

# Medical Legal Partnership Annual Report

*July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024*

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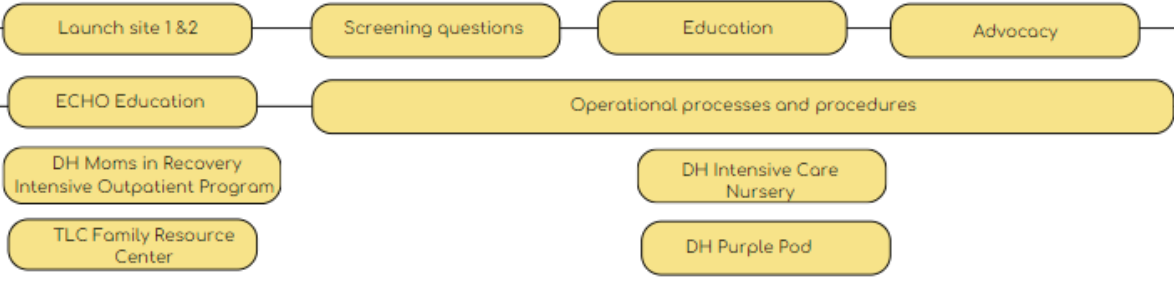
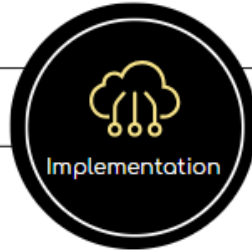
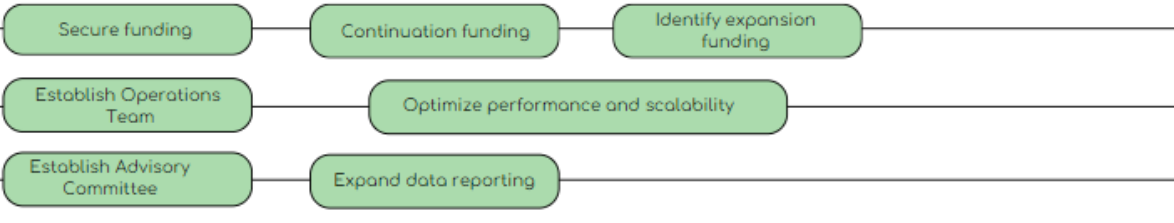
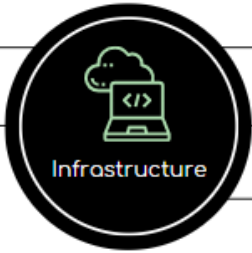
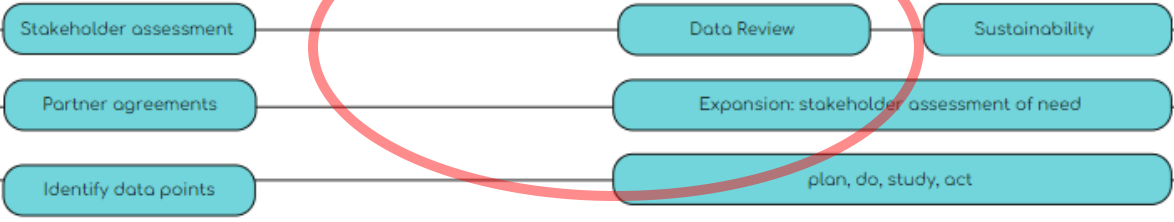
# Medical Legal Partnership Strategy Roadmap

**2021/22**

**2023**

**2024**

**2025**



Supporting civil legal needs of New Hampshire families with young children *who* also maybe experiencing or recovering from substance use disorder





# A year in review

## Program Overview

The Medical Legal Partnership (MLP) between Dartmouth Health (DH) and New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA) supports some of the most vulnerable patients and families access legal care in addition to, and in coordination with, their medical care at two locations: TLC Family Resource Center in Claremont, NH and Dartmouth Health's Addiction Treatment Program/Moms in Recovery in Lebanon, NH. The program allows for health care providers to connect their patients directly with an on-site attorney for consultations, advice, and representation, for situations that are or have the potential to impact their overall health and wellness. Staff at these locations also are provided consultation and education to aide in their abilities to support families alongside challenges impacting their health.







## Why do we have MLPs?

MLPs enable health care providers and lawyers to work together to eliminate or reduce the effects of health-harming legal needs that act as barriers to patients achieving health and wellbeing. Unlike with criminal cases, people with civil legal problems do not have a right to legal help. Therefore, cost & access serves as a barrier for many low-income families trying to access civil legal services. Individuals with substance use disorder, mental health, with disabilities and/or young children are also at greater risk for barriers accessing legal supports and services.

## Population focus

The MLP at Dartmouth Health provides free civil legal support to families who are pregnant and/or with children ages 0-8 years living in New Hampshire. The project expanded criteria beyond age 5 years due to site location feedback from Y1&Y2. These families are also receiving obstetrics and gynecology (OB/GYN) and various levels of primary/pediatric care at TLC Family Resource Center or DH Moms in Recovery. The target population aims to improve complex social needs that increase the likelihood the children will experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that could impact healthy development.

## Areas of Legal Focus

	Income	Housing	Edu & Employment	Legal status	Personal & Family
	<b>Benefits</b> SSI/SSDI appeals	<b>Unstable housing</b> behind on rent	<b>Discrimination</b> pregnancy discriminations or termination	<b>Housing discrimination</b>	<b>IP violence</b> persue legal action, warm hand off with advocate
	SS or SNAP/TANF were denied, reduced, or stopped	<b>Eviction</b> threats of eviction, received eviction notice	<b>Leave</b> not allowing for breaks not having paid time for medical appointment	<b>Asylum</b> assist with application	<b>Stalking</b> protective orders
		<b>Housing accessibility</b> needs accommodations	<b>Insurance</b> health insurance denied claim, lost health insurance	<b>Credit history</b> support or resolve	<b>Victim compensation</b> denials
		<b>Housing accessibility</b> not waiving pet policy for service animal need	<b>Insurance</b> underinsured, denied Medicaid, dropped by Medicaid	<b>Employment</b> Identify and support related barriers	<b>Special education</b> at-risk youth
		mold, bed bugs, rodents that landlord has not taken care of	<b>Secure status</b> special education needs		<b>Child care scholarship</b> denials
		<b>Utilities</b> living without or at-risk	<b>Workforce rights</b> support & enforce		<b>Transportation</b> Driver's license barriers

## Client Story: Housing

Housing is the #1 most frequent and #2 most harmful problem that low-income people face among civil legal issues, as ranked by providers. Facing housing instability can cause physical and mental illness as well as developmental delays in children.

Recently, a case manager was providing parent support, and uncovered a situation that was causing stress on the family and was potentially hazardous to their child's health conditions. The case manager, referred the parent to the Medical Legal Partnership Program (MLP), when learning that the parent had recently received an eviction notice, during the middle of winter. The family had not previously raised this concern with the case manager, as they felt they could not afford legal representation, and also had a fear of the legal process. The parent, her partner lived in a home with three young children, recently the parent had lost their employment, which is what led them to fall behind in rent. The clients acknowledged being behind on rent, but by much less than the landlord had claimed. During this time, the landlord turned down the heat in the duplex (the landlord lives in the other unit) to approximately 53-55°F, while the legal minimum is 65°F. While low temperatures can be a health risk in general, one of the children in this household has a medical genetic disorder which puts them at lethal risk from complications from even minor illnesses, making the low temperature far more than a problem of discomfort for this family, but a health and safety risk. The family had tried on many occasions to attempt to create verbal compromise with the landlord, always being turned down, left with feelings of helplessness, and increased stress.

The MLP staff attorney filed an appearance with the court for the family, including a counterclaim for the landlord's failure to provide sufficient heat under the statute which establishes certain requirements for landlords and tenants, RSA 540-A. Usually, the courts issue immediate, temporary orders in response to 540-A filings. The family again, felt hopeless, unempowered, and scared. When the court had not responded to the counterclaim, the MLP lawyer filed a follow-up motion for an emergency, temporary order, requiring the landlord to provide sufficient heat. The court granted the motion, issuing the emergency order later that same day. The family was relieved, and you could almost visibly see the stress decrease.

In preparation for the final hearing, the MLP lawyer made a discovery requests on the landlord, including for the rental ledger or similar records. ("Discovery" is the process for getting information from the opposing side in a legal dispute before the trial, meant to improve fairness and increase the chances that the court will reach the right result.) The landlord did not provide any financial records. Because of the landlord's failure to answer discovery, we were able to have the court dismiss the eviction. While the landlord had not turned the heat back up when first ordered to do so, a couple days before the final hearing, the landlord relented in the face of a potential \$20,000 penalty for the long period of insufficient heat. The final result was that the family remained housed through the winter and the heat (finally) returned to a safe level. The family felt a sense of relief, and for once stability for their children. The family felt they never would have gotten to this point without the support, trust, and perseverance of the MLP lawyer. Their teams worked together to provide consistent, supportive care, when faced with problems that felt 'too big' and overwhelming across their entire family. The family feels a restored hope in asking for help, and seeking professional support, both in the community, legal and medical settings.



# Annual Data

**100 total cases supported**

**17**

Q1 (July-Sept. 2023)

**28**

Q2 (Oct.-Dec. 2023)

**30**

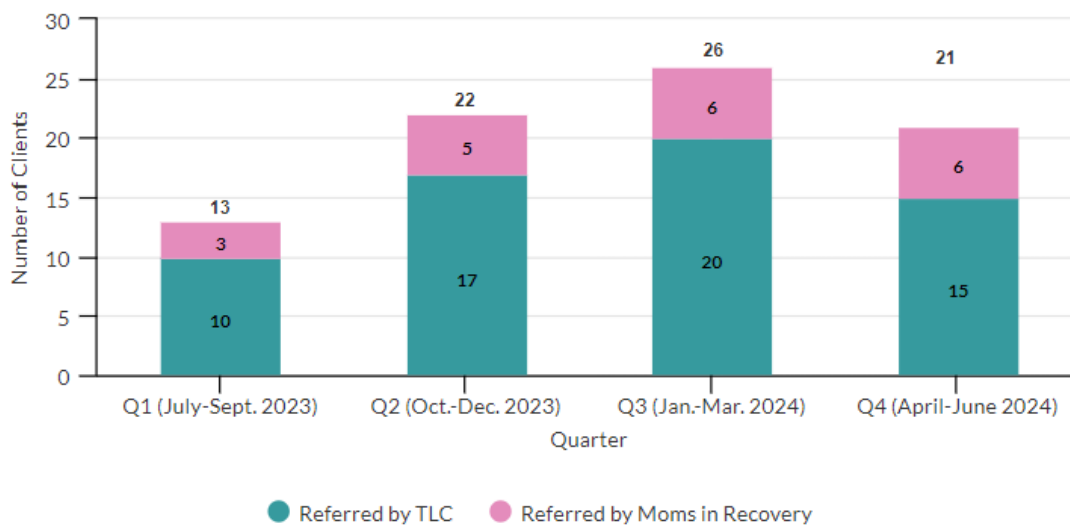
Q3 (Jan.-March 2024)

**25**

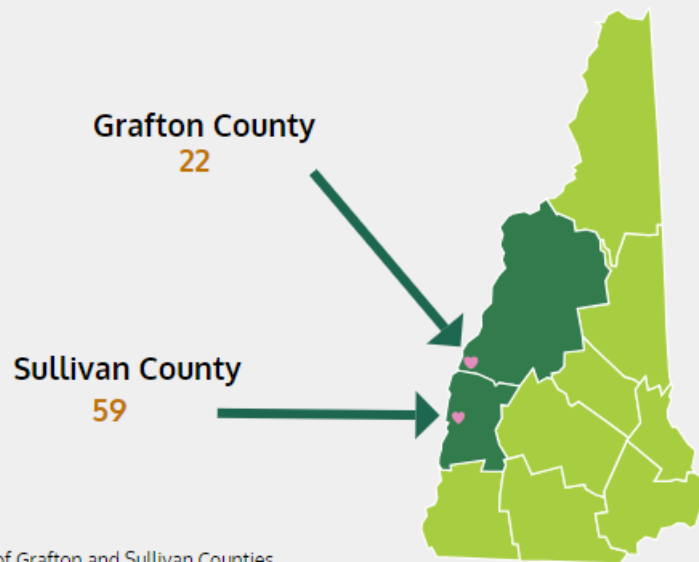
Q4 (April-June 2024)

\*Some cases were not accepted because they fall outside of the scope of the project.

## Total Number of Clients with Accepted Cases



## Client Location by NH County



\*One case fell outside of Grafton and Sullivan Counties.

# Process Measures

## Gender



7 men 75 women

## Race



- 2 African American
  - 1 Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 1 multiracial
  - 77 white
  - 1 preferred not to answer
- All clients are U.S. citizens

## Disability



14 people

## History of Domestic Violence



39 people

## Housing



23 people live with friends or family



2 person lives in a hotel/motel



49 people live in an apartment



4 people have other housing situations

\* 4 with unknown living situations

## Client Household Income Below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

Percent Below FPL	Number of Clients
50%	23
51-100%	25
101-150%	20
151-200%	2
201-300%	2
No income	10



## Patient story: benefits

One client was notified by Social Security that she had been overpaid disability benefits and Social Security was withholding all ongoing benefits until the overpayment was recovered. This client's sole source of cash income is from Social Security Disability. We helped the client work with Social Security to make a recovery plan that allows the client to continue receiving partial benefits during the recovery period. Without this support the client faced homelessness, food insecurity, and worsening health.

**Challenges that adults face can greatly impact the wellbeing of the child/children they care for**

**Parents:**



10 women receiving legal support from the MLP are/were pregnant

**Children:**



164 children under 18 years were parented by adults who were receiving legal support from the MLP

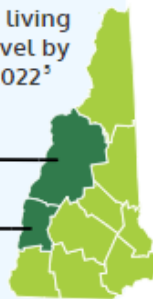
About 1 in 8 children lived with at least one parent who had a past year substance use disorder<sup>4</sup>



Rates of children living below poverty level by NH county in 2022<sup>3</sup>

Grafton: 12%

Sullivan: 13%



ACEs among children ages 0-17 in NH<sup>6</sup>

More ACEs experienced = higher risk for physical and mental health conditions

Over 20% experienced one ACE

Nearly 16% experienced two or more ACEs

4,596

new or reopened domestic violence cases received by the Circuit Court Family Division in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

88% of plaintiffs had no legal representation.<sup>2</sup>



**Patient story: housing**

A single parent with a severely disabled child and fostering a second child had faced eviction for unpaid rent in December. On her own, she reached agreement with the landlord to allow her a few days to get assistance to pay the full amount overdue and "undo" the eviction. Even though she did so, the landlord tried to have the Sheriff's department lock her out. She then sought the MLP's help, and we investigated the case with the court, helping clarify that the landlord's attempted lock-out was invalid. The court then issued an order dismissing the case so no lock-out can come from it.



**Examples of financial impact that the MLP has had on families**

**Monthly Benefits**

Annual  
July 2023 - June 2024

\$2,367 monthly Benefits

**Rent Subsidy**

\$1,069 increase in monthly rent subsidy

\$1,124 SSDI benefits resumed

**Insurance**

\$174 monthly Medicare premium

**One-time Benefits**

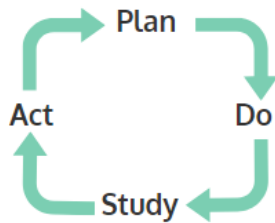
Annual  
July 2023 - June 2024

\$2,988 one-time

- \$1,300 rent for apartment with lead paint waived at tenant's move-out
- \$480 tenant-provided repairs subtracted from rent
- \$522 retroactive SSDI benefits paid, and
- \$686 retroactive TANF benefits paid



## Opportunities for expansion:



Our approach using a standard quality improvement method, PDSA (Plan-Study-Do-Act) elicits and responds to feedback continuously, using data metrics to guide the process. Below you can review some PDSA cycled improvements so far within the project:

Identified Need	Solution
Families with children above the age limit could benefit from civil legal aid	Expand age requirement (Stage 1 was 5 years and under and Stage 2 moved to 8 years and under)
Legal services for Vermont patients	Connect patients with Vermont Legal Aid and other resources within the state with a warm hand-off
Updated data about patient and staff thoughts and experiences	Resurveying clients and staff (Survey was completed during Stage 1)
Expansion of services	Continue to phase project with other locations

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