



# National Center for Medical Legal Partnership

RAISING THE BAR FOR HEALTH

## Medical-Legal Partnership: A New Standard of Care

“In my 35 years of seeing patients, I’ve learned that lawyers are critical partners in helping my patients get and stay healthy.”

– Barry Zuckerman, MD,  
MLP Founder

### THE PROBLEM AND THE OPPORTUNITY

Though America leads the world in medical research and medical care, adverse social circumstances continue to have a dramatic, negative impact on the health of vulnerable Americans. Medicine alone cannot solve the health problems of those who struggle daily with material hardships like hunger and safety. A child with asthma living in a moldy apartment will never fully breathe symptom free, no matter how much medicine is administered, without improved living conditions. A chronically ill adult will never get healthier if she or he does not have adequate nutrition.

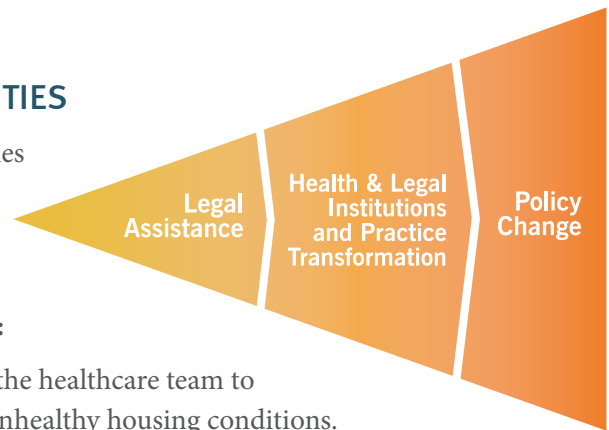
**Medical-legal partnership is a healthcare delivery model that integrates legal assistance as a vital component of patient care.**

Just as a healthcare provider refers a patient to a cardiologist for a heart murmur, a healthcare provider can refer a patient to an on-site attorney when an underlying social circumstance impairing a patient’s health is detected. Addressing the complex needs of individual patients illuminates opportunities for broader systems improvement, which is more effectively achieved when healthcare and legal providers work in tandem.

The medical-legal partnership (MLP) approach presents a compelling opportunity to leverage existing health and legal resources across the U.S. in order to reduce health disparities and create a new standard of care for vulnerable people.

## MLP CORE COMPONENTS & ACTIVITIES

Medical-legal partnership's three key activities transform the delivery of health and legal services to improve health for America's most vulnerable individuals and families.



### Legal Assistance in the Healthcare Setting:

- Legal professionals become members of the healthcare team to assist patients with legal issues, such as unhealthy housing conditions.

### Health and Legal Institutions and Practice Transformation:

- MLPs reorient health and legal services to early detection and preventive care through training and education.
- MLP teams improve institutional practices to address legal needs, such as establishing a hospital policy regarding low-income utility protections.

### Policy Change:

- MLP teams leverage health and legal expertise to improve local, state and federal laws and regulations that impact the health of vulnerable populations.

## A COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERSHIP

Medical-legal partnerships are comprised of at least one legal institution and one health-care institution in the community, and vary in size and scope. Successful MLPs establish and maintain active engagement of key leaders at every level, from front-lines to administration, in both the healthcare and legal partner institutions. Legal staff are present at the healthcare institution on a regular basis. Working together, healthcare and legal teams devise strategies for efficient referrals, joint data collection and monitoring, and fundraising to ensure high quality patient-centered care in the medical home.



### HOW MLP PREVENTS LEGAL NEEDS FROM EXACERBATING HEALTH PROBLEMS: A CASE EXAMPLE

Claudia, single mother of 2 children, is diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer. She needs multiple healthcare visits for diagnosis and staging.

Claudia gets a lumpectomy and starts bi-weekly radiation treatments. She misses a lot of work and loses her job.

MLP could have helped Claudia avoid losing her job by advising her about eligibility for Family Medical Leave Act and other employment protections.



6 months later

## MLP: TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE & LAW

Traditional healthcare and legal services treat vulnerable populations in isolation from each other. On both sides, people living in low-income communities often fall through the cracks. Many patients suffer from preventable illnesses, frequently exacerbated by unaddressed legal problems. Many adverse social conditions that impact health, such as insufficient heat, have legal remedies, but low-income communities do not have sufficient access to legal assistance. To address these problems, MLP bridges the divide to offer individuals and families the comprehensive care they need.

	PREVAILING MODEL	MLP MODEL
LEGAL ASSISTANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service is crisis-driven</li> <li>• Individuals are responsible for seeking legal assistance</li> <li>• Primary pursuit is justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service is preventive, focuses on early identification of and response to legal needs</li> <li>• Healthcare team works with patients to identify legal needs and makes referrals for assistance</li> <li>• Aims include improved health and well-being</li> </ul>
HEALTHCARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adverse social conditions affect patient health but are difficult to address</li> <li>• Healthcare team refers patients to social worker/case manager for limited assistance</li> <li>• Advocacy skills are valued, taught and deployed inconsistently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adverse social conditions with legal remedies are identified and addressed as part of care</li> <li>• Healthcare, social work and legal teams work together to address legal needs, improve health and change systems</li> <li>• Advocacy skills are prioritized as part of the standard of care</li> </ul>

“The genius in the program is the bringing together of the lawyer into the medical clinic where these problems surface, which enables the doctor to include the legal remedy as part of the medical treatment. No longer is the doctor limited by the scope of his practice, and the lawyer is introduced to the problem in its most apparent manifestation.”

– David W. Hilgers, Chair of American Bar Association’s Health Law Section

After losing her job, Claudia has no income and she and her children are evicted, become homeless and live doubled up with friends.



12 months later

MLP could have advised Claudia about eligibility for disability benefits during her illness, as well as other safety net services to avoid homelessness.

Claudia is denied health coverage because she doesn’t have a permanent address and stops radiation treatments.



16 months later

MLP could have helped Claudia provide sufficient documentation to meet application requirements so that she gets health insurance and continues radiation treatments.



“Assistance in navigating our legal system is sometimes all it takes to prevent individuals and their families from making repeated trips to the doctor or hospital for a reoccurring condition. MLPs help people obtain legal aid necessary to ensure that they receive the care and benefits they deserve, to lead healthier lives and to avoid future injuries and illnesses.”

– Sen. Tom Harkin, remarking on the Medical-Legal Partnership for Health Act of 2010

## MLP ACROSS THE U.S. IN 2010

Medical-legal partnerships serve children, the elderly, adults with disabilities and other underserved communities across the country. In 2010, MLPs:

- Partnered in over 225 hospitals and health centers in 38 states;
- Provided legal assistance to over 13,000 individuals and families;
- Trained over 10,000 healthcare providers on the connections between poverty, health, and unmet legal needs; and,
- Contributed to curricula at 38 law schools, 28 medical schools and 46 residency programs.

## MLP IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Medical-legal partnership has been the subject of increased visibility, including:

- Bi-partisan MLP for Health Act introduced in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives in July 2010;
- Articles in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe*;
- Resolutions from the American Medical Association, the American Bar Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics;
- Profiles by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; and,
- A NOVA Award from the American Hospital Association.



## ABOUT US

The National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership (NCMLP) was founded in 2005 in response to a growing demand for MLP from health and legal institutions across the country. NCMLP supports the expansion and advancement of MLP through technical assistance and dissemination of best practices leadership training, an annual MLP Summit, and coordination of national research and policy activities related to health disparities and vulnerable populations.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
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