Operational Guidelines
Medical-Legal Partnerships in Washington State

Across the State of Washington, health care, public health, and legal organizations have been partnering to promote healthy communities and advance the belief that all people deserve the same opportunity to achieve optimal health and well-being.

Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) helps families and individuals understand and secure their legal rights to safe housing, adequate schooling, medical care, income supports, and other health-harming legal issues, with a special emphasis on vulnerable populations. Lawyers, doctors, social workers, and other medical staff work together to remove barriers to good health.

Our vision is to create a system in which all health organizations leverage legal expertise and services to better address communities' health-related social needs.

In Washington, a variety of individuals, agencies and healthcare organizations have been engaged in MLP work, sharing their approaches and successes. The Washington Medical-Legal Partnership serves as a coordinating agency to facilitate this cooperation. Coordinated collaboration across sectors allows us to build a strong foundation for medical-legal partnerships that are sustainable and closely connected across the State.

We recognize that building meaningful relationships across these sectors can be challenging and time-consuming. We believe that the positive impact will far exceed the investment for our neighbors, communities, and institutions.

In recognition of this potential, we embrace and adopt the following Operational Guidelines.

Operational Guidelines

1. MLPs benefit from investment by all partners, and each Washington MLP will include active participation as well as in-kind support, personnel, or financial support from institutions in both the legal aid and the health care or public health sectors. To be an MLP, a formal agreement is needed between the partnering health and legal organizations.

2. Washington MLPs will focus on low-income clients and other patient populations with unmet civil legal needs, such as veterans, patients at community health centers, patients with mental or behavioral health concerns, marginalized or stigmatized populations, and patients with complex medical conditions.

3. Washington MLPs may begin as referral networks or co-located services, but will strive to develop an integrated Medical-Legal Partnership model, with legal services

embedded in health care settings. Mature MLPs will have formal processes to screen patients' health-related social and legal needs, share data between health care and legal partners, communicate about patient-clients, and jointly set service and evaluation priorities that reflect their shared mission. Each MLP will annually assess their progress toward this integration.

4. Washington MLPs will seek to create and fund a coordinator position for each MLP. The purpose of the coordinator position is to establish, strengthen, and maintain the relationship between the legal and healthcare partners. Ideally housed within a healthcare partner, the coordinator will promote the MLP model by engaging in activities like staffing team meetings, facilitating trainings, evaluating services, connecting the statewide and national MLP organizations, recruiting and organizing *pro bono* and community partners, soliciting philanthropic support, and tracking financial benefit to individuals and institutions.

5. In order to leverage scant resources to meet tremendous need, Washington MLPs will provide a range of services including provider training and legal consultation, direct client services for patients, and systemic advocacy and health policy change. We recognize that legal needs can be met at a number of levels and that not all legal concerns require direct intervention by an attorney.

6. Washington MLPs will encourage the use of the shared experience of their members to inform system-improvement within healthcare and joint policy advocacy on the local and state levels, where allowed.

7. In order to demonstrate the impact of their activities, Washington MLP partners will collect and share input and outcomes data from both the legal (case management software) and medical (electronic health record) sectors.

8. Washington MLPs will provide opportunities for the next generation of health care, public health, and legal professionals to learn in interprofessional settings through partnerships with law schools, medical schools, nursing schools, schools of public health, schools of social work, and other health professional schools.

9. Washington MLPs will engage with the community and private legal sector to further expand the capacity to meet client needs through *pro bono* services and consultations. Washington MLPs will also strive to create their own MLP advisory board, comprised of community members with expertise and experience that reflect the program's model and mission. They can also serve as a resource to support MLP advocate requests or systemic advocacy projects.

10. Washington MLPs will work together through regularly scheduled joint meetings, shared resources, and the provision of mutual assistance where possible. All Washington MLPs will also belong to and contribute data to the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership.