

OCTOBER 2025

Camden Coalition Medical-Legal Partnership

Integrating legal aid to enhance addiction medicine care in New Jersey

Background

In November 2017, the Camden Coalition launched a medical-legal partnership (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. Over time, the program has grown to include two full-time attorneys and a paralegal. This additional capacity has allowed us to reach more patients and to provide additional legal services.

In 2022, the Camden Coalition MLP formalized our relationship with Cooper Health Care's Center for Healing (addiction medicine program) to place an attorney within the Center for Healing and take direct referrals for patient legal needs. The MLP has since expanded to other addiction medicine programs and been provided services to patients with behavioral health diagnoses through a New Jersey eviction diversion program.

In many cases, legal issues - like a pending criminal charge, a benefits denial, or a threatened eviction - become barriers to better health. The MLP model integrates attorneys into healthcare settings to resolve needs that can undermine a patient's health and well-being and can be better met through the legal system. The Camden Coalition MLP program embeds the attorneys into the care team and clinical setting to help participants resolve legal matters.

A unique setting and scope of services

Frequently, MLPs address a limited range of legal issues (e.g. housing, benefits). The Camden Coalition MLP, however, serves individuals with a variety of civil and criminal legal issues across the Coalition's interventions and partnerships, including:



Cooper Center for Healing, integrated center that provides innovative, compassionate care for patients with SUD, pain, trauma, and psychiatric disorders.



Oaks Integrated Care, provider of comprehensive behavioral health services across NJ, with MLP services funded through NJ opioid litigation settlement funding.



Camden Core Model, the nationally recognized intervention serving individuals with frequent hospitalizations, multiple chronic conditions, and social vulnerabilities.



Housing First, serving individuals in permanent, supportive housing who previously experienced high hospital utilization and chronic homelessness.



New Jersey Comprehensive Eviction Diversion & Defense (CEDD), serving a cohort of families facing eviction and diagnosed with behavioral health conditions.



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Real results for patients

- A patient lost her Section 8 voucher, which covered 100% of her rent, due to mental health issues and was thrown into eviction proceedings. We were able to get her Section 8 voucher reinstated, helped her obtain rental and utility assistance to cure all arrears, and got her eviction action dismissed. Today, she remains housed, in a safe and stable place.
- A patient wanted to become a nurse, but her past criminal history was preventing her from doing so. We were able to get her record expunged, and she is now enrolled in nursing school.
- A patient was falsely accused of multiple crimes, which violated his probation. We were able to get all his legal matters either dismissed or resolved in his favor, such that he did not have to go to jail, and his probation was terminated, which gave him a sense of peace to focus on his recovery.
- A patient was facing a mental health crisis, due to prior domestic violence. The patient sought medical and psychiatric treatment for her mental health crisis. When she requested assistance from her child's father, he responded by taking the child from her custody and then filed an application for primary custody. We were able to overcome this application, return primary custody to the patient, and reunite the mother and child.
- A survey of 70 MLP patients at Cooper's Center for Healing confirmed the impact of this program. 90% of participants agreed that the MLP staff "is able to effectively advocate for me." 91% reported "making good progress on [their] recovery journey." And 84% were "confident that [their] current legal issue(s) will be resolved through working with the MLP staff."

Impact

A relatively small investment of resources has generated a big impact for staff and patients. As of August 2025, the MLP has worked on 1048 legal matters for 926 patients and achieved positive outcomes in many of these cases. Around 28% of these matters concern housing-related legal issues. Criminal cases accounted for another 26%. The MLP also devotes significant effort to traffic matters, warrants, family law/DV issues, court fines/fees, and other financial/benefits matters.

Our partnership with the Cooper Center for Healing has generated more than half of these referrals. Since launching that partnership in 2022, we have received over 539 patient



referrals. These individuals seek assistance with civil and criminal legal matters, issues that often pose a threat to the progress of their recovery. This partnership has demonstrated the substantial legal needs facing addiction medicine patients - and the enormous benefit in addressing those issues as patients seek treatment.

Integrating legal services into the patient care team and behavioral health setting

The partnership with Cooper's Center for Healing replicates the earlier work of our MLP, where the attorney becomes another member of the larger care team. Most referrals happen onsite when patients come in for treatment. Center for Healing care team members, which include medical providers, navigators, and social workers, identify potential legal issues that come up in conversations with patients and ask patients if they are interested in receiving legal help. Our lead attorney for this partnership then meets privately with each referred patient to determine legal needs and collaboratively create a course of action. This MLP is unique among medical-legal partnerships across the country in that our attorneys provide direct representation in defending criminal matters. An attorney integrated into the Center for Healing's care team has allowed for more holistic treatment of the patient in a novel way. Working together, we seek to remove the burden of a patient's legal issues, so they can better focus on their recovery.

The vision

Our objectives are to increase health equity and patient health by strengthening and sustaining a medical-legal collaboration and to make legal services part of the standard of care for addiction medicine patients throughout New Jersey and across the country.