



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Making Health Care Accessible for the Most Vulnerable

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Dr. Angie Settle, DNP, APRN, BC, FNP, is the CEO and Executive Director of West Virginia Health Right, Inc. (Health Right), West Virginia's oldest and largest free and charitable clinic. Prior to this role, she served the clinic as its clinical coordinator and as a family nurse practitioner. A lifelong resident of the Mountain State, she has devoted her entire professional health care career to caring for the underserved of West Virginia.

Dr. Settle received her master's degree in nursing from Marshall University in 1997 and her doctorate in nursing from the University of Alabama in 2014.

Under her leadership as clinical coordinator, Health Right converted from a strictly free clinic to a free and charitable clinic, accepting Medicaid when West Virginia expanded its coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2014. Since then, Health Right has successfully morphed into an entity that bills for low income Medicaid & Medicare patients while continuing to see the uninsured free of charge.

West Virginia Health Right (Health Right), the state's oldest and largest free and charitable clinic, provides comprehensive medical, dental, pharmaceutical, behavioral health, vision and health education services at no charge to more than 20,000 uninsured/underinsured adults. Health Right was founded on the principle that everyone is entitled to quality health care, regardless of financial or insurance status.

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Entering its 36th year of continuous operation, Health Right relies on its army of 400-plus volunteer medical and dental professionals who enable the clinic's small paid staff to care for the ever-growing numbers of impoverished patients seeking treatment. Because of the tremendous in-kind community support from volunteers, medical supply companies, Charleston Area Medical Center and others, Health Right is able to provide \$25 of medical services for every one dollar received. In fiscal year 2017, the clinic delivered nearly \$16 million of care on a budget of \$2.5 million.

Clinic patients are low-income residents who may have government insurance (e.g., Medicaid or Medicare) but are unable to access care through private practices; people who have low-wage jobs that offer no health benefits; the unemployed; laid-off workers who have lost benefits; the homeless; seniors and the working poor who cannot afford private insurance due to high premiums, deductibles and co-pays.



Throughout the clinic's history, its Board of Directors and staff have sought to identify and fill health care gaps for its vulnerable "working poor" patient population. In addition to primary care provided by staff family nurse practitioners, virtually every medical specialty is provided by volunteer physicians. In 2001, at the request of the community, Health Right began operating the state's only full-time adult dental clinic. More than 100 dental professionals volunteer their time and talents to provide much needed dental services.

In 2008, at the request of then Governor Joe Manchin, Health Right developed and implemented WVRx, the state's only charitable mail-order pharmacy, to improve medication access to low-income adults. In response to West Virginia's decision to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, in 2014 Health Right became the first free clinic in the state to obtain Medicaid/Medicare billing privileges in order to ensure that its established patients who became eligible for governmental insurance would continue to have a medical home.

In 2015, Health Right implemented a robust behavioral health component to address the substance abuse epidemic facing our communities. Upon discovering that veterans are ineligible to receive restorative dental appliances through the Veterans Administration unless they have a 100 percent service-related disability, Health Right began providing



*The WV Health Right Mobile Dental Clinic travels to McDowell, Boone, Logan, Clay, Harrison and Roane counties twice a month to serve low-income adult patients*

restorative dental care to low-income veterans in 2016.

In July 2017, Health Right launched its most recent healthcare gap innovation: a state-of-the-art mobile dental clinic that travels to Boone, Clay, Harrison, McDowell, Logan and Roane counties twice a month to provide fillings, extractions and cleanings to qualifying adults. This effort truly embodies the power of cross-sector community collaboration on a project that would have been too large for any one agency to achieve, but it became a reality through support from local and regional foundations, Marshall University Department of Dentistry, governmental agencies and individual donors. The three-chair unit is staffed with volunteer dentists, dental residents and faculty from Marshall University, and Health Right clinic hygienists and assistants. Through collaboration with area hospitals, local dentists and social service agencies, Health Right identifies eligible patients, including seniors and low-income veterans, in each service county to provide much needed dental care and treatment.

Although the national health care landscape is uncertain, West Virginia Health Right remains steadfast in its mission to improve our communities by improving the health status of our residents. The clinic staff and Board of Directors will continue to advocate for quality health care for West Virginians in need! ▽