

The Medical-Legal Partnership

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What is the Medical Legal Partnership?



- A Community Legal Aid attorney is embedded at four UMass Memorial primary care partner clinics and accepts referrals directly from medical providers.
- Community Legal Aid then works with pro bono attorneys from the private bar to serve these families.

“Many complex health-related social problems are entrenched in federal, state, and local policies and laws that require expertise in poverty law and administrative law. Using legal expertise and services, the health care system can disrupt the cycle of returning people to the unhealthy conditions that would otherwise bring them right back to the clinic or hospital.

There are currently 50,000,000 Americans who face health-harming legal needs which disproportionately affect low-income families, children, the elderly, and people of color.”

-National Center for Medical Legal Partnership



The Advocacy Model

Referral

MLP
Overview

Substantive
Legal Areas

Case Referral

Consultation
with providers

Intake

Referral packet
to volunteer
attorneys

Individual

Pro Bono Project

Private
Attorneys

Legal Aid
Attorneys

Training for
Volunteers
and
Providers

Advocacy

Interprofessional teams: the physician-attorney relationship

- The components of the MLP are all necessary for its function
 - **Physicians and other members of healthcare team:** refer patients to Community Legal Aid (CLA)
 - **Attorneys (CLA, Pro Bono):** represent patients as clients
 - Agencies and services including Worcester Housing Authority, Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, and the Parent Welcome Center
- How to find CLA:
 - CLA has clinical presence: a staff attorney circulates around 4 UMass clinical sites
 - CLA also has its own office in downtown Worcester
- CLA recruits Pro Bono attorneys to increase breadth of care
 - We were able to interact with these attorneys during “Pro Bono Appreciation Week”



Why should an attorney get involved?

Some examples:

Eviction

- A patient facing eviction may not know their rights, so can refer to CLA
- If the patient is aided by an attorney, they can postpone the date of their eviction for nearly 2 months (at minimum)
 - Document processing time and court dates help to push timeline

Income support

- Patients have the right to appeal government income support (disability benefits, SNAP, unemployment benefits, etc)
- An attorney can support and push forward their appeal, potentially reversing denial of these resources

Areas of Legal Intervention

Income Maintenance

Disability Benefits

Unemployment

SNAP

Mass Health

EAEDC/TAFDC

Education

IEP/504 Plan

Behavior Issues

Suspension

Expulsion

Language Barrier

Housing

Eviction Threat

Bad Conditions

Public/Subsidized
Housing

Shelter

Utilities

Accommodations

Guardianship & Alternatives

Medically
Incapacitated

Transition to
Adulthood

Healthcare Proxy

Durable Power of
Attorney

Living Will

Does it Work?

Studies show that when legal expertise and services are used to address social needs:

- People with chronic illnesses are admitted to the hospital less frequently.
 - Studies showed that legal assistance targeted at improving housing conditions improved the health of asthma patients (*Journal of Asthma* and *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*), and another study showed medical-legal partnership's positive impact on the health of sickle cell patients (*Pediatrics*).
- People more commonly take their medications as prescribed.
 - *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* and *Journal of Clinical Oncology*
- People report less stress and experience improvements in mental health.
 - *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, *Behavioral Medicine*, and *Health Affairs*
- Less money is spent on health care services for the people who would otherwise frequently go to the hospital, and use of preventative health care increases.
 - A study showed that MLP services reduce health care spending on high-need, high-cost patients (*Health Affairs*), and a randomized control trial found families of healthy newborns increased use of preventive health care after MLP services (*Pediatrics*).
- Clinical services are more frequently reimbursed by public and private payers.
 - Medical-legal partnerships have been shown to save patients health care costs and recover cash benefits (*Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* and *Journal of Palliative Medicine*).

Needs Assessment used to identify need within patient community

Administered at three sites:

- ❖ Hahnemann Family
- ❖ Benedict Family
- ❖ Benedict Pediatrics



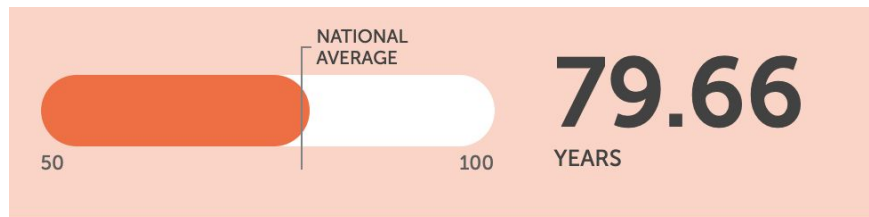
Needs Assessment used to identify need within patient community

Surveyed four areas of need:

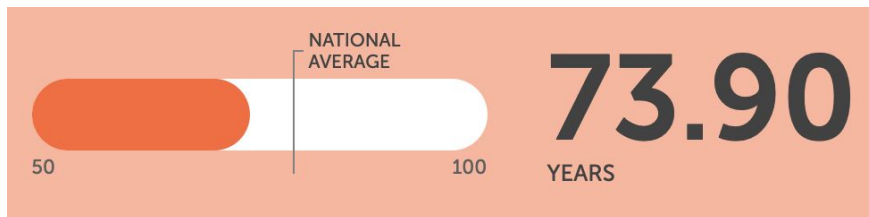
- ❖ Benefits and Finances
- ❖ Personal and Family Stability
- ❖ Housing and Utilities
- ❖ Education and Employment

Zip code is an important indicator of health

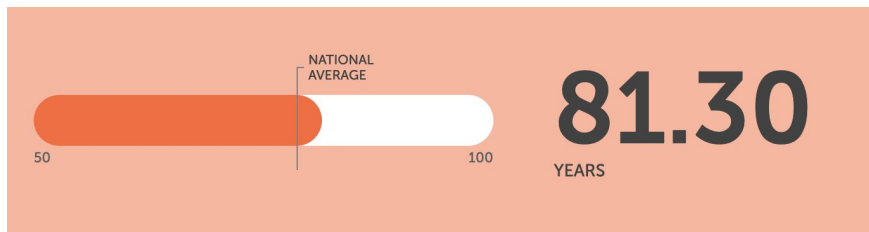
Worcester County



Great Brook Valley & Booth
Apartments Area
Worcester 01605

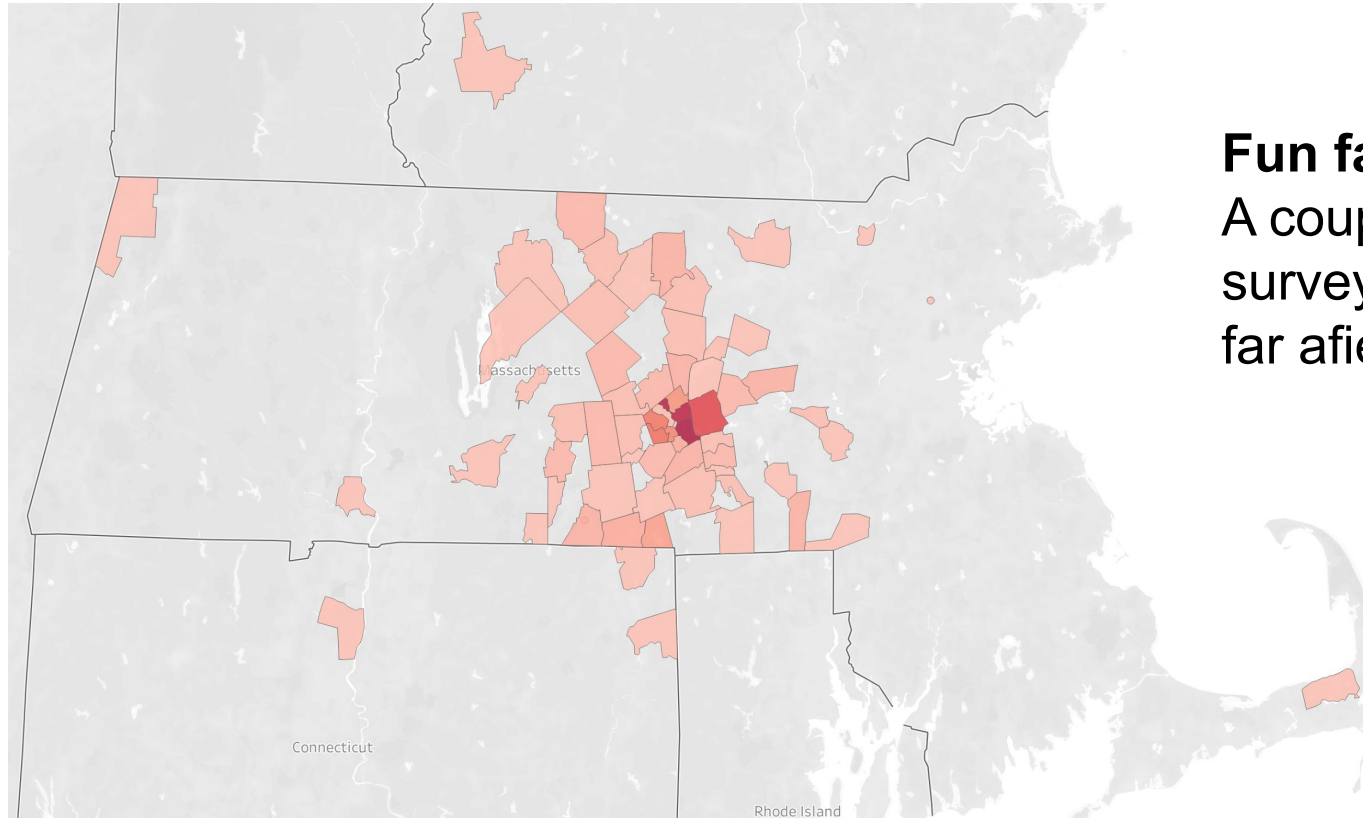


Westwood Hills (Salisbury St)
Worcester 01602



Data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

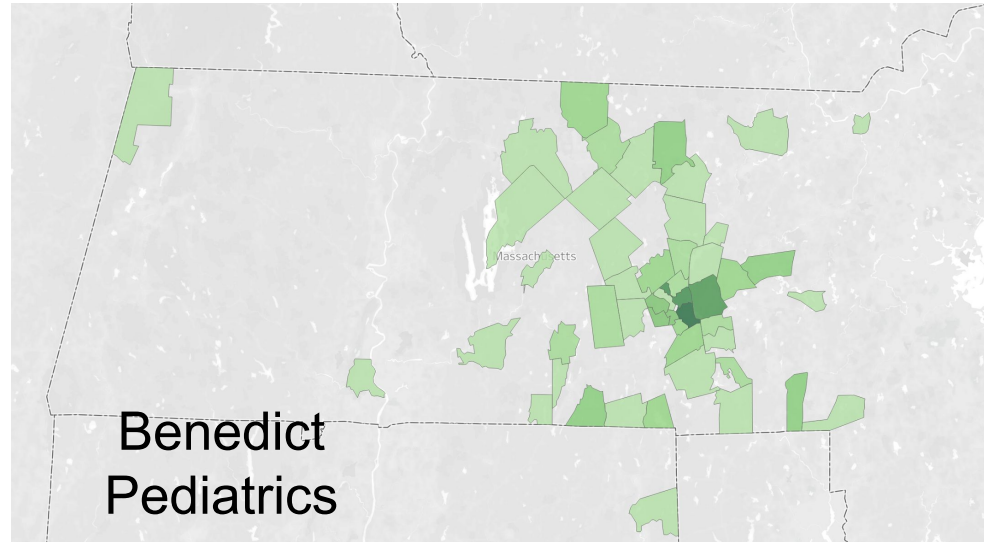
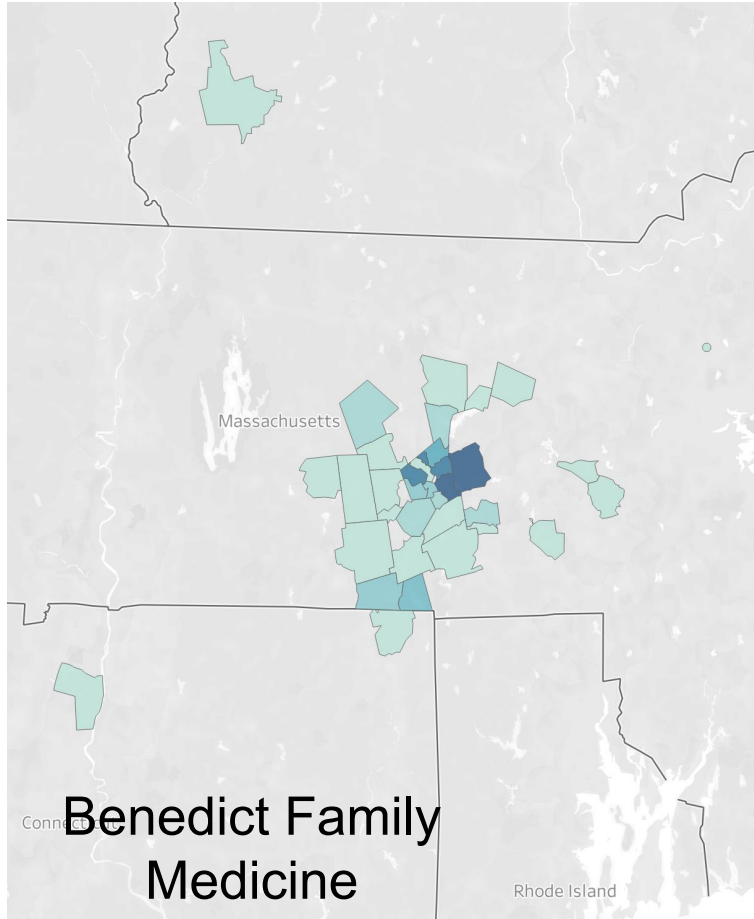
Density Map of Zip Codes Served by our Clinics



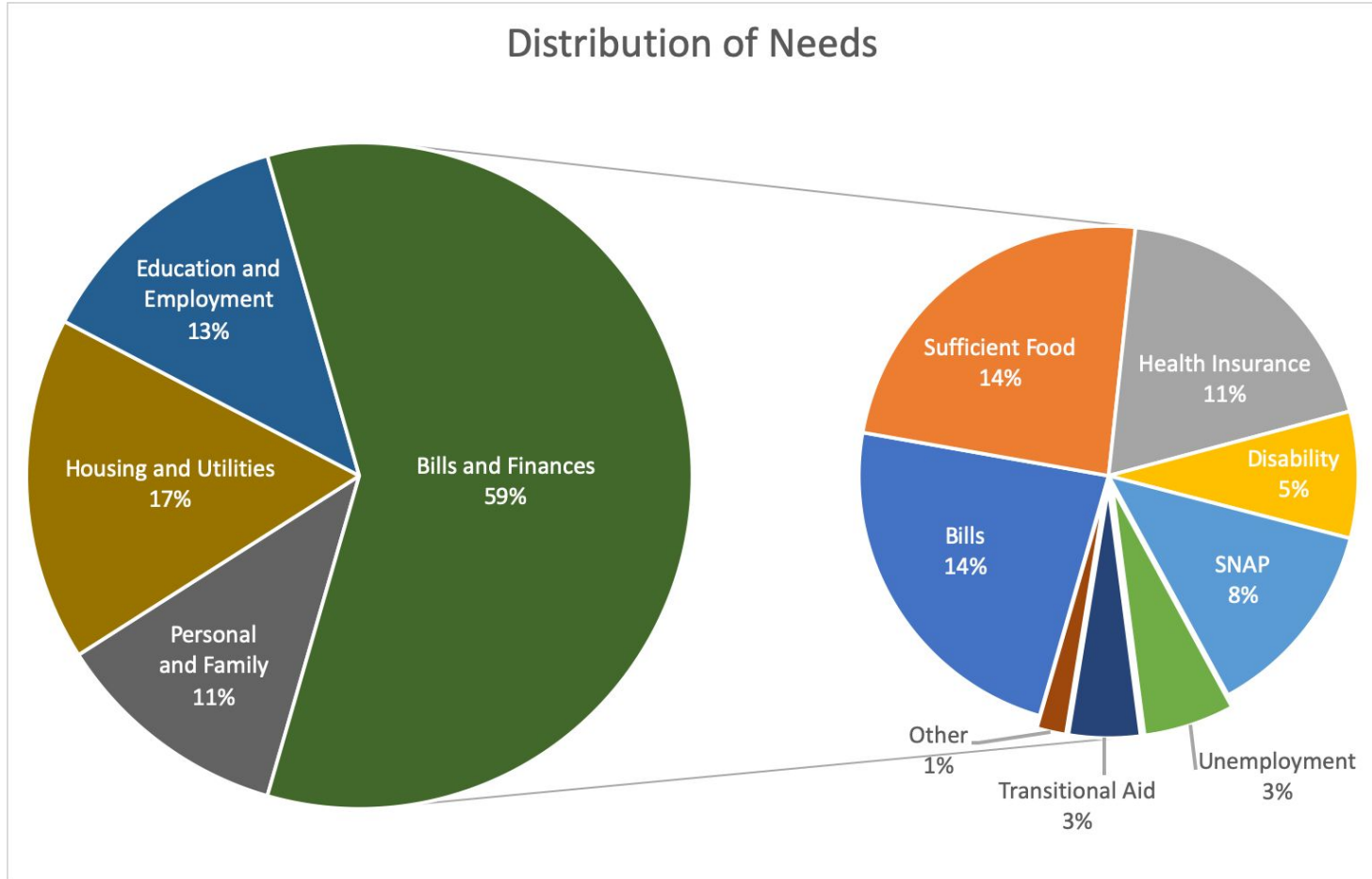
Fun fact!

A couple patients surveyed were from as far afield as Colorado

Zip Code Distribution by Clinic



Survey Results: Need Within the Three Clinics



Survey Limitations

- ❖ Language Barriers
- ❖ Response Bias

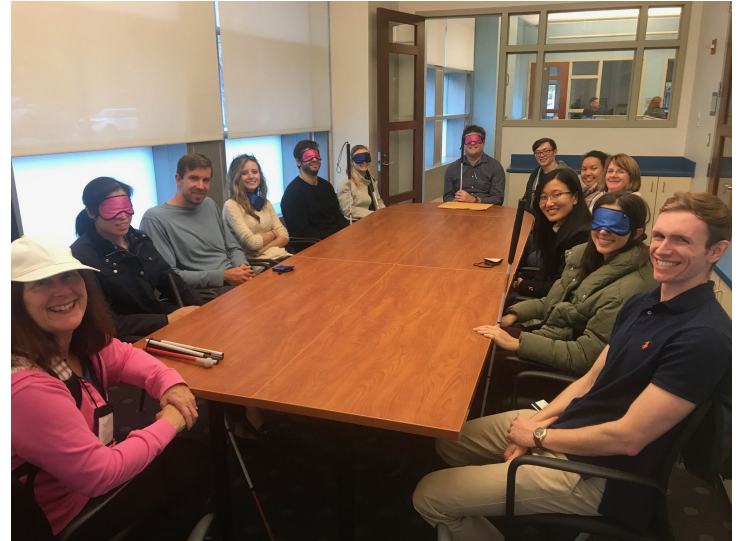
Worcester Housing Court

- Cases we saw involved evictions, unresponsive landlords, and illegal rent hikes
- Approximately 90% of tenants are self-represented in Worcester Housing Court, as opposed to only 20% of landlords (Housing Court Department, Fiscal Year 2019 Statistics).
- There are many barriers to people who need legal support, including language barriers, cost, and things like not being able to bring your cellphone into the courthouse.
- CLA represents tenants who cannot afford a lawyer.



VIP Tour of the Housing Court

- Attorney Liz Myska, who is non-sighted, and 3 staff members took us on a guided tour of the Worcester District court from the perspective of a Visually Impaired Person (VIP)
- Students took turns being blindfolded and acting as a sighted guide while navigating the building and seeking services
 - Sighted guides were taught how to properly navigate spaces and communicate with VIPs
 - Students were blindfolded for ~45 minutes to simulate the experience of a VIP and gain a better understanding of their perspective
- Interactions also served as training for the staff at the Worcester Court House



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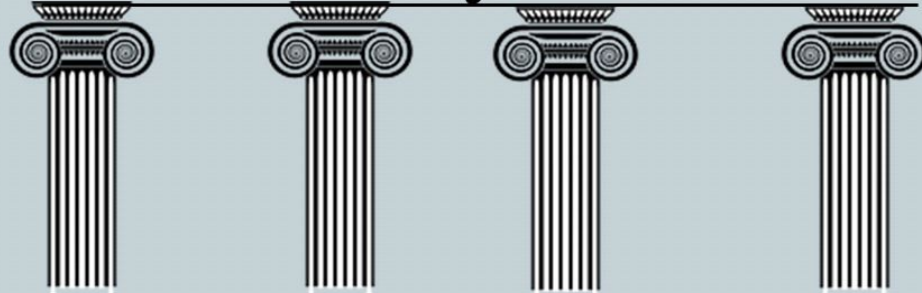
National Center for Medical Legal Partnership



Questions?

Medical-Legal Partnership Model

Community Health



Legal Aid



Health Care



Evaluation



Pro Bono

