

Legal Aid wins competitive grant for medical-legal partnership

Akron one of eight communities in US to receive federal funding

Community Legal Aid has received a \$214,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide legal assistance to Akron Children's Hospital families.

Legal Aid was one of only eight organizations selected nationwide to receive federal funding through the Administration for Children and Families' new demonstration program, [Medical-Legal Partnerships Plus \(MLP+\)](#). The program is designed to address root causes of poor health outcomes, as well as health inequities.

"The bottom line is that this money is going to help us help more kids, and we're thrilled about that," shared Steven McGarrity, executive director for the nonprofit law firm. "We're also grateful that this award further demonstrates the value of collaboration and taking a holistic approach to improving our community's health outcomes. We can do more for our kids and their families by working together."

Legal Aid and Akron Children's have partnered for more than 10 years to improve the health outcomes of patients served through the hospital network. Through Legal Aid's Health, Education, Advocacy and Law (HEAL) project, lawyers get direct referrals from healthcare providers for legal issues that impact children's health.

Common issues include poor housing conditions, the need for special education resources in school, problems with public benefits, immigration issues, and family issues.

“We know that where our patients live, the quality of their housing, how safe they are in their homes, whether their families are financially secure – all these things impact their health,” said Michele Mizda, manager of Social Services at Akron Children’s Hospital. “To us, this funding means helping to lessen, if not, eliminate those barriers that our patients and families face. We know that taking care of children goes beyond the healthcare lens. This helps us to address social determinants of health, which means taking care of the whole person.”

Marie Curry, managing attorney for the HEAL project, oversees the legal work performed under the MLP. Curry, who holds a Masters in Public Health in addition to her law degree, understands well the intersection between health and law.

“There are instances when healthcare alone can’t resolve the underlying factors that contribute to prolonged or exacerbated health conditions,” she shared, adding that access to attorneys and social workers can have a direct bearing on health outcomes.

“Take a child with asthma,” she explained. “A doctor can prescribe an inhaler and create an asthma treatment plan. But if that child goes home every night to a house filled with mold, that’s going to keep impacting their breathing. An attorney can help the family enforce their rights and compel their landlord to mitigate the mold, and that has a direct effect on the child’s health outcomes.”

Since its inception, this partnership has helped 1,300 families resolve 2,100 legal issues that were affecting children’s health outcomes.

Congresswoman Emilia Sykes, who represents the district where the funds will be used, was pleased with the award and what it means for the community.

“As a former volunteer for Community Legal Aid, I am personally familiar with the vital services this outstanding organization provides to our communities, specifically with Community Legal Aid’s Medical-Legal Partnership,” Rep. Sykes said. “The ability to enhance the work with Akron Children’s Hospital will ensure vulnerable families have access to quality legal representation, resulting in better health outcomes for citizens in Ohio’s 13th Congressional District.”

To date, Legal Aid’s and Akron Children’s partnership has focused on protecting the housing rights and addressing education needs of patients. With the new funding, Legal Aid will be able to expand its services to include other prevalent matters – such as accessing public benefits or resolving immigration matters – while Akron Children’s integrates care coordination to connect patients to additional non-medical services they need.

About Community Legal Aid

Community Legal Aid is a 501(c)3 non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals in central and northeast Ohio. Legal Aid believes that all individuals, including those who are impoverished, should have opportunities to control, improve, and enrich their lives and community. Dedicated to this vision, Legal Aid uses legal advocacy - through education and representation - to transform the lives of its clients, increasing opportunity, fairness, and stability for a stronger community and justice for all. The non-profit law firm serves clients in Columbiana, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull and Wayne counties.

About Akron Children’s Hospital

Akron Children's is an independent, nonprofit pediatric health care system that has been caring for children in northeast Ohio since 1890. With two hospital campuses, six regional health centers and more than 50 primary and specialty care locations throughout Ohio, we are making it easier for today's busy families to find the high-quality care they need. We also operate neonatal and pediatric units in the hospitals of our regional health care partners. In 2022, our health care system provided more than 1.3 million patient encounters. Every year, our Akron Children's Home Care nurses provide thousands of in-home visits, and our School-Based Health Center nurses manage clinic visits for students from preschool through high school. With our Quick Care Online virtual visits and Akron Children's Anywhere app, we are here for families whenever and wherever they need us. Learn more at akronchildrens.org.

Additional Information about the grant and program:

[About the MLP+ Program](#)

[HEAL MLP+ fact sheet](#)

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