

Medical-Legal Partnership Outcomes Suggest Addressing the Legal Needs of Pregnant Women Lowers Extreme Preterm Birth Rate

Grantee: Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

Project Name: Maternal Health Law Partnership (M-HeLP)

bi3 Funding Priority: Maternal and Infant Health

Grant Award: \$874,000

Grant Timeframe: 2016-2019

Grant Purpose: To improve health outcomes for pregnant patients of the TriHealth Good Samaritan OB-GYN Center by resolving health-harming legal needs through legal advocacy and increasing engagement in prenatal care.

Project Partners: TriHealth Good Samaritan Hospital and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

Key Accomplishments

- Created a screening tool for civil legal needs and integrated it into TriHealth's electronic medical record (EMR)
- Screened 88% (2,809) of 3,184 maternity patients during the grant period
- Referred 802 patients to legal support to resolve health-harming legal needs
- 900 cases were opened to address health-harming legal needs (some patients required more than one legal case)
- Conducted 17 training sessions on a variety of legal topics for 286 Good Samaritan team members

Key Outcomes

- 36% reduction in extreme preterm birth rate (1.4% for M-HeLP mothers compared to 2.2% for the total Good Samaritan population delivering during the same period)
- 97% of cases (670) completed with an outcome that resolved individual social needs
- Estimated cost savings by preventing 18 extreme premature births is more than \$1 million

Overall Learnings

- The most common health-harming legal needs included inadequate or unsafe housing, access to public benefits (e.g. Medicaid, food stamps) and family law issues.
- Integrating screening for social determinants into patients' EMR and provider workflow increased the capability of TriHealth providers to identify and take action to address patients' needs.
- Cohesive and accurate data collection requires proactive planning and investment.
- Health-harming legal needs can arise at any time during pregnancy and the newborn period; ongoing screening is necessary to identify and address new issues.
- Successful shared project management depends upon meaningful investment and sustained commitment from all partners.
- The current fee-for-service medical reimbursement structure makes sustainability challenging for programs addressing the social determinants of health, partners continue to look for opportunities to leverage value-based reimbursement and other funding sources.

Sustainability and Next Steps

M-HeLP services continue to be available to patients of the Good Samaritan OB GYN Center, supported through funds from bi3 and private donors. The partners are exploring options for sustainable funding and hope to expand the program to patients of the Bethesda North OB GYN Center in the future.