

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Health Center To Launch Study To Assess Underserved Populations In St. Thomas

Health / **Published On March 28, 2015 01:53 PM /**

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The St. Thomas East End Medical Center Corporation (STEEMCC), the only federally qualified health center in the St. Thomas-St. John district, on Wed., April 8 will begin a comprehensive community healthcare needs assessment designed to serve the medically underserved and uninsured school-aged populations, including children who have limited or no access to primary preventative health care.

According to information received from STEEMCC, the study is being conducted in conjunction with the University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center and the Eastern Caribbean Center. It is the first in more than 30 years seeking to ensure health care is accessible to vulnerable populations.

Communities in the east end area of St. Thomas, including persons living in public housing and attending public schools, will be the focus of the study. Researchers will canvass designated communities over the next few months and collect data expected to reflect elements that contribute to health care disparities in those communities.

The assessed measurements will support the health center's pilot outreach program that has been designed to remove barriers that prohibit at-risk communities from receiving health care, officials say. It is a part of the center's five-year strategic plan.

"This project is greatly needed, long overdue and will greatly help policy makers and providers of comprehensive preventative primary health care best serve our community," said Executive Director, Moleto A. Smith, Jr.

The health center had prepared for the study for about two years. In 2014, it was awarded a \$200,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Interior to complete the research. The University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center Health and its Eastern Caribbean Center was selected to conduct the study.

The project will officially launch with a press conference on Tues., April 7 at 10 a.m. at the health center's executive offices in the Tutu Park Mall. Government officials and community stakeholders have been invited to attend.