

NURSING-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP

Policy Agenda

2018

THE 2018 NURSING-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP POLICY AGENDA

Introduction

The Nursing-Legal Partnership (NLP) is a unique collaboration between the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium (NNCC) and Health, Education and Legal Assistance Project: A Medical-Legal Partnership (HELP: MLP). An interdisciplinary team of lawyers and public health nurses work hand-in-hand to ensure that pregnant women and new mothers have the opportunity to raise their children in safe, healthy homes, with uninterrupted health insurance coverage and other benefits. As public health nurses educate and support new parents through the evidence-based Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Mabel Morris/Parents As Teachers (PAT) home visiting programs, lawyers offer concrete support to families in crisis with unmet legal needs, including issues related to housing, income, education, employment, immigration and domestic violence.

NLP goals include: improving housing conditions for families living in unsafe homes; ensuring pregnant women and children have health insurance; improving the economic well-being of vulnerable families; decreasing toxic maternal stress; evaluating program results; and building a movement for widespread replication.

Funded primarily by grants from the Rita & Alex Hillman Foundation, the Oak Foundation, and the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund, the NLP project includes engagement in systemic advocacy for local and state policy reform that will resonate beyond the circumstances of individual clients enrolled in the two home visiting programs. To that end, NLP nurses and attorneys have researched and developed a policy agenda that incorporates client voices and nurses' experience in the field. Going forward, this agenda will educate and inform conversations with local partners, external stakeholders and state/city officials, while participating in policy coalitions with aligned goals. The NLP prioritizes the following issues for policy advocacy and education.



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Catalyze Collaboration Among Home Visiting & Family Support Programs

Several home visiting programs in Philadelphia address the needs of pregnant and parenting low-income women by offering comprehensive family supports over an enrollment period of time. These primary programs, which are part of large non-profit, public health organizations, mostly operate independently, often vying for the same funding. There is limited collaboration among these large home-visiting programs to advocate for changes in systems that create barriers to optimal health and well-being among the families we serve. A strategic alliance of Philadelphia's largest home visiting programs focused on networking, resource sharing, training and systemic advocacy, could wield considerable organizational clout and create collective impact benefiting families that we collectively serve. **The NLP seeks to catalyze and support strategic alliance and collaboration among home-visiting and family support programs in the city.**

ACTION STEPS

- Sponsor a Brunch and Learn educational series addressing the unmet legal needs of home-visiting program clients which negatively impact their health and well-being. Through networking, sharing resources and training, home-visiting program staff will align toward collective systemic advocacy and impact.

Identify and Address Barriers to Maintaining Health Insurance Coverage

The Affordable Care Act decreased the number of uninsured people in Philadelphia in several ways, including the expansion of Medical Assistance (Medicaid) in Pennsylvania. Yet many poorly resourced pregnant and parenting women with complex health and social needs still lack ongoing health insurance for themselves and their families due to barriers securing and maintaining coverage. Access to quality health care and continuity of care hinges upon uninterrupted health insurance coverage. Identifying and reducing barriers to securing and maintaining health insurance coverage will enable vulnerable families to get the health and social services they need to sustain their health and their well-being. The NLP seeks to support policies and emerging legislation that help reduce barriers to health insurance coverage for low-income pregnant and parenting women in Philadelphia. **The NLP seeks to support policies and emerging legislation that help reduce barriers to health insurance coverage for low-income pregnant and parenting women in Philadelphia.**

ACTION STEPS

- Partner with local and state legislators and organizations in support of systemic advocacy toward reducing barriers to uninterrupted health insurance coverage.
- Inform local and state policymakers on the impact of disrupted health insurance coverage on the health and well-being of individuals, families and the Philadelphia community.
- Protect the rights of families to ongoing health insurance coverage and continuity of care through NLP legal services and referrals to community resources.

Improve Housing Conditions Through Enforcement of City Codes

Many families live in unsafe and hazardous living conditions contributing to their poor health and well-being, including high stress levels. Of particular concern are high blood lead levels among children living in homes with lead exposure, which carries a significant risk of impaired cognitive functioning and behavior. Improved health and well-being of Philadelphia families will result from greater availability and affordability of safe and sanitary housing options, as well as through enforcement of lead laws and anti-eviction and safe housing measures. **The NLP seeks to support policies for the prevention of lead poisoning and response to childhood lead exposure, including the enforcement of existing lead laws in Philadelphia. The NLP seeks to ensure that the right to legal counsel in housing court is known by clients and exercised as needed.**

ACTION STEPS

- Work with local and state legislators and organizations in support of systemic advocacy work toward improving housing conditions for families in Philadelphia.
- Inform local and state policymakers on the impact of unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions on the health and well-being of individuals, families and the community and the need for revised housing policies and increased funding to meet needs and improve community health.
- Support the work of community-based organization and city-wide agencies focused on creating bold public health and housing policies, including the preservation of existing affordable housing.
- Support the collaboration of state coalitions and city-wide agencies to identify, fund and provide housing improvements to homeowners and tenants.
- Protect the rights of tenants and homeowners to safe and healthy living conditions through NLP legal services and referrals to community resources.

Reform TANF Provisions to Better Support Vulnerable Families

The current Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is not a viable or adequately funded financial resource for pregnant and parenting women and their families in Pennsylvania. The program currently fails to fulfill its mission of providing adequate assistance to families living in poverty and creates barriers to employment and subsidized childcare. TANF program reforms are necessary to better meet the needs of vulnerable, low-resourced individuals and families in Philadelphia. The authors of a new Community Legal Services (CLS) report (Mending the Safety Net: Why PA Must Restore its TANF Program to Protect Its Neediest Families) recommends that the PA Department of Human Services (DHS) should: simplify program rules for families facing homelessness, physical or behavioral health problems, or sexual assault or domestic violence; modify financial eligibility rules and grant amounts to make TANF a more viable financial resource for pregnant women and families; reinvigorate TANF employment and training programs, to allow families to move more quickly toward self-sufficiency; and commission a new

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Reform TANF Provisions to Better Support Vulnerable Families (*continued*)

study of TANF leavers, to better understand what happens to families who no longer receive TANF, and to assist in identifying further policy solutions. **The NLP seeks to support reform of these TANF provisions in accordance with the recommendations set forth in the recent CLS report.**

ACTION STEPS

- Partner with local and state legislators and agencies, community-based organizations, and national offices of NFP/PAT, in support of activities to reform the TANF program to better meet the needs of vulnerable, low-resourced individuals and families in Philadelphia.
- Advocate for reducing barriers to stable and securely scheduled employment and subsidized childcare associated with TANF's employment and training programs.
- Advance recommendations from *Mending the Safety Net: Why PA Must Restore its TANF Program to Protect its Neediest Families*.

Increase Emergency Housing for Pregnant and Parenting Victims of DV

Pregnant and parenting women who are victims of domestic violence (DV) have tremendous difficulty finding emergency housing given its scarcity in Philadelphia. Women Against Abuse has developed an advocacy agenda comprised of the following initiatives:

- Ensure adequate funding for DV services
- Empower survivors to gain independence
- Create safety for victims of DV
- Provide safe and affordable housing for survivors of DV
- Provide access to safe emergency and transitional housing for individuals and families experiencing DV
- Ensure safety for survivors living in the community through landlord/tenant protections
- Create affordable housing opportunities to provide a backdoor out of homelessness
- Create a coordinated community response to DV

The NLP seeks to support efforts by Women Against Abuse toward providing safe and affordable emergency and transition housing for individuals and families experiencing domestic violence. NLP supports a robust coordinated city-wide community response to domestic violence and the needs of victims.

ACTION STEPS

- Partner with Women Against Abuse and other local stakeholders (such as People's Emergency Center), to work towards creating a robust, coordinated, city-wide response to the problem of DV and the needs of victims, including increased emergency housing.

Eliminate Food Insecurity and Improve Access to Healthy Food

Most clients of the Philadelphia NFP and Mabel Morris home visiting programs live in neighborhoods with poor options to purchase healthy food. Poor access to healthy food in the home, school and community, contributes to obesity, chronic health conditions, stress and generally higher levels of illness and poor health. **The NLP seeks to support the increased presence of large grocery chains, farm markets and healthy food-provision organizations in vulnerable neighborhoods to enable accessibility and affordability of healthy food choices. It seeks to support the development and funding of healthy good nutrition initiatives in childcare centers and schools, and community garden space.**

ACTION STEPS

- Support activities of community-based organizations focused on eliminating food insecurity experienced by low-resourced individuals and families in Philadelphia.
- Inform local policymakers on the impact of food insecurity on the health and well-being of individuals, families and the community and the need for revised policies and funding.

Promote Secure Scheduling Work Weeks

Retail and food service employees encounter unpredictability in their workplace by way of last-minute scheduling changes, inadequate ongoing hours, back-to-back shifts that prevent adequate rest and being on call without being paid. Their income fluctuates, childcare management is difficult and family supports are disrupted. Fair scheduling standards already exist in some states and localities, including San Francisco, Seattle, New York City, and the District of Columbia, as well as Oregon, Vermont and seven other states. **The NLP seeks to inform and support Secure Scheduling regulations in Philadelphia for stability and predictability in shift-working employees' schedules and opportunities to earn additional and consistent income.**

ACTION STEPS

- Convince employers, city-welfare administration and other agencies who stand to gain from such regulations of the cost-benefit of Secure Scheduling.
- Encourage employers who receive tax benefits from employing women with TANF to practice Secure Scheduling.

Advance Legislative Support for Lactating Students

Lactating students in Philadelphia experience a profound lack of support for breastmilk pumping and/or breastfeeding while at school. Current legislation does not confer students the same rights and support given to employees at their educational institutions. Due to barriers to breastfeeding, lactating students often must choose between attending school and breastfeeding their infants. Precedent exists in California and Virginia with legislation piggybacked onto employee laws supporting breastfeeding and pumping accommodations. **The NLP seeks to support enactment of legislation requiring schools to remove barriers to breastfeeding and to provide time, a place and other accommodations needed by lactating mothers, in support of their ongoing educational pursuit and the health and wellness of their infants.**

ACTION STEPS

- Support pending legislation on breastfeeding accommodations, such as the PA Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (HB 1176) and Sanitary Conditions for Nursing Mothers Act (HB 1100).
- Inform academic institutions of the rights of tuition-paying students who should not be penalized for missing class time due to a lack of breastfeeding accommodations.
- Demonstrate the benefits to students and academic programs of breastfeeding accommodations in terms of fewer missed academic days.

Promote Safe and Clean Public Spaces Through Community Revitalization

At the 2016 and 2017 Community Action Days sponsored by the Philadelphia NFP and Mabel Morris home visiting program collaborative, clients identified many issues needing to be addressed in their communities, including unsafe and unsanitary abandoned buildings and outdoor public spaces. They pointed to the need for greater safety and improved sanitation in public spaces like parks and playgrounds, deserving community action initiated by systemic advocacy efforts. **The NLP seeks to support increased funding for revitalization activities by city agencies, foundations and community-based organizations to improve the safety and cleanliness of public areas in low-resourced communities.**

ACTION STEPS

- Work with City Council members, grassroots community-based organizations and public health/city agencies, in support of innovative and ongoing activities to improve the safety and cleanliness of vulnerable communities.
- Inform local policymakers about the impact of unsafe and unsanitary public spaces and abandoned buildings on individual, family and community health and well-being, and the need for revised policies and funding.

Improve Funding of Non-Emergent Transport for Families with Medicaid

Medical Assistance provides non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) benefit to its recipients; however, funding restrictions prevent parents and their children to utilize conjoint transportation benefits. This places an undue burden on families and leads to missed appointment and inconsistent health care. Families need reliable non-emergent medical transportation. Clients' failure to attend health care appointments due to unreliable transportation results in missed appointments, financial losses for healthcare providers, and the overuse of emergency transportation.

Since 2015, the Good Care Collaborative statewide action committee of the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, has worked with the State of New Jersey, consumers and their advocates, along with several community partners, to improve NEMT in their state. The Collaborative recommended that NEMT contracts include the following provisions: GPS utilization, complaint resolution, reduced "will-call" times, and mandatory reminder phone calls. **The NLP seeks to support improvement in non-emergent transportation (NEMT) of Medical Assistance clients and their children to health care services through funding revision.**

ACTION STEPS

- Document and demonstrate the negative effects of restrictive NEMT on families with children.
- Partner with consumers and advocates toward improved NEMT transportation for families with Medical Assistance through funding code revisions.
- Inform local and state policymakers on the cost-benefit to individuals, families and the community of conjoint funding of NEMT.

The Nursing-Legal Partnership is a collaboration between the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium (NNCC) and the Health, Education & Legal assistance Project (HELP:MLP).

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