

Civil Legal Aid in Health Care



Line Item 0321-1600

People with low incomes face greater obstacles to accessing and retaining essential health care, including mental health treatment and lifesaving medications.

Legal aid helps people with low incomes access 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, families, older adults, veterans, people with behavioral health needs, immigrants and asylum seekers so they can access essential health care and make the best medical decisions for themselves and their families
- Participating in medical-legal partnerships that help address the social determinants of health (see page 2)

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$37,500 per year for a family of four; \$18,225 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.

\$126 million

in estimated economic benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including **\$4,050,796** in health benefits and savings.

441

health care cases were closed in FY22, including cases involving:

162

Medicaid

148

Medicare

33

Long-term Health Care Facilities

15

State and Local Health

83

Other (including Private Health Insurance)



When **Jenn*** needed cataract surgery, no one at the doctor's office let her know that the recommended lens upgrade might not be covered by her insurance plan. She didn't find out it wasn't covered until the surgery was over - including the upgrade. When she received the \$2,000 bill for the lenses, Jenn panicked.

A **Community Legal Aid** attorney helped her fight the bill. First, the attorney contacted the medical practice and confirmed that no documents had been provided to Jenn in either of her native languages (Vietnamese and Khmer). Additionally, no interpretation services were used, so Jenn could not understand the repercussions of the upgrade. Thanks to the attorney's intervention, the insurance provider revoked the bill.

*Name changed for privacy

MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS

Medical-legal partnerships (MLPs) place civil legal aid attorneys at hospitals, clinics, and community health centers to work alongside medical professionals and help address the root causes of poverty-related health problems that a doctor alone might not be able to fix.

Socio-economic factors, often referred to as the social determinants of health (SDOH), have a tremendous impact on a person's overall well-being. An American Journal of Preventive Medicine study from 2016 claims up to 80% of a person's health outcomes are affected by things like economic stability, domestic safety, and personal networks. Together, medical providers and legal aid advocates can help people improve their health outcomes by addressing the root causes of their problems. Working in medical settings also makes MLP attorneys easily accessible to patients who need help with other civil legal issues.

For example, if a child's breathing problems can be traced to hazardous levels of mold in their apartment, a legal aid lawyer can help ensure the landlord complies with public health and safety laws so the child has a healthy place to live.

MLPs are also an important part of the Commonwealth's response to the opioid epidemic. Attorneys working on-site in a medical setting can address barriers to accessing health care, housing, and employment, which can all help individuals with substance-use disorders find the stability to sustain recovery.



According to research by the National Center for Medical Legal Partnership, when legal expertise and services are used to address social needs:

- People with chronic illnesses are healthier and admitted to the hospital less frequently, saving health care costs
- People report less stress and experience improvements in mental health
- People are more stably housed and their utilities are less likely to be shut off
- People have access to greater financial resources

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

18 Tremont St., Suite 1010
Boston, Massachusetts 02108
617-367-8544

Lynne Parker Executive Director, MLAC

lparker@mlac.org
617-391-5640

Mary Ann Walsh | Mary Ann Mulligan Governmental Strategies

mawalsh@governmentalstrategies.com
617-447-3711
mamulligan@governmentalstrategies.com
617-447-5043