

Medical-Legal Partnership: Rutgers Law School and Camden Coalition

Integrating legal aid to improve complex care in Camden

Background

In November 2017, the Camden Coalition and Rutgers Law School launched an MLP to better address the health-related social needs of community members involved in the Coalition's complex care interventions. A consulting attorney joined the Coalition's complex care team alongside nurses, social workers, and community health workers.

In many cases, legal issues — like a threatened eviction, a benefits denial, or a utility shut-off — become barriers to better health. The medical-legal partnership (MLP) model integrates attorneys into healthcare settings to resolve needs that can undermine a patient's health and wellbeing and can be better met through the legal system. Medical-legal partnerships follow the principle that leveraging legal services and expertise can advance individual and population health as it addresses structural problems at the root of so many health inequities.

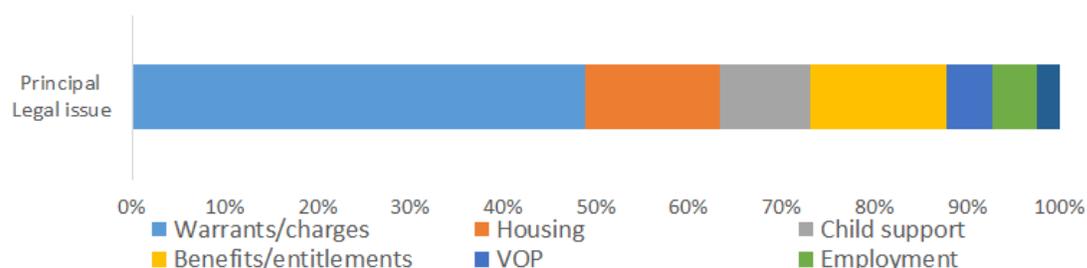
A unique setting

Typically, MLPs focus their services on a specific health condition (like HIV/AIDS) or legal issues (like accessing benefits). The Camden Coalition/Rutgers MLP, however, serves individuals with a variety of medical and legal issues across the Coalition's interventions, including:

- **Camden Core Model**, the nationally-recognized intervention serving individuals with frequent hospitalizations, multiple chronic conditions, and social vulnerabilities
- **Camden RESET**, serving individuals with frequent hospitalizations and jail utilizations
- **Camden Delivers**, serving pregnant women experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder in partnership with the Addiction Medicine Clinic at Cooper Hospital
- **Housing First**, serving individuals in permanent, supportive housing who previously experienced high hospital utilization and chronic homelessness

Impact

A relatively small investment of resources has generated big impact for staff and patients. As of November 2018, the MLP has worked on legal matters for 41 patients and achieved positive outcomes in many of these cases. Notably, the MLP has assisted 4 patients in retaining or securing stable housing. The MLP has also obtained more than \$9,000 in reduction of fines and fees and more than \$10,000 in disability benefits for vulnerable patients.

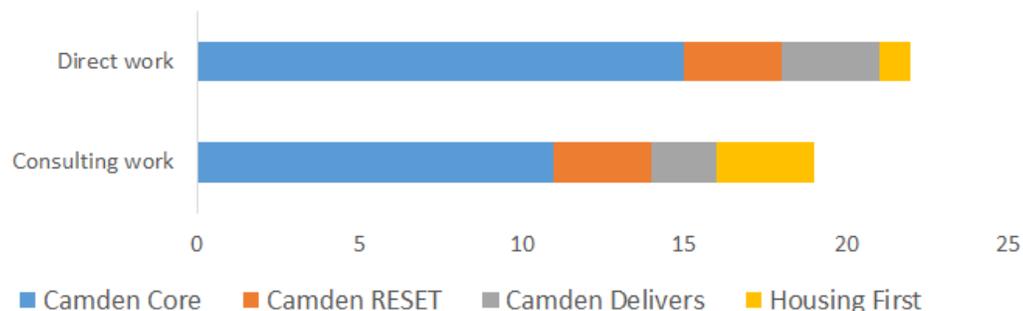


Real results for patients

- A patient with renal failure received short-term disability payments after an initial denial.
- A patient in a mental health crisis retained a subsidized apartment and avoided homelessness.
- A patient recovering from addiction received a favorable sentence and was able to continue recovery.
- A patient with outstanding child support arrears was able to focus on treatment for depression and addiction without fear of arrest after the court suspended enforcement.
- A homeless patient with a housing voucher was able to move into his new apartment after resolution of identity theft issues with the utility company.

Integrating Legal Services into the Patient Care Team

As the Camden Coalition care team holds the primary relationship with the patient, the consulting attorney is able to join the care team for scheduled visits in the community, eliminating logistical challenges and enabling immediate focus on legal issues. Coalition staff is able to follow up with patients on legal issues or gather additional information and documentation needed in order to maximize the attorney's time. The MLP attorney also consults directly with Coalition staff to build legal knowledge across the team to better serve all patients.



The vision

Our ultimate goal is to have an official clinic housed in Rutgers Law School (R-Law) with close relationships with our community partners, including the Addiction Medicine Clinic at Cooper Hospital. The vision is to involve students from across the Rutgers Camden campus (R-Law, Rutgers Nursing, and Rutgers School of Social Work) with the MLP. Through the MLP, patients will receive short-term and intensive case management services and have access to supervised student-lawyers who can assess legal needs; determine what legal services are required and whether they are within the purview of the clinic; and agree to representation or refer clients to provide other services if necessary.

The MLP is supported by the Holman Auto Group and the Rowan/Rutgers Board of Governors.