

A new health care oasis in Minneapolis



Family Tree Clinic is relocating to an underserved area, breaking down barriers to care.

By Editorial Board Star Tribune

A venerable community clinic is opening a new health care oasis in a Minneapolis neighborhood designated as a federal "[medically underserved area](#)." That's a milestone worth celebrating, especially given that construction on the spacious new building and the fundraising for it has continued apace during a pandemic.

[Family Tree Clinic](#) has long been a medical mainstay in St. Paul, serving those who may have difficulty paying for medical care or face other barriers accessing it. It is relocating this month to a new home in Minneapolis. Its modern two-story facility at [1919 Nicollet Ave.](#) will open on Nov. 22.

At around 17,000 square feet, Family Tree's new location is more than double the size of its St. Paul facility. That will enable the nonprofit to add an additional 10,000 patients and clients to

the 22,000 already served through its sliding-fee clinic and nationally known community health education programs.

Finishing touches were still being added during an editorial writer's recent tour. But the new building's welcoming atmosphere is already evident.

Art will greet patients entering on the main floor. A towering stairwell is painted an almost luminescent daffodil hue, an effect enhanced when the sunlight streams in through an overhead skylight. This architectural feature both brightens and beckons, naturally ushering patients to the second floor, where most medical services will be. Windows abound on both floors, allowing patients to see the [Stevens Square](#) neighborhood, one with many convenient transit options. The atmosphere is warm and inviting. That is especially important given the vulnerable patients who Family Tree serves.

The clinic specializes in sexual and reproductive health, though it also has provided limited primary care. Around 60% of its patients identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. About 50% are Black, Indigenous and people of color. About a quarter of patients are uninsured. Another 30% rely on medical assistance programs. About 70% meet low-income guidelines.

[Critical care](#) provided by Family Tree includes prescriptions for [PrEP](#) (preventive medications to reduce HIV risk); testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases; birth control, and pregnancy testing and cervical cancer screening. It has also become a regional draw for transgender adult and pediatric patients seeking [hormone treatment and supportive care](#). Executive Director Alissa Light proudly acknowledges Family Tree's "boldness of mission." While that mission can make finding corporate support challenging, individual donors have long recognized the vital niche Family Tree fills. Their support has powered the new facility's fundraising effort. Currently, the clinic has raised \$6.5 million of the project's \$8 million cost.

When the work began to build the new location, a key priority was ensuring that it physically communicated an important message: "You matter. You belong here. You are seen. And cared for," Light said.

The building's thoughtful design easily accomplishes that. Congratulations to Family Tree as it embarks on a new era. The beautiful and much-needed clinic is a welcome addition to Minnesota's world-class medical community and will strengthen care provided in the Twin Cities.