

# Civil Legal Aid in

# Health Care

Massachusetts  
Legal  
Assistance  
Corporation

Line item 0321-1600

The pressures of COVID-19 on low-income people have had an adverse impact on mental health. In FY21, legal aid organizations expect to address a 45% increase in mental health cases and a 58% increase in disability rights cases compared to the previous year.

## Legal aid lawyers help low-income people have access to health care by:

- Identifying and correcting errors that jeopardize access to treatment
- Addressing the improper denial, termination, or reduction of public health benefits
- Appealing denial of coverage for life-sustaining medications or procedures
- Advocating for the rights of children, immigrants, asylum seekers, older adults, people with mental illness, and others so that they can make the best medical decisions for themselves and their families
- Participating in medical-legal partnerships that help address social determinants of health - see reverse.

Low-income people at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$33,125 per year for a family of four) qualify for civil legal aid.



Jenna received an unexpected medical bill when she was pregnant with her third child. A legal aid lawyer at the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center helped eliminate the unjust medical debt.

## 546 Health Cases closed in FY20, including:

MassHealth	222
Medicare	164
Private Health Insurance, and other cases	77
Long-term Health Care, Home and Community-Based Care	64
State and Local Health	19

Last year  
legal aid provided  
**\$115 million**  
in economic benefits to  
the Commonwealth and  
its residents, including  
**\$8.4 million**  
in health benefits

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**In medical-legal partnerships, legal aid lawyers can “identify problems that patients present to their doctors... that can’t be solved with a prescription pad.”**

**- Faye Rachlin, Community Legal Aid**

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## **Medical-Legal Partnerships**

Medical-legal partnerships place civil legal aid attorneys at hospitals, clinics, and community health centers to work alongside medical professionals and help address the root causes of an illness that a doctor alone might not be able to fix. For example, while a doctor can treat the symptoms of a child’s breathing problems caused by mold in their apartment, a legal aid lawyer can help ensure the landlord complies with public health and safety laws and regulations so that the child has a healthy place to live. Working in medical institutions also makes medical-legal partnership attorneys easily accessible to patients who seek help with other civil legal issues.

Medical-legal partnerships are an important part of the Commonwealth’s response to the opioid epidemic, which creates many medical and legal challenges. Civil legal aid attorneys in a medical setting can work to address barriers to health care, housing, and employment, which can help individuals with substance-use disorders find stability to sustain recovery.

During the COVID-19 crisis, access to patients in medical-legal partnership clinics has been challenging because of remote visits. Advocates use innovative strategies to connect with clients and address legal issues that cause health problems during the pandemic.