

# Findings from the Implementation and Outcomes Evaluations of the Kaiser Permanente Health, Housing, and Justice Initiative

An Executive Summary  
June 6, 2024

Full results from both evaluations will be shared in early 2025. If you have questions about the executive summary, please contact Marisa Conner at Kaiser Permanente: [Marisa.L.Conner@kp.org](mailto:Marisa.L.Conner@kp.org)

## Overview of the Health, Housing, and Justice: Medical-Legal Partnership Initiative

Kaiser Permanente's national Office of Community Health launched the Health, Housing, and Justice: Medical-Legal Partnership Initiative within the Kaiser Permanente healthcare system to integrate robust medical-legal partnerships into Kaiser Permanente and build capacity of the community-based legal aid ecosystem to increase housing stability and eviction risk for Kaiser Permanente members and communities. Five Kaiser Permanente regions implemented the medical-legal partnership model and partnered with local community-based legal aid agencies to provide housing-related legal services to Kaiser Permanente patients:

- Kaiser Permanente Southern California (with Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County);
- Kaiser Permanente Northwest (with Legal Aid Services of Oregon);
- Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States (with Maryland Legal Aid);
- Kaiser Permanente Northern California (with Legal Services of Northern California); and
- Kaiser Permanente Colorado (with Colorado Legal Services).

The medical-legal partnership infrastructure consists of curbside consults (brief legal consultations), office hours, training, and legal referrals as well as legal aid partner services that provide support and training for each team to be able to address housing related legal issues.

## Implementation Evaluation

### Goals

The Center for Community Health and Evaluation (CCHE) conducted an implementation evaluation focused on staff and system capacity, barriers and facilitators to adoption and spread of operational changes, and learnings from implementation at participating medical-legal partnership sites.

### Key Findings

- **Medical-legal partnership sites expanded access to legal services for Kaiser Permanente patients and members.** During the program's first two years, more than 800 referrals were made to legal services. Attorneys noted that many of the clients who came to them via the Kaiser Permanente medical-legal partnership would not have received services through their agencies' typical intake processes. In some cases, attorneys described the people they served through the Kaiser Permanente medical-legal partnership as particularly vulnerable due to the compounding effects of poverty, housing instability, and their medical conditions.
- **Training for Kaiser Permanente staff increased screening and staff knowledge.** In general, Kaiser Permanente staff reported that initial training equipped them with adequate knowledge to begin making referrals to legal services. Ongoing learning through office hours, curbside consults, and case collaboration were important to growing their ability to identify appropriate referrals.
- **A large majority (80%) of Kaiser Permanente patient-facing staff reported that the medical-legal partnership improved their overall job satisfaction.** In interviews, Kaiser Permanente staff indicated that the medical-legal partnership reduced their feelings of helplessness around offering meaningful options to people experiencing housing challenges. Every medical-legal partnership stakeholder understood housing as a critical driver of health, and nearly all agreed that the medical-legal partnership benefitted patients.

## Outcomes Evaluation

### Goals

The Partners in Education and Research (PiER) Center at Kaiser Permanente Colorado's Institute for Research designed and conducted a cross-site evaluation study across all participating regions and partners. The descriptive, mixed-method evaluation study used a cross-sequential design with secondary and direct data collection protocols to address the study questions. Study questions focused on: 1) reach & project implementation workflow; 2) participant outcomes; 3) healthcare system impact.

### Key Findings

In 2023, preliminary findings from the medical-legal partnership survey and interview data indicated positive early outcomes and trends, including:

- **Participants reported that connection to legal services improved their understanding of their legal rights and self-advocacy.** Participants with positive medical-legal partnership experiences cited their lawyers' promptness, communication, and dedication to resolving the issue, as well as additional supportive behaviors such as referrals to outside organizations, as facilitators to success. Survey and interview data indicated that participants improved their knowledge and understanding of their legal rights by follow-up.
- **Emergency department use and hospitalizations decreased** from the 6-month period prior to referral to the 6-month period after referral for sub-groups who received legal review of their case and for those who had a case closed. This is reflected both in the number and rate of hospitalizations and emergency department visits, as well as in the proportion of patients in each group who had at least one emergency department visit or hospitalization.
- **Satisfaction with Kaiser Permanente healthcare and providers remained high and interviewees attributed trust in Kaiser Permanente to the medical-legal partnership,** particularly when the medical-legal partnership comprehensively addressed the "whole person," meaning needs were met across legal, social, and health domains.
- **Interview participants reported improved housing quality and stability.** Several interview participants indicated that legal aid helped them avoid evictions and maintain stable housing. Follow-up patient surveys reported a 150% increase in patients self-reporting stable housing.

- **Interview participants reported improvements in their physical and mental health.** Interview participants reported positive outcomes resulting from resolving issues through legal aid. These included improved mental health (reduced stress, depression, and anxiety) as well as physical health (improved mobility, healthier weight, and better sleep).

### Plans for Further Research

Promising trends emerged for participants even with only 6-months follow-up measurement. Further evaluation is needed to build the sample and to extend the follow-up period to confirm these findings. The 2024 outcomes evaluation will also boost rigor by including non-intervention comparison groups. Key areas of improvement will include enhancing communication, data sharing, qualitative methods, and examining longer-term outcomes.