

Medical-Legal Partnerships and Community Engagement



Leveraging local resources to provide engaged legal assistance to Veterans at VHA facilities.

Did You Know? Legal problems comprise five of the top 10 unmet needs of homeless Veterans¹. Although VA has no statutory authority to provide legal assistance to Veterans, under VHA Directive 2011-034, VA medical facilities can partner with attorneys in the community to counsel Veterans on a variety of legal issues such as child support, eviction/foreclosure, and outstanding warrants and fines.

What is a Medical-Legal Partnership? Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs) encourage care delivery collaboration between medical and legal practitioners. MLP Attorneys train VA health care teams to screen for legal needs in Veterans. The health care teams then refer Veterans to on-site legal clinics, whose pro bono attorneys provide advice, intervention, and representation. The health and legal teams collaborate to resolve the issue and provide any necessary follow-up services.

The result? Improved medical and legal outcomes for Veterans². Patients who receive services at MLPs are more likely to take prescribed medications, less likely to be admitted to the hospital, and report less stress. By addressing the social determinants of health, MLPs reduce overall health care spending.

Does VA have MLPs? Yes. VA presently has 10 Medical-Legal Partnerships across the country, with more planned to launch in the Fall of 2016. While the model is well-supported at VA, it relies heavily on participation from legal service providers in the local community. Among the network of 125 legal clinics that occupy space and serve Veterans in VA facilities nationwide, legal partners include: non-profit legal aid organizations, pro-bono attorneys, law schools, and philanthropic foundations.

MLPs increase access to much-needed legal services by operating at VA health facilities. In addition to their role in preventing homelessness, MLPs are also of particular value to Veterans with serious mental illness and substance use disorders. These Veterans, whose legal needs often negatively affect their health outcomes, are especially poised to benefit from access to legal advocacy.

“Their support, encouragement and technical assistance made the difference. I now have peace of mind. Within a year all my criminal offenses will be banished from my record. It’s incredible. I never thought it would happen and didn’t think it was even possible. All veterans need these legal services.”

-Mike D., Connecticut

How can MyVA Communities benefit from MLPs?

- Connect VA clinicians with legal partners in the community to establish MLPs at VA medical centers that address health-harming legal needs and improve Veteran wellness.
- Presentations at CVEB meetings about MLPs would help educate community legal partners about the opportunity to use VA space for clinics that address Veterans’ legal needs.

What next? For a current list of VA Legal Clinics: <http://www.va.gov/ogc/docs/LegalServices.pdf>
For more information about VA Medical-Legal Partnerships: VAMLPTaskforce@va.gov

¹ Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education & Networking Groups (CHALENG) 2015 survey: <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/CHALENG-2015-factsheet-FINAL-0616.pdf>

² Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, Volume 23, Number 2, May 2012, pp. 705-714 (Article).
Journal of General Internal Medicine. 2010. 25(Suppl 2): 136-9. Journal of Palliative Medicine. January 2010; 13(1): 15-18.