

Civil Legal Aid Messaging Guide for Partnering with HRSA-Funded Health Centers

Strategies for delivering a clear message about civil legal aid



- 1. Understand your audience:** Come to your audience with a clear understanding of health centers' goals and business model. Leverage this knowledge, talk with audience members, not at them, and emphasize analogous objectives.

Remember, this target audience = individuals and groups outside the legal community.



- 2. Drop the lingo and be concise:** Avoid jargon and lengthy explanations that can disengage your audience. Instead, take a conversational tone and use laymen's terms to describe the legal landscape.

Say This	Not That
Federally funded legal aid community	LSC-funded agency
Legal community contributions	Private pro bono resources
Health-harming social conditions	Civil legal aid problems



- 3. Describe the connection:** Make the link between health care and civil legal aid clear and explain the concept as an ongoing dialogue between these two industries that are providing essential human services.

- 4. Avoid assumptions:** Do not assume that the benefits of an MLP are obvious to health care providers. Otherwise, your audience may be left thinking, "What's in it for me?" Beyond just describing the connection between civil legal aid and health care, emphasize shared goals.

For example, accentuate the point that there can be measurable reduced costs to health care providers when civil legal aid is utilized to improve patients' living conditions and other social and environmental causes of health issues.



- 5. Make your message a human story, NOT a legal one:** Bring the concept of medical-legal partnerships to life by focusing significant energy on the story of one person's challenges and ultimate accomplishments with the help of an MLP

The slideshow presentation that accompanies this guide includes one person's success story, but don't be afraid to incorporate another anecdote that illustrates the powerful and positive effect MLPs can have.



- 6. Generate a call to action:** Make sure you explain how the audience can advance this work.
- 7. Create opportunities for dialogue:** Use the slides as a backdrop to answer their questions about the legal community, and then be prepared with [Phase I of the MLP Toolkit](#), so you can move quickly from basic questions into action. Your audience may already be on board – so be ready to discuss how you can begin to operationalize your partnership vision together.

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Understanding your audience: What civil legal aid leaders should know about HRSA-funded health centers

Health centers provide high quality preventive and primary health care to patients regardless of their ability to pay. Approximately one in 14 people in the U.S. relies on a HRSA-funded health center for medical care.

Nearly 1,400 health centers operate 9,800 service delivery sites in every U.S. state, D.C., Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the Pacific Basin; these health centers employ more than 170,000 staff who provide care for nearly 23 million patients. For millions of Americans, including some of the most vulnerable individuals and families, health centers are the essential medical home where they find services that promote health, diagnose and treat disease and disability, and help them cope with environmental challenges that put them at risk.

How health centers work

Health centers are public and private non-profit health care organizations that comply with Federal requirements to:

- Serve a medically underserved population,
- Provide appropriate and necessary services with fees adjusted on patients' ability to pay,
- Demonstrate sound clinical and financial management, and
- Be governed by a board, a majority of which includes health center patients.

Most of these health centers apply for and receive Health Center Program grant funding that, on average, constitutes about 18 percent of their operating revenue. The remainder comes from Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, patient fees, and other resources.

Seventy health centers meet all health center program requirements, but do not receive health center grant funding. These are called Health Center Program look-alikes.

For more information see <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/about/what-is-a-health-center/index.html>.

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