is less clear-cut. States are not required to extend dental care coverage to income-qualified students. HealthLink enlists experienced dentists to volunteer, apply for grants, invite corporate partnerships, and open doors for sponsorships.

Doug Rouff is a retired dentist who volunteers at HealthLink to provide vital services to patients who might otherwise go without. He sees this as one way he can help the world around him. Rouff moved to Doylestown from Michigan, where he was in private practice for 35 years.

"It's about using my talents, experience and skills to help those who need them," said Rouff. "The staff at HealthLink does an unbelievable job, and [they] are super organized. Inside, it's a very modern facility with fine equipment, and the patients are treated really well. I'm proud to say I have a part to play in meeting their community service goals.

"Dentistry is not an inexpensive service and the people at HealthLink are finding ways to provide an opportunity for people to receive care. When you have a private practice career, you have to make money, pay your staff, and keep the office running smoothly. Now that I'm retired, engaging in the volunteer opportunities has been extremely satisfying. It keeps me busy and I really do feel like I am making a difference to others."

Dental services at HealthLink include routine cleanings, X-rays, fillings, root canals and crowns. Only patients with root canal procedures completed at HealthLink are eligible for crown treatment.

"I believe in their mission to supply dental care to low-income people who do not qualify for Medicare or Medicaid. It is [otherwise] a tremendous expense," said Phyllis Detwiler, another HealthLink volunteer dentist, who was introduced to the clinic through an oral surgeon friend about two years ago. "Recruiting enough service providers to meet appointment needs can be a big challenge, and it's a great opportunity for those of us who are retired and must maintain state licenses to practice, as well as for dentists who can find a little spare time to offer their expertise to those in need. Surprisingly, awareness of the free services HealthLink has available is also a challenge. It's important to get the word out."

When dental health care is neglected or must be cut altogether because of its cost, the risk for developing more serious health conditions and problems dramatically increases. Gum disease and recession, and tooth loss may be directly linked to poor oral hygiene. Poor oral hygiene is also being linked to serious conditions, such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Since the coronavirus pandemic closed most, if not all, dental practices for a period of time, HealthLink was closed from March 15 to June 12. The dental practice is now open on an "appointment only" basis. The staff is committed to be fully operational as soon as possible.

"I will be happy when the facility can increase its current operation," said Detwiler. "The HealthLink staff is working diligently to assure they satisfy all requirements and offer a safe experience for clients."

"You have your preconceived notions of how things are going to be," said Rouff, adding that he's learning a lot since beginning to volunteer at HealthLink. "There are a lot of people who are working and don't make a lot of money, or don't have dental coverage. It's been very eye-opening to me."

To learn more about HealthLink, located at 1775 Street Road, Southampton, visit [healthlinkdental.org](http://healthlinkdental.org) or call 215-364-4247.

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