

Title

Lessons Learned Implementing and Evaluating a Boston Hospital System's Cross-Sector Housing Intervention to Prevent Eviction

Abstract

Background and Rationale

Safe and affordable housing is recognized as a critical driver of health. In 2018, Brigham and Women's Hospital, an academic medical center in Boston, instituted screening for health-related social needs (HRSN) at its 14 primary care clinics and created a Social Care Team (SCT) to address patients' HRSN alongside clinical staff; 30% of patients screened positive for housing needs. Thus, in late 2018, the SCT added two housing advocates (HA) to the SCT, which consisted of community resource specialists, community health workers, and a legal partner to provide team-facing problem solving and policy updates. The first evaluation of the intervention (2018-2021) found associations between program participation and reductions in outpatient utilization, and patients reported physical and mental health benefits and an increased sense of connection to their healthcare provider. These findings were recently published in *NEJM Catalyst* and *Health Affairs*. The program has since been updated to include a triage component, a legal partner offering patients representation, more HAs, and an emergency fund to bridge one-time monetary barriers to permanent housing. In June 2024, the Boston Mayor's Office for Housing granted the program a Homelessness Prevention & Emergency Housing Assistance award, which will sustain the program for at least an additional year. It will require some changes to current operations to work more closely with the Office of Housing Stability. A second evaluation is underway to understand how these changes impact patients' healthcare and housing, experiences with legal representation, as well as clinicians' perspectives on the program's value. Broadly, this evaluation explores the potential for healthcare systems to redress the nation's housing crisis and restore trust between marginalized patient populations and healthcare institutions.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Share practical lessons learned from implementing HRSN screening and housing program focused primarily on homelessness prevention into a healthcare system's primary care strategy.
- 2) Examine results from evaluating novel updates to the housing program's design.
- 3) Explore how cross-sector collaborations between healthcare systems, legal experts, elected officials and policy-makers can work together to prevent homelessness.

Agenda Description

From the perspectives of a physician-researcher and frontline housing advocate, this workshop explores data and lessons learned from an urban, academic medical center's implementation and evaluation of a program focused on homelessness prevention at its 14 primary care sites; this second-phase evaluation includes the addition of a triage system, patient-facing legal partner offering court representation to prevent eviction, and new partnership with Boston's Mayor's Office for Housing. We offer recommendations for healthcare delivery systems expanding support for HRSN, from a cross-sector perspective, and seek to encourage dialogue between

attendees regarding others' successes and challenges. This workshop is ideal for health systems, hospital associations, researchers, policymakers, legal organizations, and community-based organizations interested in addressing HRSN/patients' housing needs via the healthcare system from a cross-sector perspective.

Participant Interactivity

The workshop will be interactive and include several different components. Presentation elements will include a PowerPoint presentation to set the context for the session (e.g., overview of intervention, study) by the physician-researcher and frontline housing advocate (~50%), audience polls (e.g., to gauge levels of experience with the topic) (~10%), and participant discussion (e.g., praxis via application of tools and resources to patient cases, Q&A, prompts to share successes and challenges with similar efforts) (~40%).