



# ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY, PROVIDING HOPES

MACKENZIE PEEKE, MARGARET WEST, ALYSSA WILKINSON, MATTHEW SERRATA, MICHAEL BAROODY, CONNOR TEMBE, CHRISNEY YERENA

## INTRODUCTION

**F**ounded in the 1970s as a grassroots effort to provide care to the underserved population of Hampton Roads, Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS) has long been committed to community-centered care. The HOPES Free Clinic is a manifestation of that mission. Launched in 2011 as a student-run phone triage service, the Health Outreach Partnership of EVMS Students (HOPES) later transitioned to provide direct clinical services—becoming the first student-run free clinic in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 2014, HOPES integrated into [Community Engaged Learning](#) to enhance and solidify its efforts. Since its inception, medical and health professions students have partnered with volunteer physicians from Norfolk and the greater Hampton Roads area to deliver high-quality care at no cost to those in need.

Now part of the newly established Macon and Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences EVMS at Old Dominion University (Brock VHS EVMS at ODU), HOPES continues to uphold the founding ideals of equity, education, and service. The clinic provides sustainable, student-led healthcare while creating meaningful, hands-on learning experiences for future health professionals. At its core, HOPES fosters a welcoming environment where students grow into compassionate providers, and community members feel empowered to take charge of their health.

## WHO WE SERVE

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, WHERE HOPES CLINIC OPERATES, FACES SEVERAL PRESSING HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES THAT HIGHLIGHT THE NEED FOR FREE AND ACCESSIBLE MEDICAL SERVICES:

### High Uninsured Rates

As of 2022, 9.5% of Norfolk adults aged 18–64 were uninsured, surpassing the state average of 8.7%.<sup>1</sup> Uninsured Virginians are more likely to experience unmet medical needs due to limited access to preventive care, often resulting in worse health outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

### Economic Barriers

With 17.3% of Norfolk's population living below the poverty line, many residents are forced to choose between basic necessities and medical care. This financial strain disproportionately affects Black, Hispanic, and low-income communities.<sup>3</sup>

### Health Disparities

Norfolk's underserved communities face significant disparities in chronic disease burden and healthcare access. For example, Black residents experience higher mortality rates from breast, colorectal, lung, oral, and prostate cancers. Food insecurity further exacerbates these health challenges, particularly among Black, Hispanic, and pediatric populations.<sup>4</sup>

### Chronic Disease Burden

Norfolk's mortality rates for chronic conditions—such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and respiratory illnesses—exceed state and national averages.<sup>4</sup> Many of these conditions are preventable or manageable with routine screenings and early interventions—all of which HOPES provides at no cost to its patients.

### Who Qualifies for Care?

HOPES serves uninsured and underinsured adults in Norfolk and surrounding cities, including Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Suffolk, Portsmouth, Hampton, and Newport News. To qualify, patients must:

- Be between 18–64 years old
- Have a household income of less than 200% of the federal poverty level
- Be uninsured or underinsured (i.e. facing such financial barriers to care as high deductibles or inadequate chronic care coverage)
- Not be eligible for Medicaid, Medicare, or pregnancy-related insurance programs

## WHAT WE PROVIDE

# MEDICAL SERVICES

FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF SERVICES, [CLICK HERE](#)

- General vitals check
- Routine lab testing
- Continuity of care
- Primary Care clinic
- Chronic Disease Management clinic
- Street Health clinic
- Gynecology clinic
- Otolaryngology clinic
- Ophthalmology clinic
- Sports Medicine clinic
- Orthopedic clinic
- Mental Health clinic
- Dermatology clinic
- Trauma-informed Care clinic

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# A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

**T**he HOPES Free Clinic embraces a collaborative, multidisciplinary model that integrates medical education with community service. Medical (MD), Medical Master's, and Physician Assistant (MPA) students are trained to apply their medical education in a real-world clinical setting. Under the supervision of dedicated physician volunteers, students gain hands-on experience in taking patient histories, developing differential diagnoses, ordering labs, and crafting treatment plans, all while receiving real-time, formative feedback. This learning environment is further enriched by the involvement of residents from the Brock VHS EVMS at ODU Internal Medicine and Family Medicine residency programs, who serve as additional student mentors.

Though incredibly valuable, HOPES cannot be sustained by students and physicians alone—its success relies deeply upon the support of both internal and external community partners. Internally, HOPES collaborates with the EVMS Student Government Association, Street Health, and Medical Spanish Community-Engaged Learning initiatives, as well as Brock VHS at ODU Departments of Risk Management, Occupational Health, Environmental Health & Safety, and Human Resources. These connections ensure that clinic operations are safe, well-coordinated, and compliant with institutional guidelines. Externally, HOPES works with trusted local healthcare providers to expand the range of services available to patients. Partners such as Sentara Ambulatory Care Clinic (ACC), Sentara Norfolk General Hospital, and Chesapeake Regional Healthcare Imaging Center accept referrals for patients requiring specialized care beyond what the clinic can currently provide. Additionally, HOPES partners with ODU Dental Hygiene Care Clinic to host Clínica Infantil de Higiene Dental to meet pediatric dental needs in the community.

The clinic is also grateful to the Norfolk Department of Public Health, Virginia Department of Health, and Virginia Department of Forensic Science, which supply the physical space and materials needed to operate weekly clinics. As a proud member of both the National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics and the Virginia Association of Free Clinics, HOPES continues to grow through partnership, innovation, and shared commitment.

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## INNOVATION & GROWTH:

**A**t HOPES Free Clinic, innovation and continuous improvement are central to our mission. Our team remains dedicated to expanding our clinic's reach by increasing patient advisement efforts and volunteer recruitment. The HOPES team is in the process of releasing bus and billboard advertisements to be displayed across Hampton Roads. On campus, we are promoting student involvement by having new students shadow current HOPES leadership. In this way, we continue to be committed to the vision of our school, to "be recognized as the most community-oriented school of medicine and health professions in the United States."

HOPES student volunteers and leaders also strive to enhance clinic capabilities and services. One of the most recent innovations is the Food Insecurity Team, created to address a key social determinant of health and to provide more holistic care by screening patients for challenges in accessing basic food needs. Another way HOPES strives for excellence is through the Research and Innovations team; these students analyze real-time patient and clinic data to enhance workflow efficiency, streamline patient care, and support data-driven decision-making.

Furthermore, Brock VHS EVMS at ODU encourages inter-departmental institutional collaboration, and the HOPES team is pushing to make that a reality. A recent collaboration with the ODU Monarch Engineering and Innovation Lab (M-Lab) enabled the clinic to refurbish and maintain some of our essential medical equipment. This is a practical example of how cross-departmental support drives real impact. HOPES would not be where it is today without the generous contributions of countless individuals and organizations who nurtured and supported its growth.

## OUR IMPACT

**O**ver the last 14 years, HOPES has provided compassionate care to thousands of patients with diverse backgrounds from across Hampton Roads. In the 2023-2024 academic year alone, the clinic supported over 700 appointments, with many patients returning regularly for primary care visits. In total, 432 students volunteered over 9,153 hours throughout weekly clinics. Services are offered in both English and Spanish, with several patients identifying Spanish as their primary language. Our bilingual volunteers play a vital role in ensuring clear, respectful communication, reflecting a commitment to cultural and linguistic accessibility.

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The HOPES free clinic provides immense value to Norfolk and the surrounding community by serving as a critical safety net clinic. Not only does HOPES deliver essential healthcare services, but the clinic also significantly reduces taxpayer costs. By offering a free alternative to costly emergency room visits and laboratory services, the clinic saves the community nearly \$40,000 annually. In 2024, VAFCC (Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics) valued the 235 primary care visits at HOPES at \$196/visit, giving HOPES a total value of \$46,060 in primary care alone. Specialty visits were valued at \$278/visit, giving HOPES a total value of \$53,654 for the 193 specialty visits that were held across the various specialty clinics in the same year. With only 6 four-hour long clinics a month, the total clinic yearly value adds up to about \$96,968 to \$184,292, highlighting the invaluable primary and specialty services HOPES offers free of cost.

HOPES directly addresses healthcare disparities in Hampton Roads, building trust within the community and [creating lasting impacts for patients](#). "Last year I had developed a real bad pain in my shoulder to where I couldn't move my arm," one patient shared. "I've been coming here for physical therapy. It has helped me because they give me exercises to do when I'm at home and then when I'm here they'll do certain exercises to help me elevate my arm." For students, HOPES provides a unique opportunity to gain clinical experience and understand the healthcare disparities that underserved populations face. One student volunteer, Kelly Hogan (MD'25), reflected, "[HOPES] helps us get really early exposure to working in a clinic, working as a team but also serving the community, especially people that need it so much. It's a great opportunity to just give back to the community that we will one day serve as doctors for."

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#### STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## THARIDU GUNAWARDENA

For Tharidu Gunawardena (MM '21, MD '25), volunteering at HOPES has been more than a service opportunity—it's been a defining part of his medical education.

Tharidu began volunteering at HOPES as a Medical Master's student and has remained involved throughout his four years of medical school. "When I started, HOPES was already a strong clinic. Over time, we've added more roles, expanded the Clinic Coordinator position, and created even more [student leadership opportunities]," he says. "Now, almost every [Brock VHS EVMS at ODU] student knows what HOPES is or has volunteered here. It's really become a staple of our campus culture."

He values the clinic's unique structure, where students take on meaningful responsibilities early. "It's completely student-run, and that autonomy helps us grow as future physicians," he explains. "You're not just volunteering; you're developing as a physician in your own right."

As a longtime Virginia Beach resident, Tharidu finds special meaning in giving back to his home community. "Every time we're at clinic, we're helping people with language barriers, people without access to care—people who really need it most," he says. "And we're doing it with our classmates. It doesn't feel like we're working under anyone; it feels like we're building something together. If you're at [Brock VHS EVMS at ODU]," he adds, "join HOPES. Volunteer. Get involved."



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CALL TO ACTION: JOIN US!

THE HOPES FREE CLINIC CANNOT FUNCTION WITHOUT COMMUNITY SUPPORT. WE ARE ALWAYS ACCEPTING NEW PHYSICIAN VOLUNTEERS. EACH ADDITIONAL CLINICIAN ENABLES US TO SEE MORE PATIENTS AND MAKE A GREATER IMPACT ON HAMPTON ROADS.

## MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

- We are currently accepting board-certified physicians for all specialties as well as physical therapist volunteers
  - To volunteer, please fill out our [provider application](#) and somebody will be in touch within 2-3 business days of submission
- As a professional volunteer, your focus is solely on direct patient care—students handle rooming, vitals, labs, and documentation
- See 2–4 patients per evening and take the time needed for thorough, unrushed care
- Play a vital role in mentoring future healthcare providers, as students will present patients and learn from your clinical reasoning
- Create meaningful connections with underserved patients and passionate students in a low-pressure, educational environment

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Support is not limited to volunteer work. HOPES is a free clinic that relies solely on grants and monetary donations to maintain functioning. These help us maintain and improve the quality of care that we provide to our patients. We welcome and appreciate contributions to HOPES free clinic.

## PATIENTS

The clinic cannot run without its most important people: the patients. If you or someone you know is uninsured or underinsured, HOPES is currently accepting new patients— including limited walk-ins. Help us spread the word so that more people in Hampton Roads can access the healthcare they deserve.

TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT CALL AND LEAVE A VOICEMAIL AT:

757-446-0366

OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

[https://www.evms.edu/education/resources/community-engaged\\_learning/hopes/](https://www.evms.edu/education/resources/community-engaged_learning/hopes/)

## CONNECT WITH US:

If physician, HOPES provider application: [application form](#)

If donor, please contact: [vhscommunityengagedlearning@odu.edu](mailto:vhscommunityengagedlearning@odu.edu)

If potential EVMS student, learn more about our CEL program: [https://www.evms.edu/education/resources/community-engaged\\_learning/](https://www.evms.edu/education/resources/community-engaged_learning/)

**For any additional questions, please contact: [vhscommunityengagedlearning@odu.edu](mailto:vhscommunityengagedlearning@odu.edu)**



## HOPES Clinic Coordinators 2024-2025

**Top Left to Right:** Connor  
Tembe, Matthew Serrata

**Bottom Left to Right:**  
Michael Baroody, Mackenzie  
Peeke, Alyssa Wilkinson,  
Margaret West

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