

Legal Access as Disability Health Justice: Scalable Models for Breaking Systemic Barriers

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Roadmap

(1) Introduce LCD

(2) Two Models for Breaking Systemic Barriers

Medical-Legal Partnership

Philadelphia Eviction Prevention Project (Right to Counsel)

(4) Take a closer look at a pediatric MLP

(5) Case study and brief overview of relevant law

Legal Clinic for the Disabled

WE PROVIDE FREE LEGAL SERVICES TO LOW-INCOME PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN PHILADELPHIA AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTIES.

OUR AREAS OF PRACTICE ARE CIVIL ONLY AND INCLUDE:

Landlord/tenant disputes and evictions

Child custody and support

Utilities and subsidized housing

Basic estate planning

Public assistance/benefits, Medical Assistance

Social Security, SSI appeals

Other issues on a case-by-case basis

Protection from Abuse litigation

General legal advice and referrals

LCD – MLP Initiative

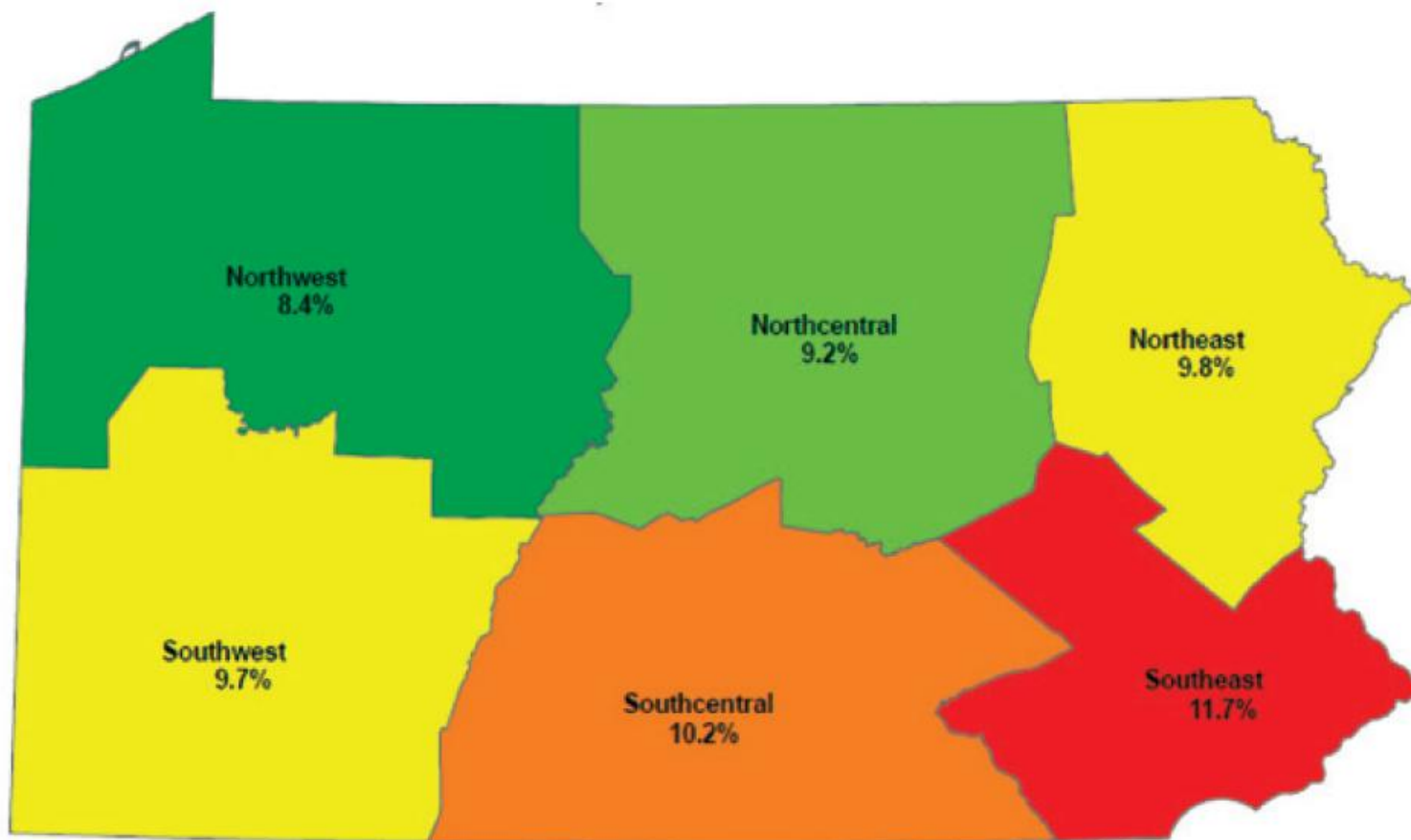
Legal Clinic for the Disabled has six MLPs at nine sites in Philadelphia

- Magee Rehabilitation Hospital
- St. Christopher's Hospital for Children
- Stephen Klein Wellness Center and the Hub of Hope
- Family Practice Counseling Network (3 sites)
- The Philadelphia AIDS Consortium
- Nemours Children's Health (Jefferson)

Case Study: Asthma + Housing Justice

- Despite significant advances in our understanding and treatment of the medical disease and
- Despite major reduction in ambient air contaminants
- **THE PREVALENCE OF ASTHMA IN CHILDREN HAS ALMOST DOUBLED NATIONALLY in the last 30 years.**

Figure 4-2: Lifetime Asthma Prevalence Among School Students by Health District, Pennsylvania 2003/04-2008/09 (Combined Data)

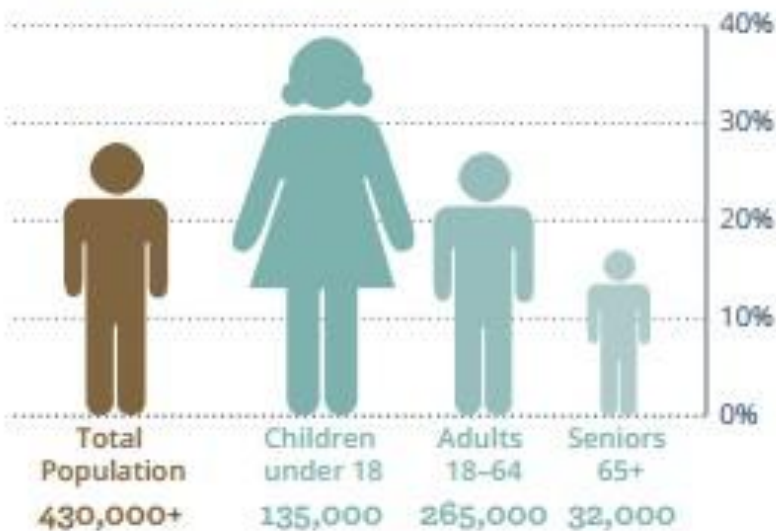


Legend
Percent ■ 8.4% ■ 8.5% - 9.2% ■ 9.3% - 9.8% ■ 9.9% - 10.2% ■ 10.3% - 11.7%

Poverty and Median Income in Philadelphia

NEARLY 1 OUT OF EVERY 2.5 CHILDREN LIVES BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE.

Poverty by Age Group



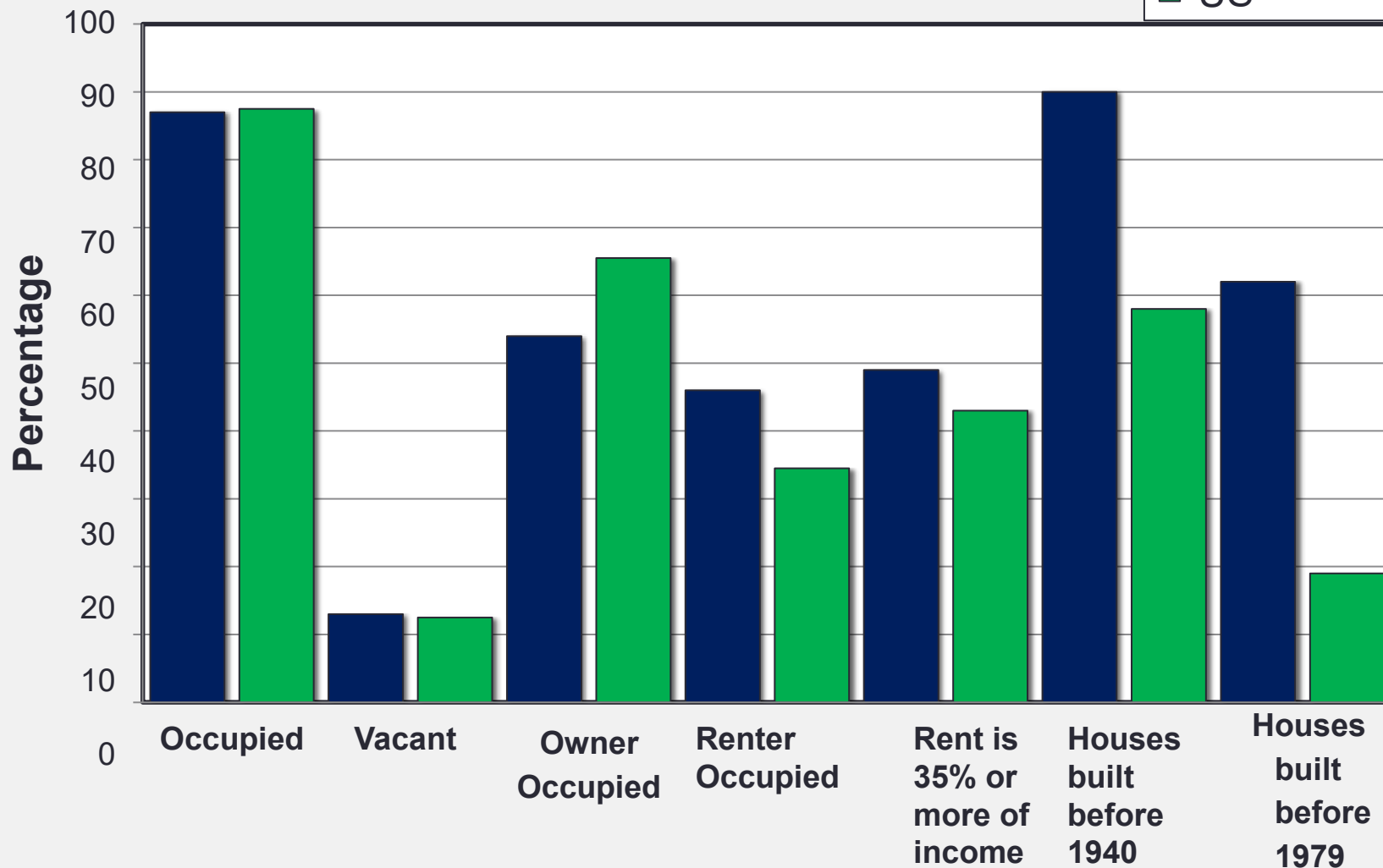
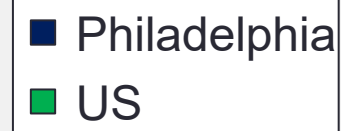
Median Household Income: 25 Largest Cities

National Average: \$50,502



Housing Characteristics

Philadelphia, PA and US (2008-2012)



2008-2012 American Community Survey

Common Substandard Housing Concerns and Increased Risks

- Rodent and cockroach infestation
- Water leaks and mold
- Peeling paint and lead paint
- Exposed wires and uncovered radiators
- Insufficient heat or running water
- Overcrowding
- Increased Asthma
- Increased lead poisoning
- Increased Injuries
- Radiator burns
- Window falls
- Fires from improper wiring, lack of smoke detectors, use of space heaters
- Increased infectious diseases

Conditions of Housing Philadelphia and US

Condition	% Philadelphia	% National
Rodents in home in past 3 months	23	6
Leak(s) inside home	11	8
Open cracks or holes inside homes	10	5
Moderate or severe physical problems with home	8	5
Lacking a working smoke detector	5	6
Hole in Roof	5	1
Broken plaster or peeling paint inside home	5	2
Broken windows	3	3
Holes in floors	3	1
Rooms without electric outlets	3	1
Overall rating of structure is poor	3	1
Foundation crumbling, cracks or holes	1	2

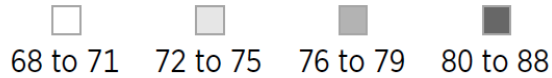
The Big Picture

- Your Health may be more influenced by your **zip code** than your **genetic code**

Life Expectancy Within Philadelphia

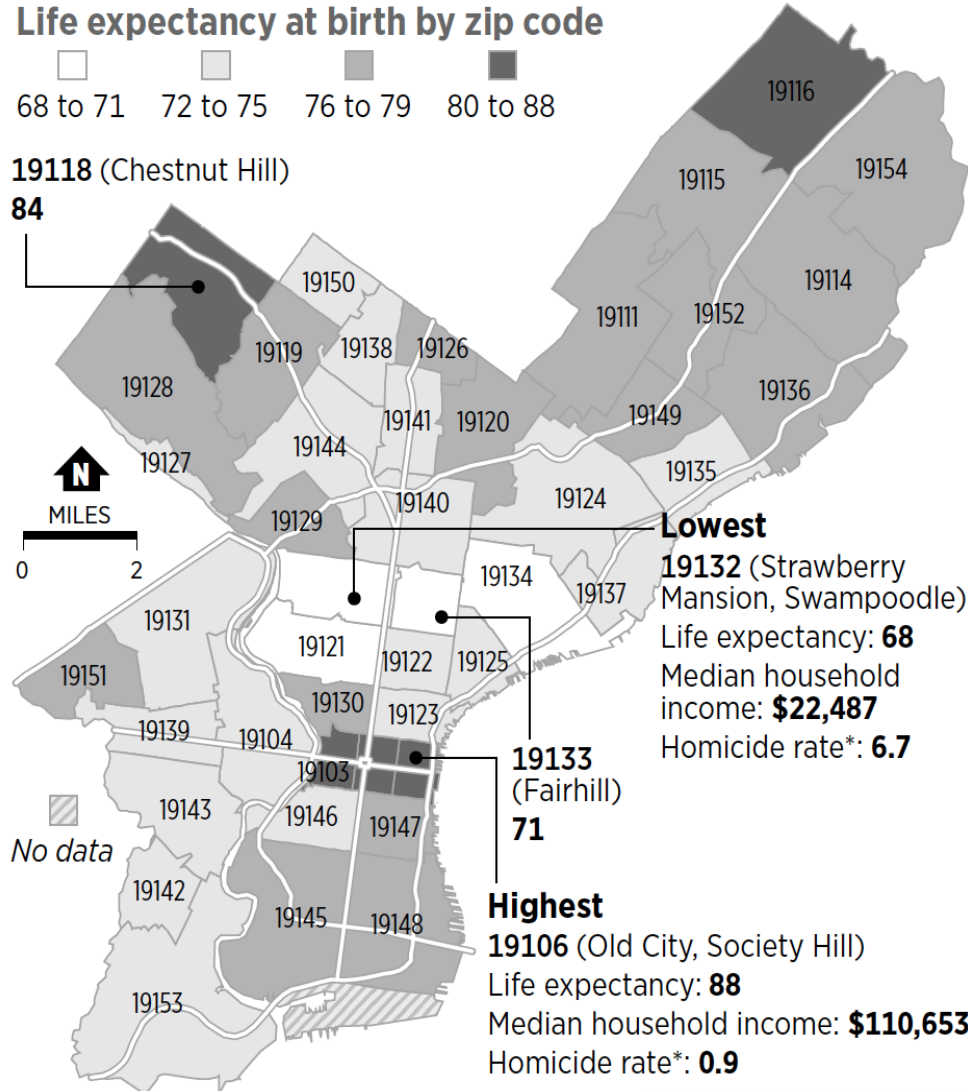
Children born today in parts of North Philadelphia have an average life expectancy up to 20 years shorter than children born in Society Hill, according to a study by Virginia Commonwealth University.

Life expectancy at birth by zip code



19118 (Chestnut Hill)

84



Philadelphia A tale of 2 hills



Syria and Iraq
74 years old

* Annual rate per 10,000 residents, based on homicides from 2006-15

The Solution?

- There is no **one** solution
- Medicine alone is not the answer
- Individual decisions alone are not the answer
- Issues must be addressed systemically

HOORAY - THAT EAR IS BETTER...
ANYTHING ELSE...?



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Medical Legal Partnership

A Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) is a care delivery model that embeds lawyers within healthcare teams to address social, economic, and environmental factors that harm patient health. By tackling legal issues—such as housing instability, utility shutoffs, or denial of benefits—MLPs help treat the root causes of illness that medicine alone cannot fix.

Each Stakeholder Has Unique Needs

- Legal services provider
- Target Population
- Medical providers
- Healthcare system
- Emerging stakeholders: MCOs

Why Legal Advocacy in the Clinical Setting?

Health care providers are trusted, credible resources

Screening for legal issues in the clinical setting facilitates preventive law

Improves access to remedies for social determinants of health

Starting a Medical Legal Partnership

Strong core belief that affecting the social determinants of health leads to direct long-term health improvement (and perhaps cost reduction)

Needs assessment

Provider education

Referral form and a starting workflow

Legal Barriers to Care

I-HELP categories

- Income supports & Insurance
 - Medical Assistance, SSI, SNAP, public benefits
- Housing & Utilities
 - Housing Conditions, Evictions, Accessibility, Shut-off Prevention
- Employment & Education
 - Evaluations, IEPs, Accommodations for Disabilities
- Legal Status
- Personal & Family Stability
 - Protection From Abuse Orders, Divorce, Child Support, and Custody

St. Christopher's Hospital for Children MLP: History

Started in 2011

Provides free civil legal services to families in the Center for the Urban Child (CUC)

To date, over 60,000 families have been screened for unmet legal needs

- On average, 40% indicated at least one unmet legal need

Screening for Social Determinants (former screener)

1. Housing/Utilities Please answer Yes or No Below

a) Do you have problems with your LANDLORD getting home repairs (mold, rodents, leaks)? Yes No (L)

b) In the past 30 days, has your LANDLORD threatened to evict you or turn off utilities? Yes No (L)

c) Have you received a shut off notice from any utility (gas, electric, water) in the past 30 days?
 Utility Resources Given Yes No (P)
(Consider MLP)

2. Income/Insurance Supports

a) Is there someone in your home who doesn't have health insurance? Insurance Resources Given Yes No (P)
(Consider MLP)

b) Have you been denied in the past 90 days SSI for your child? Yes No (L)

c) Have you been denied in the past 90 days Social Security benefits (SSI/SSD) for yourself? Yes No (L)

d) Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more. Food Resources Given Yes No (P)
(Consider MLP)

e) Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more. Food Resources Given Yes No (P)
(Consider MLP)

f) Have you stopped getting food stamps, WIC or cash assistance? Yes No (L)

3. Education

a) Do you have concerns about your child's school or about your child's learning needs? Yes No (S)

4) Legal Status

a) Do you have any questions about your family's immigration status? Yes No (L)

5) Personal and Family Safety and Stability

a) Have you ever been hit, threatened, or abused by a boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse? Yes No (D)

b) Do you want information about separating from your spouse or getting a divorce? Yes No (L)

c) Do you have concerns about child support or custody of your child(ren)? Yes No (L)

Every family receives a screener at the start of the visit to self-identify unmet legal needs









- Resident or attending reviews the screener and refers to the MLP attorney or social work as necessary
- Some issues, such as food insecurity or utility shut-offs, can be handles directly by the provider

Screening for Social Determinants (current screener since mid 2022)

Here at St. Chris, we care about your child and family. If you want help with any of the resources listed below, let us know by checking them off. We have an on-site team, including FREE legal help, and can share information about other resources in your community. Your responses are kept confidential.

Would you like help with...?
(Check Yes to all that apply)

	Yes
 Food Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Utility Bills or Shut-off Notices	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Transportation to Appointments	<input type="checkbox"/>
 School or Childcare Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Health Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Free Tax Preparation	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Emotional or Behavioral Concerns (for you or your child)	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Safety Issues (for you or your child)	<input type="checkbox"/>

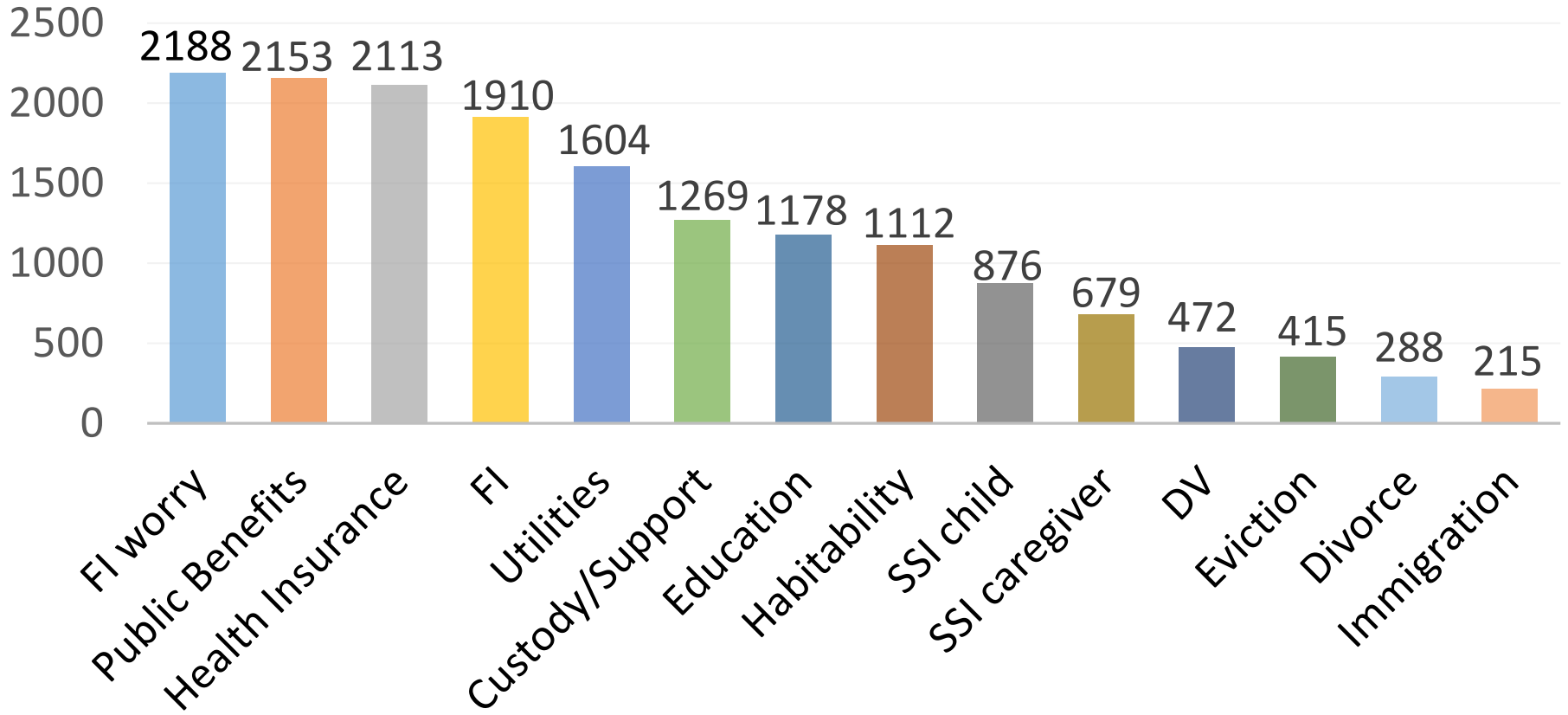
	Yes
 Eviction or Threat of Losing Home	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Unsafe Housing or Repairs	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Custody	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Child Support	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Separation or Divorce	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Immigration	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Social Security Benefits (SSI)	<input type="checkbox"/>
 Other Benefits (WIC, SNAP, Cash)	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is your favorite thing about your child? _____

MRN: _____

DATE: _____

Total Legal Needs by Type 2011-2021



Core Component #1: Direct Legal Services

Provide on-site free legal services to families:

- Brief advice
 - Preventative law: goal is to prevent crisis
 - Position families to be in the best position if the situation escalates
- Full representation
 - Send demand letters to landlords to address housing concerns
 - In-court representation
 - Eviction defense and/or negotiate a settlement

Core Component #2: Provider Education and Care Integration

Attorneys train providers to identify legal issues that impact patient health

- Resident rotation on Social Determinants of Health
- Noon Advocacy Lectures about MLP topics
- Available for curbside consults and a resource for advocacy projects

Providers educate and assist attorneys with relevant expertise.

- Ex –SSI/SSDI

Core Component #3: Internal and External Systems Change

Develop practice-wide protocols to standardize the provider response

- Utility medical certification forms, CAO caregiver forms

Track and monitor legal and social needs of the patient population

- Local and state advocacy

Lessons Learned

Need a streamlined workflow otherwise it will not happen

Patient identified screening

Continuous provider and staff education

- 1:1 training for residents and new staff on social determinants
- Regular staff-wide training

Maximize attorney hours on-site

Challenges

Funding

- Sustainable partnership requires a financial contribution from the health center

Time

- Dedicate onboarding time to social determinants of health including MLP
- Separate, at-least quarterly, lectures around a specific MLP issue

Confidentiality

- HIPAA
 - Attorney/client relationship
- 

Philadelphia Eviction Prevention Program (Right to Counsel)

Purpose: Promote housing stability and prevent homelessness

Means: Provide legal counsel to as many as possible, to prevent eviction

Problem

- High rates of eviction in Philadelphia
- High rates of disability in Philadelphia
- Housing instability leads to poor health outcomes and vice versa

Solution

Philadelphia Eviction Prevention Project

- Legal Clinic for the Disabled
- Senior Law Center
- Community Legal Services
- TURN (Tenant Union Representative Network)
- Clarifi

Model

High quality, accessible direct services

- Central intake line for initial screening
- Referrals directly to legal agencies
- Representation in non-court involved issues, pre-court and court proceedings
- Readily available, easy to digest legal information via website and print materials

Disability and the Court System

- Reasonable accommodations
- Continuances
- Early intervention

Outcomes

- Early intervention and representation for more tenants than ever before, resulting in better outcomes
 - Longer time in housing
 - Better chances to remain housed

- Collaboration among agencies to tackle system issues
 - Eviction Diversion Program
 - Landlord Tenant Officer accountability

Eviction Diversion Program (“EDP”)

EDP was implemented in 2020 during the Covid pandemic

Landlords are required to file and be approved for eviction diversion 30 days prior to filing a Landlord Tenant complaint

The EDP aims to divert landlord-tenant disputes away from actual legal filings by providing for mediation and rental assistance

Notice of Diversion Rights



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA NOTICE OF DIVERSION RIGHTS

Date: _____

This Notice is to let you know that you have the right to participate in the City of Philadelphia's free Eviction Diversion Program under Philadelphia Code 9-811. The Program is an opportunity to work out an agreement to prevent eviction.

Your landlord is required to send you this Notice and participate in the Eviction Diversion Program before filing an eviction case against you in Court.

Here are the next steps:

1. The landlord must now apply to the Eviction Diversion Program. If approved, the application will be assigned to a path. Depending on the amount of back rent and fees that your landlord says is owed and other issues, you may be assigned a housing counselor, mediation session or other resources. **You will receive a text and/or email from the Eviction Diversion Program with your next steps.**
2. **After seven days, if you do not receive an email or text message,** call the Save Your Home Philly Hotline at (215)334-HOME (4663) to find out your next steps.
3. **You may contact your landlord immediately** to try to work out an agreement, such as a possible payment plan, agreed upon move-out date or other resolution.

For more information about your rights and responsibilities, visit www.phillytenant.org or attend a virtual Tenants Rights Class. To register for the class, go to www.rturn.net or call the Philly Tenant Hotline at 267-443-2500, option 3.

Challenges

➤ Buy-in

➤ Funding

➤ High need

Questions/Comments

LCD General Info

LCD helps people who:

- Are low-income; AND
- Have a disability; AND
- Live in Philadelphia, Bucks, Montgomery, Chester, or Delaware Counties.
- Must have a legal issue that LCD handles.
- LCD intake (Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday): 215-587-3350. Options for Housing issues and All other issues

Questions or comments:

- Sherry Thomas, Esq.
- sherrythomas@lcdphila.org