

Highland Hospital breaks ground on Acute Tower Replacement Project

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OAKLAND -- If you are gravely ill, stabbed or are in a major car accident in Oakland, the nurses and doctors in Highland Hospital's emergency room and trauma center will work to save your life.

The emergency room at Highland is the busiest in Alameda County, with more than 85,000 visits annually with about 80 percent checking into the hospital. What's more, in 2009, the last year for which data was available, more than 2,500 trauma patients were treated at the hospital's trauma center.

Those buildings were opened in 2005 and are seismically sound. But many Highland buildings are more than 80 years old, outdated and seismically unsound. They can't be upgraded, but must be rebuilt because studies by Alameda County show that running the hospital during a major retrofit would be operationally impossible and too expensive, county officials said.

Highland held a groundbreaking ceremony Friday to mark the start of construction on the \$668 million seismically sound Highland Hospital Acute Tower Replacement Project, a rebuilding of the historic hospital's main facilities and the largest construction project ever undertaken by Alameda County.

The project calls for construction of two new buildings, a new front entrance to the hospital and a new courtyard complex, as well as the demolition of six existing buildings on the 14.4-acre Highland campus in Oakland.

"This project is a symbol of hope, wellness and recovery in this community,"

said Alameda County Administrator Susan Muranishi. "It also represents an unprecedented commitment by Alameda County to the health of its residents."

Over the next six years, the campus will see a new building for urgent care, cardiac care, respiratory therapy and infusion, hematology, oncology and other services and a new nine-story, 169-bed acute care tower for inpatient, maternal and support services.

Medical Center CEO Wright Lassiter said the new buildings will expand health care coverage and access in order to reduce health disparities in Alameda County. And Supervisor Keith Carson, whose district includes Highland, said the upgrades ensure that everyone, regardless of their ability to pay, will have "first-rate" health care.

Alameda County will pay for the project with a combination of funds, starting with roughly \$50 million in Tobacco Tax Revenue proceeds, and bond financing. The first bonds were issued in 2010, with other bonds expected in years to come. The project will be built in three overlapping phases and is expected to be completed by 2017.

The project was unanimously approved by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors nearly three years ago and has been designed to meet federal standards for design on historic sites. The county has also completed a historic resources preservation study of the existing buildings; the remaining buildings could get National Register of Historic Places status.

Highland is part of the Alameda County Medical Center, which also includes the 80-bed John George

Psychiatric Pavilion, 159-bed Fairmont Hospital, a skilled-nursing and acute-rehab facility, and a network of community clinics.

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A portion of the construction site of the Highland Hospital Acute Tower... (DEEBAYAVROMSTAFF PHOTO)