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## Dell Children's Medical Center may grow

\$48M sought for addition

Austin Business Journal - by [Sandra Zaragoza](#) ABJ Staff



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**Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas was built three years ago and already needs a major expansion to accommodate rehab patients.**

Seton Family of Hospitals is proposing a \$48.5 million tower for the three-year-old Dell Children's **Medical Center of Central Texas** so rehabilitation services can be expanded.

The hospital system, which points to a growing need for children's inpatient rehab in Central Texas, is working on a financing proposal for the tower, which it hopes to present in July to its parent business, **Ascension Health**. Funding for a new building will likely come from community donations and Ascension Health, a Catholic nonprofit health care system with 500 locations in 19 states.

"The probability that we will get it approved and get it built is very strong," said Bob Bonar, CEO and president of Dell Children's Medical Center.

If approved, Seton hopes to begin work on the rehab tower by late 2012 or early 2013, and have it ready to admit children by 2014, Bonar said. The size of the tower and the number of beds it would bring online is still unknown. An architect has not yet been hired.

Seton plans to build the tower on a site fronting Seton's administrative offices at 1345 Philomena St. To make room for the addition, Seton plans to relocate Stepping Stone, a privately operated day care that is housed in a temporary building outside Dell Children's.

Dell Children's is seeing a strong demand for children's inpatient rehabilitation services, some of which stems from its busy trauma center, Bonar said.

The hospital, which is among 17 Level I pediatric trauma centers in the U.S. and the only one in Central Texas, served 1,022 pediatric trauma patients in 2008. The average patient age was about 7 years, according to a 2008 report.

Dell Children's outpatient rehab center provides occupational, physical and speech therapy, working closely with pediatric specialists, such as orthopedic surgeons, neurologists, developmental specialists, oncologists and pediatricians.

Children with more serious injuries who need inpatient rehab are referred to other Texas children's hospitals, including **Warm Springs Rehabilitation Hospital of San Antonio** and Our Children's House at Baylor in Dallas.

Last week, a Dell Children's rehabilitation team member said she referred three young patients to hospitals in Dallas and San Antonio that focus on inpatient rehabilitation for children. "We need it" at Dell Children's, she said.

The new tower also would house other services, such as general surgery, Bonar said.

Although the rehabilitation landscape has grown in the last few years, with hospitals expanding their services and new players entering the market, not all serve children. A health care provider must have a specialized staff, standards and clinical competencies to provide children's rehabilitation services.

St. David's Rehabilitation, which offers inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation services, sees patients ages 13 and older.

**HealthSouth** Rehabilitation Hospital of Austin offers outpatient rehabilitation services at its **Starbright Pediatric Rehabilitation Institute**, a program designed to help infants through 21-year-olds with disabilities and injuries. Starbright's services are offered at HealthSouth's South Lamar Boulevard and Round Rock locations.

Duke Saldivar, CEO of HealthSouth Austin, said he's seen an increase in demand for inpatient rehabilitation services for children, in large part because of the pediatric care happening at Dell Children's.

"There has been a substantial expansion in the availability of pediatric care. A lot of patients may have gone to San Antonio, Houston or Dallas for rehabilitation ... but with Dell's Children's now being such a prominent medical facility, I think it's very important that [Austinites] provide the continuum of care."

HealthSouth has no plans to offer inpatient rehab services, but hopes to collaborate with Dell Children's and add complementary outpatient services in the future.

At Dell Children's, inpatient rehabilitation services is the last missing piece to complete the continuum of care for children with serious injuries.

Having those services close to home would make it more convenient for patients and less costly for their families, Bonar said.

This is not the first time the relatively new hospital has experienced growing pains. In its first year, demand for its emergency room department outstripped capacity, so the hospital expanded its ER from 34 to 44 beds.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**