

## MONEY, POWER, INEQUALITY

# Three years ago, Boston announced plans for a community health center in Hyde Park. It hasn't happened.

By [Tiana Woodard](#) Globe Staff, Updated December 3, 2024, 1 hour ago



Marcia Kimm-Jackson, photographed in Hyde Park, is a decadeslong resident leading an effort to open a community health center in the neighborhood, which she said is often overlooked. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Irene Nakabonge-Lugude was late again to her recent weekday check-in at Brigham and Women's Hospital. At this point, she felt like she was gaining a reputation as consistently being "late and with my blood pressure through the roof."

Her tardiness is in part because of where she lives. To get from her Hyde Park home to the Longwood Medical Area, Nakabonge-Lugude has to take the 32 bus from Cleary Square to the Forest Hills Station and the 39 from there to the hospital. If either bus is late, so is she.

“As a patient, you want to do good by your doctor,” said Nakabonge-Lugude, who has arthritis and recently tore her meniscus and ruptured her Achilles tendons. For that appointment, she took an Uber from Forest Hills after missing the bus. She hoped it would get her there on time, but she was late again.

Nakabonge-Lugude's Hyde Park neighborhood is something like a health care desert. Many residents there once relied on Carney Hospital in Dorchester for care until it closed amid the Steward Health Care bankruptcy turmoil. And while there are a few private physicians scattered about, unlike most other Boston neighborhoods, there are no community health centers to offset the lack of major hospitals nearby. In fact, Hyde Park is one of two city neighborhoods without a community health center, which specialize in preventative, primary care for underserved locations.

The diminishing stock of health care options there has reignited a push from locals to build a community health center in the neighborhood, an idea that was floated at City Hall years ago but has seemingly stalled amid a search for a suitable location. The need to act with urgency, proponents say, is increasingly dire.

“We deserve more, and we deserve better,” said Marcia Kimm-Jackson, a neighborhood resident who's leading the Hyde Park Health and Wellness Center steering committee, which is brainstorming ways to open one in their area.

In a statement, a spokesperson for Mayor Michelle Wu said the administration “continues to be in conversation with community leaders and providers about identifying other potential solutions.”

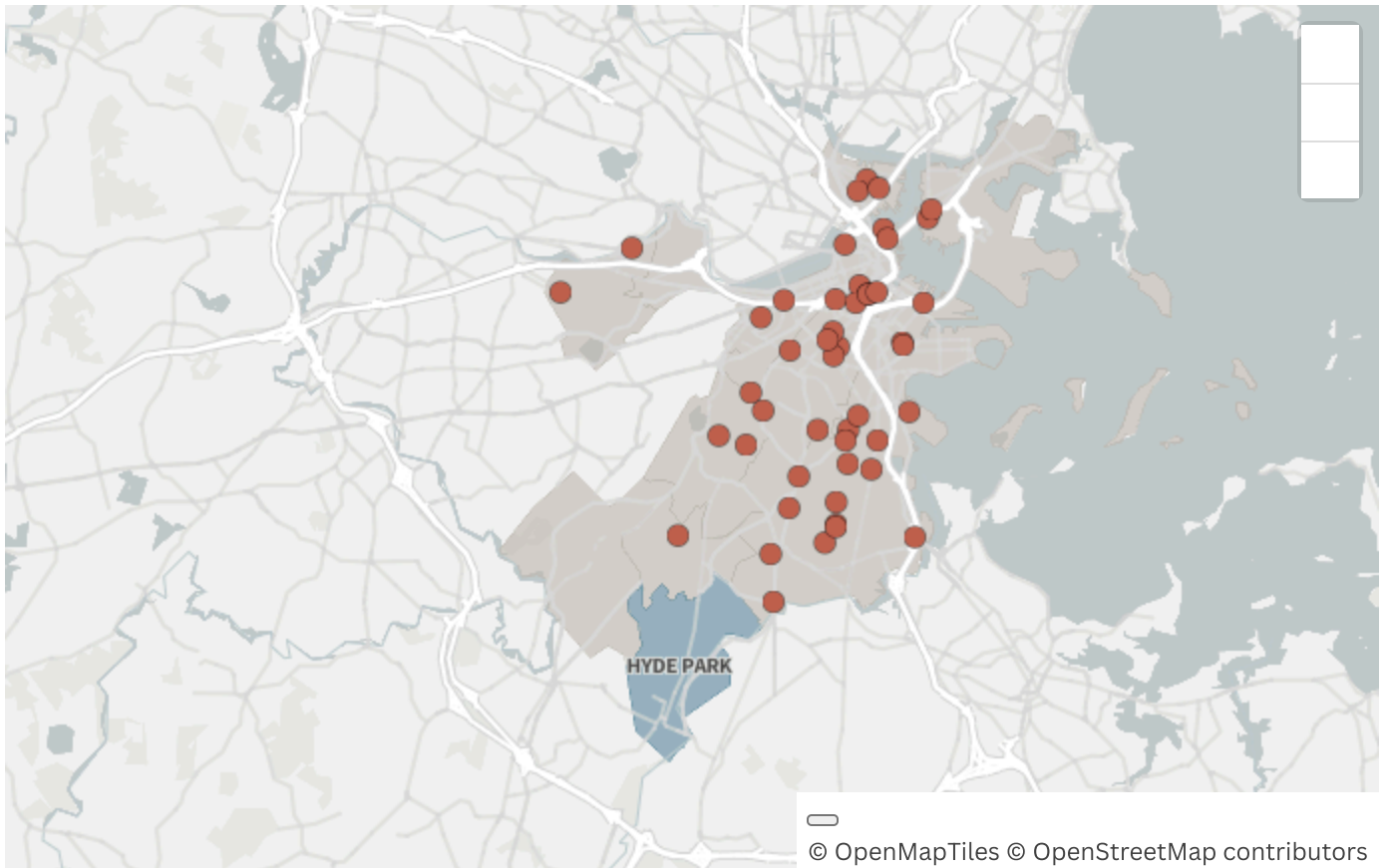
Since their inception, community health centers have largely been the result of grassroots efforts, driven by neighborhood activism and not the financial benefits of powerful medical institutions. Advocates consider them a lifeline for the uninsured who can't access private practices or for people who might not be able to afford exorbitant hospital or urgent care fees.

At least a dozen Hyde Park residents told the Globe that such a model is an ideal match for the neighborhood where [roughly half of its residents are Black](#) and [two in five speak a language other than English at home](#). Its lower rates are more accessible to MassHealth and uninsured patients, services are often provided in several languages, and care is often coupled with community programming.

Massachusetts is home to 52 of these nonprofit providers, according to the [Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers](#), which supports the organizations. Roughly 20 of those are within Boston city limits. Some access sites are sprinkled in the Back Bay, Fenway, and Roslindale, where health outcomes are somewhat higher. Most of Boston's community health centers are concentrated in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plain, all communities of color with proven health disparities.

## Community health centers in Boston

Boston is home to 20 federally qualified health centers and homeless health care centers. These 20 organizations have at least one access point within city limits, displayed below. Hyde Park, in blue, has none.



SOURCE: Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers - KIDKI AND AN/CLOPE STAFF

✳ A Flourish map

Health disparities permeate Hyde Park, too. The neighborhood has Boston's highest infant mortality rate, according to a 2023 [Boston Public Health Commission](#) analysis of city data. Its rates of [heart disease hospitalizations](#) and [diabetes](#) are higher than the city average. At the height of the [coronavirus pandemic](#), the multiethnic, immigrant neighborhood led the city in positive cases. A third of residents with Hyde Park's 02136 zip code use public insurance, according to [2022 American Community Survey data](#).

"When you look at the current demographics, it just screams for more local health care centers," said Bill Henning, a Hyde Park resident and steering committee member.

West Roxbury is the only other neighborhood without a community health center site, according to a Globe analysis of available directories. However, the nonprofit Brigham

and Women's Faulkner Hospital is near the Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury neighborhood line.

City Councilor Enrique Pepén, who represents Hyde Park, and Boston City Council President Ruthzee Louijeune, a neighborhood resident, requested a [hearing in October](#) to assess health care access in the area.

Pepén said a health center would bring not just much-needed care to Hyde Park, but also a place of belonging. At the Brookside Community Health Center in Jamaica Plain, Pepén's mom learned about the local food pantry. His mom enrolled him in a center-run group for children with asthma. There was an element of trust that private, large providers couldn't deliver and have often broken in communities of color.

"I felt like we weren't just going there for an appointment," Pepén said. "It felt more like community."

If only, he said, his constituents could get that experience without crossing neighborhood lines.

Other elected officials have also tried to use their political leverage to steer resources toward a site. State Senator Michael Rush, a Democrat representing Hyde Park, requested a [\\$125,000 earmark](#) to study the potential of a neighborhood health and wellness center, but it was rejected. He said in a statement that he filed similar legislation in previous sessions without approval.

In 2021, then-acting [Mayor Kim Janey](#) sought to open a community health center in the Boston Centers for Youth & Families Hyde Park Community Center. A \$2 million earmark was allocated toward that vision, but the location was later deemed unfit to accommodate health services. That money was never used, but a \$2 million allocation for a Hyde Park health center study has appeared in the past two fiscal budgets.

Former city councilor Ricardo Arroyo said he explored opening a Greater Roslindale Medical and Dental Center satellite office in the community space. The BCYF branch, he said, had potential with “a health center, a food pantry, a day care — that’s a one-stop shop there.”

Arroyo said much of the trouble came in finding a viable property in Boston’s hot real estate market and convincing community members to start building sooner and not waiting to decide what the health center should specialize in.

“Let’s get a shovel in somewhere, let’s get a hammer in somebody’s hand, and then while it’s being built, we can cement what exactly those specializations are,” Arroyo said. “I didn’t want what the community health center is going to do to be the barrier.”

A dozen Hyde Park residents, worried about the vision getting lost in the shuffle of administrations, formed a working group to keep the pressure on political and medical leaders. The three years of ambiguity, they said, have been agonizing.

Kimm-Jackson said Boston is a health care mecca home to several of the nation’s leading, pioneering private providers and community health centers within 48 square miles. And yet, she said, the area’s studded medical infrastructure has left her neighborhood out.





Marcia Kimm-Jackson stood at the real estate agency where she bought her first home. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

“Hyde Park just does not get a lot of love, and I don’t know why that is,” Kimm-Jackson said.

The neighborhood steering committee doesn’t know what a site in their backyard would look like yet, but members are hopeful an increased community engagement process could inform a decision.

Hyde Park resident Lara Saavedra said living there is a health care barrier because “we’re not a desert per se, but we’re an island.”

The 46-year-old’s sister just moved in with her from California in part because MassHealth provides transportation to hospitals for scheduled appointments. The one concern, however, is if there was an emergency and Saavedra could not leave work, getting her sister to Faulkner Hospital in Jamaica Plain or Beth-Israel Deaconess in Milton would prove difficult.

“She wouldn’t be able to navigate five buses,” Saavedra said. “But who can?”

*This story was produced by the Globe’s [Money, Power, Inequality](#) team, which covers the racial wealth gap in Greater Boston. You can sign up for the newsletter [here](#).*

---

Tiana Woodard can be reached at [tiana.woodard@globe.com](mailto:tiana.woodard@globe.com). Follow her [@tianarochon](#).

[Show comments](#)

---

©2024 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC