

Addressing NMDOH Through a Medical-Legal Partnership



Susan Soto
Staff Attorney, Houston
Volunteer Lawyers
/ AccessHealth Medical-
Legal Partnership



Darci Moore
Population Health
Programs Coordinator,
AccessHealth



Carol Luna,
Lead Community Health
Worker Trainer,
AccessHealth



Addressing NMDOH Through a Medical-Legal Partnership

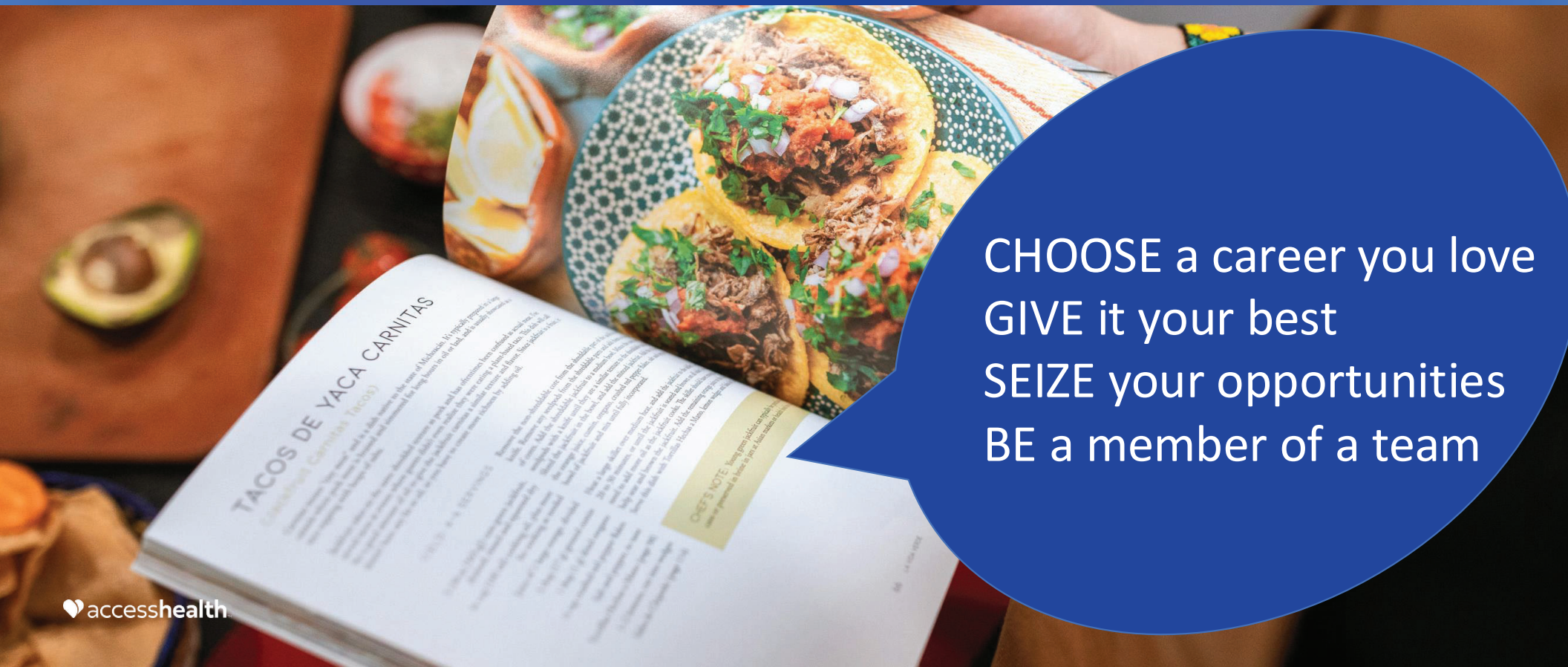
PRESENTED BY:

Darci Moore, Population Health Programs Coordinator

Carol Luna, Community Health Worker

Susan Soto, Staff Attorney

A Recipe for Success



CHOOSE a career you love
GIVE it your best
SEIZE your opportunities
BE a member of a team

List of Ingredients for Today's Presentation

- AccessHealth's **commitment** to NMDOH
- The **relationship** between unmet legal needs, NMDOH, and health outcomes
- Lessons **learned** in the development and implementation of a Medical-Legal Partnership within a Federally Qualified Health Center
- The **role** of the Community Health Worker in building rapport and determining the unique legal needs of the patient population

Preheat the Oven

AccessHealth's Commitment to NMDOH



OUR LOCATIONS

ACCESSHEALTH LOCATIONS

- A AccessHealth Brookshire Clinic
- B AccessHealth East Fort Bend Clinic
- C AccessHealth Fort Bend County Annex Missouri City Clinic
- D AccessHealth Richmond Clinic
- F AccessHealth Second Mile Clinic
- F AccessHealth Stafford Clinic

WIC CENTER LOCATIONS

- 1 Brookshire WIC Center
- 2 Bellville WIC Center
- 3 Columbus WIC Center
- 4 Eagle Lake WIC Center
- 5 Hempstead WIC Center
- 6 Katy WIC Center
- 7 Rosenberg WIC Center
- 8 Sealy WIC Center
- 9 Stafford WIC Center
- 10 Weimar WIC Center
- 11 Wharton WIC Center



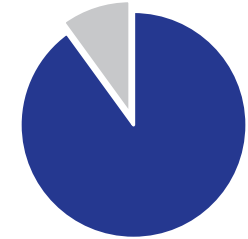
PATIENT PROFILE

accesshealth

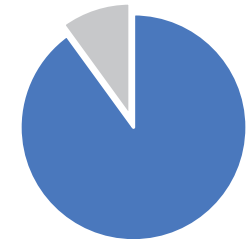
19,353 +

Unduplicated Patients Served at 6 Medical Sites in 2023

38% Male | 62% Female



90% of Patients are Minorities



98% of Patients in 2023 had Household Incomes at or Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

BASED ON INSURANCE

50%

Uninsured

19%

Private

28%

Medicaid/CHIP

3%

Medicare

EVERYONE IS ELIGIBLE

We are committed to fostering an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome, regardless of their income, insurance status, or financial position.



FACTORS AFFECTING HEALTH OUTCOMES



INTEGRATED CARE SYSTEM

Community Centered Health Home



Primary Care, Lab, OB/GYN, Behavioral, HIV & Substance Use, Dental, Pharmacy (Class A & D), WIC

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

 EPISCOPAL HEALTH FOUNDATION	 The George Foundation	 THE Henderson-Wessendorff FOUNDATION	 BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GREATER HOUSTON	 FORT BEND HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES Prevent. Promote. Protect.	 United Way Greater Houston	 Hogg Foundation for Mental Health
 forC Fort Bend Regional Council On Substance Abuse Inc.	 Catholic Charities ARCHDIOCESE OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON	 PREVENTION INSTITUTE	 Direct Relief			 FORT BEND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
 Greater Houston HEALTHCONNECT	 THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MD Anderson Cancer Center	 MEMORIAL HERMANN	 St. Luke's Health	 niagara BOTTLING, LLC	 HOUSTON Methodist LEADING MEDICINE	 the Y
 UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON SUGAR LAND	 Wharton County Junior College	 FORT BEND WOMEN'S CENTER	 ATTACK POVERTY	 RICHMOND EST. TEXAS 1857	 missouri CITY TEXAS the show me city	 TEXANA

What We Do

The Population Health Department, including our **Care Coordination Team**, focuses on the **Non-Medical Drivers of Health** (NMDOH or SDOH).

Our team is committed to incorporating upstream preventative support services through innovation, advocacy, and dignified care coordination.

What We Do

- **Step 1** Each patient completes a social and medical needs screening tool addressing 5 domains including education/employment, transportation, housing/utilities, legal needs, and access to food.
- **Step 2** Screens indicating a need are flagged by clinical staff to the department's care coordination team.
- **Step 3** Our team of Community Health Workers and Navigators contact the patient to provide education, resources, and referrals as needed.

accesshealth
SOCIAL & MEDICAL NEEDS FORM

AccessHealth is committed to reducing both medical and social issues that impact our patients' well-being. Your response to this form will allow us to connect you to our community resources. Kindly respond to questions that apply to **your household**.

For Office Use Only
Name: _____
Date: _____
Patient #: _____
PAS Initials: _____ MA Initials: _____

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

1. Do you want help with school or job training?*

No Technical/Vocational Training
 GED College Readiness
 ESL

2. What is your current employment status? (Choose one)

Unemployed Full-time job
 Not looking for work Part-time/Temporary, looking for full-time job
 Part-time or temporary job N/A

HOUSING AND UTILITIES

3. What is your current housing situation? (Choose one)

I have stable housing
 I am staying in a hotel, in a shelter, or with relatives/friends
 I am living on the street, in a car, or in a park

4. In the past 3 months, has the utility company shut off your service for not paying your bills?

Yes No

5. In the past 3 months, did you worry about clothing for you or your family for work, school, etc.?

Yes No

FOOD

6. In the past 3 months, did you worry that your food would run out before you had money to buy more?

Yes No

7. In the past 3 months, did the food you bought run out before you had money to buy more?

Yes No

8. Would you be interested in receiving additional food resources? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

Yes, I would like help signing up for SNAP (food stamps)
 Yes, I would like to be connected to local food pantries
 No

TRANSPORTATION

9. In the past 3 months, has a lack of transportation kept you from getting to medical appointments, meetings, work or from getting things you need for daily living?*

(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

Yes, it has kept me from medical appointments and/or getting medications
 Yes, it has kept me from non-medical appointments, meetings, or getting things that I need
 Yes, it has kept me from getting to work
 No

LEGAL NEEDS

10. Would you be interested in getting help with any legal matters such as divorce/custody issues, tax and probate, record clearing, immigration, guardianship, or other civil cases?

Yes No Maybe

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

11. If any of your needs are urgent, would you like a member of our team to contact you for assistance?

Yes No

12. If you answered yes, what is a good time to contact you?

Early Morning (8 a.m. – 10 a.m.)
 Mid Morning (10 a.m. – 12 p.m.)
 Lunch (12 p.m. – 2 p.m.)
 Afternoon (2 p.m. – 5 p.m.)

General Care Coordination Services

The department's **Care Coordination Team** is made up of specialized **Community Health Workers** (CHWs) who connect patients to internal programs and community resources.

We monitor trends in patient health outcomes to develop programs and partnerships that address a variety of nonmedical needs.

Forming the MLP at AccessHealth

- AccessHealth leaders attended an **MLP learning collaborative** hosted by Harris County Public Health & visited with various legal aid providers
- HVL had an existing MLP with Texas Children's Hospital
- HVL's **pro bono model** was more sustainable and HVL was willing to expand to Fort Bend to build an MLP
- Pilot Stage (2021) - Patient referrals to HVL and an in-house Legal Education series

Houston Volunteer Lawyers



- Largest provider of **pro bono** legal services in Texas
- **Free legal assistance** on civil legal matters to eligible, low-income area residents
- LegalLines, clinics, pro bono legal representation



Combine into a Large Bowl

Unmet Legal Needs, NMDOH & Health Outcomes

An MLP Taste Test

1. You Placed Your Dot

2. Let's Debrief

"Health-Harming Legal Needs"

- Unmet civil legal needs are increasingly characterized as **"Health-Harming Legal Needs."**
- When unresolved, common civil legal issues such as **evictions, domestic violence, child custody**, and access to **public benefits** have devastating health consequences for individuals and families.

Michele Statz and Brianna Watters, 2024: An Agenda for Addressing Health-Harming Legal Needs in Indigenous Communities, American Journal of Public Health 114, 1170_1174, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2024.307774>

History of Medical-Legal Partnerships

- **1960's** The Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, Mississippi
- **1980's** Whitman-Walker Health in Washington, D.C.
- **1990's** Boston Medical Center & Greater Boston Legal Services
- **2000's** National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership

Joel Teitelbaum, Ellen Lawton, 2017: The Roots and Branches of the Medical-Legal Partnership Approach to Health: From Collegiality to Civil Rights to Health Equity, Yale J of Health Policy, Law, and Ethics, 17:2, 343-377.

MLPs in Texas

- **2008:** Brownsville & San Antonio
- **2021:** First MLP in Fort Bend County
- **18 partnerships in Texas**
- **14%** of Texans live in poverty
- **2022:** 0.6 civil legal aid attorney per 10,000 low-income Texans

National Center for Medical Legal Partnership, 2018: Medical-Legal Partnerships in Texas & Opportunities for Growth; Deborah Hankinson and Harry M. Reasoner, 2022: The State of Access to Justice in Texas, Texas Bar J, 85:6, 408-410.

Early Stages of MLP at AccessHealth

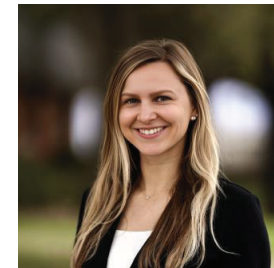
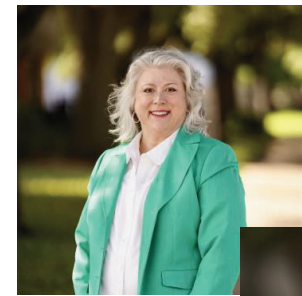
Early Challenges

- Programs working independently, not coordinated
- No dedicated attorney
- Unable to update EMRs

AccessHealth's MLP Team

The Medical-Legal Partnership is a **collaboration** between Houston Volunteer Lawyers and AccessHealth.

The MLP **team** is comprised of our Staff Attorney, Susan Soto, the clinic's Lead CHW Trainer, Carol Luna, and Population Health Program Coordinator, Darci Moore.



Add a Healthy Pinch of...

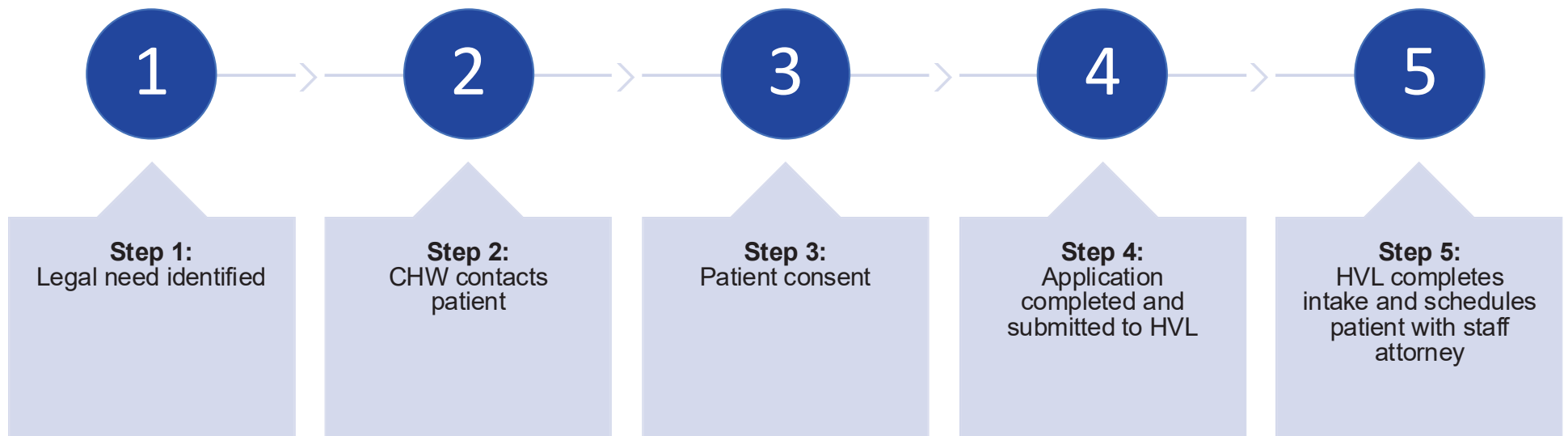
Community Health Worker Expertise



Patient Eligibility Criteria

- Must be **active** AccessHealth patient (seen within the last year)
- Have a completed and updated **social needs screener** on file
- Not already working with a private attorney
- Income at or below 200% of the federal poverty guideline

Workflow



A CHW's Perspective

What makes this MLP work:

- Clinic rounds
- Training sessions
- Staff referrals
- 100% advice and counsel



A CHW's Perspective

Continued Challenges:

- SDOH screening completion by patients every 90 days
- Limited to no legal assistance for Immigration
- Staff training & buy-in
- Community engagement

Medical-Legal Partnership Today

- In-house Staff Attorney
- MLP Mixer
- Wills Clinic
- Clinic staff training sessions
- Marketing the program to clinic patients



Medical-Legal Partnership
with Houston Volunteer Lawyers

Susan H. Soto, M.Ed., J.D.
Houston Volunteer Lawyer

FREE LEGAL ADVICE

FREE LEGAL ADVICE ON CIVIL LEGAL TOPICS

- Available to all patients at AccessHealth.
- Family law, housing, estate planning, social security and more.
- For more information, contact the Community Health Worker at your clinic. Ask clinic staff for a referral.

Legal Needs Addressed by MLP

- Family law
- Landlord / tenant issues
- Alternatives to guardianship
- Guardianship
- Wills & estate planning
- ID restoration
- Consumer law
- Naturalization
- Record clearing
- Employment

By the Numbers

- **Jan - May 2024:**
 - 20 individuals served
- **May 2024 - present (with staff attorney):**
 - 100+ individuals have received at least legal advice and counsel
 - 20+ cases placed with a volunteer lawyer
 - Just a few on waiting list
- **Jan 2024 - present:**
 - 1000+ individuals screened positive for legal need

MLP Success Stories

Señora N.

An octogenarian clinic patient with a legal permanent resident card came in for a consultation with the staff attorney because she wished to become a U.S. citizen. After receiving legal advice and counsel from the staff attorney, Señora N. was paired with a pro bono attorney, who helped her complete an application for naturalization. We are eagerly waiting for news about Señora N.'s interview with USCIS and her naturalization ceremony appointment.

MLP Success Stories

Mrs. O.

Mrs. O. came to the MLP with a pro se divorce that she had already filed. She was having trouble understanding the judge's requests and requirements and sought help to navigate the court system. After two meetings with the staff attorney, Mrs. O.'s paperwork was finally accepted by the judge and her divorce was granted – less than five weeks from the time she first applied with the MLP. Ms. O. was so happy with the outcome that she called the staff attorney before leaving the courthouse to share the good news!

Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration** between entities is key
- **Plan** the level of access the staff attorney will have to EMRs
- **Evaluate** office and program space before launching

Let It Simmer!

Our Vision for the Future of the MLP

Next Steps

- **Build** the pro bono attorney network in Fort Bend County
- **Increase** program capacity
- **Increase** legal education opportunities for patients



THANK YOU

Darci Moore: dmoore@myaccesshealth.org

Carol Luna: cluna@myaccesshealth.org

Susan Soto: ssoto@myaccesshealth.org or susan.soto@hvlp.org



Questions?