Montana Health Justice Partnership - Recovery Project in Region 4

2026 Montana Opioid Abatement Trust Grants

Montana Legal Services Association

Alison Paul
616 Helena Ave #100
Helena, MT 59601

donor@mtlsa.org
O: 406-438-3448
M: 406-439-2518

Michelle Potts

616 Helena Ave #100
Helena, MT 59601

donor@mtlsa.org
O: 406-442-9830
M: 406-438-3448

Application Form

Region Selection

To collaborate with someone else on this request, click the blue "Collaborate" button in the top-right corner.

Project Name*

Montana Health Justice Partnership - Recovery Project in Region 4

You may only select one Abatement Region, if you are applying for funding from more than one region you will need to fill out and submit a separate application for each region.

Select Multi County Abatement Region OR Metro Region*

Select the Multi-County Abatement Region **OR** the Metro Region you are requesting grant funds from.
Click HERE for a detailed map of Multi-County Regions and Metro Regions.

Abatement Region 4

Regional Funding Request*

If you are applying to multiple regions, please select all the regions to which you are submitting applications.

Abatement Region 3
Abatement Region 4
Abatement Region 5
Cascade County Metro Region
Flathead County Metro Region
Lewis & Clark County Metro Region
Yellowstone County Metro Region

Application Overview

About the Organization/Program*

Give a brief description of the Organization/Program/Project. Include the mission statement and the services provided.

The Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA) is a non-profit law firm whose mission is to protect and enhance the civil legal rights of, and promote systemic change for, Montanans living in poverty. For 60 years, MLSA has provided free legal assistance (such as legal information, advice, and representation) to thousands of vulnerable Montanans. Civil legal aid helps Montanans to address urgent legal issues such as domestic violence, family law, housing law, public benefits, debt, tribal law, and more. These common civil legal problems get to the heart of essential human needs: health, safety, and access to food and shelter.

MLSA accomplishes its mission in part by partnering with seven Federally Funded Qualified Health Clinics, one hospital, MOAT Region Five, VA Healthcare, and the Montana Consortium for Urban Indian Health to form the Montana Health Justice Partnership, a medical-legal partnership first established in 2015 that addresses the physical and mental health-harming civil legal needs of patients, including those with substance use disorders. MLSA is an essential partner for creating long-term recovery support and solutions for people and families living with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). These vulnerable patients struggle to maintain a stable recovery while civil legal matters endanger their physical safety, food security, safe housing, and adequate healthcare. By giving healthcare providers the tools needed to treat common civil legal problems, such as ensuring access to basic food benefits, securing orders of protection against abusers, preventing illegal debt collection practices, and attaining safe and stable housing, MLSA helps OUD patients build healthy lives and stay in recovery. The primary partners for this expanded Recovery Project in Region 4 are Aware, Inc. (with physical locations in Anaconda and Whitehall), Blacktail Health (with locations in Dillon and Anaconda), and Ag Worker Health and Services (with a location in Dillon).

What category does the program fit into*

Check the category/categories the program fits into. You may select more than one option.

Click **HERE** for a list of approved opioid remediation uses

Recovery

Exhibit E List of Opioid Remediation Uses

Schedule A - select all that apply

E. EXPANSION OF WARM HAND-OFF PROGRAMS AND RECOVERY SERVICES

Exhibit E List of Opioid Remediation Uses

Schedule B - select all that apply

B. SUPPORT PEOPLE IN TREATMENT & RECOVERY

How does the program meet the Opioid Remediation Guidelines*

Provide a detailed explanation of how the program fits into the approved Opioid Remediation Guidelines selected in the above question.

Please be specific

The Montana Health Justice Partnership-Recovery Project meets the Opioid Remediation Guidelines for Recovery by providing evidence-based services that adhere to the American Society of Addiction Medicine continuum of care Dimension 5: Recovery Environment Interactions, which focuses on the safety and support a person has access to in their current environment. The MHJP-Recovery Project in the Region 4 will help healthcare patients and participants in a clinical recovery program succeed in long-term recovery by working to address civil legal problems that directly impact the four major domains of recovery identified by the US

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: (1) health, (2) home- a stable and safe place to live, (3) community and connection, and (4) purpose – engaging in meaningful daily activities, such as employment and family, with independence and resources to participate in society. (SAMHSA, 2017, https://www.samhsa.gov/recovery.) Because many civil legal problems are a major destabilizing threat to these domains, providing civil legal services to individuals with OUD and co-occurring SUD/Mental Health conditions is essential to creating the safe, supportive, and stable environment a person needs in order achieve and maintain their recovery.

The medical-legal partnership service delivery model of the MHJP-Recovery Project stands to particularly benefit individuals in recovery by enabling healthcare providers, substance abuse support workers, and civil legal aid attorneys to work together to address the co-occurring health, social, and legal problems that directly impact the four major domains of recovery (Girard, et al., Archives of Psychiatric Nursing 35, 2021). By expanding legal services to more partner provider sites and people, the MHJP-Recovery Project will build on successful national models to address an unmet need under the Opioid Remediation Guidelines to support recovery in Region 4 counties.

New Program or Existing*

Is the funding intended for a new program or to expand an existing program?

A proposed supplement or expansion to a program.

Fiscal Information

Requested Amount*

$25,340.00

Program Budget*

How will the funds be allocated? Attach a detailed line item budget breakdown for the program. If the funds are intended for a multi-year program please specify the amount budgeted for each year.

2026 Budget Region 4 MOAT 6.10.2026 submission.pdf

Source of Funding*

Does the program currently receive funding from another source? If yes, please explain in detail. (i.e. amount, funding source, etc.)

Grant funding is intended for the creation or expansion of opioid prevention, treatment, and recovery projects. The money is **NOT** meant to replace or supplant existing funding.

MLSA requests funding to dedicate 0.13 FTE attorney time and 0.07 FTE Intake Navigator time to focus on OUD clients, along with associated costs. In turn, this investment will be supported by the existing infrastructure of the current MHJP Project, which does not currently have the capacity to focus on OUD patient referrals or add referral partners.

The statewide MHJP has a solid reputation and support in Montana and over the years has received funding from private foundations and federal agencies. The MHJP is also supported by a financial commitment from all partners, who provide a yearly cash amount to help cover project costs, and through allocations of MLSA's general operating grants. These statewide funding sources will help ensure that the Region 4 Recovery Project has a solid foundation in a thriving medical-legal partnership. MOAT funding will not replace or supplant existing funding, but will instead expand the current local partnership by increasing capacity for legal services to people living with an OUD, to add the partnership with Aware, and to integrate these services into the core medical-legal partnership.

2026 Statewide MHJP Annual Cost for current services including Region 4 is $588,028; received funding for 2026 is $536,255:

MHJP Partner Contributions: $184,190
Montana Opioid Abatement Region 5: $15,237
W.K. Kellogg Grant: $100,000
St. Patrick's Providence Hospital Contribution: $210,000
Montana Healthcare Foundation Grant: $50,000
Legal Services Corporation Grant: $6,636
VA Homeless Veteran Grant: $5,461
Montana Consumer Protection Grant: $4,000
Office of Violence Against Women Grants/Subgrants: $5,000
Office of Victims of Crime Grant: $2,000
Montana Justice Foundation Grant: $3,731
Private Individual Donations being cultivated and grant applications pending.

Although these funding sources allow MHJP to provide services to hundreds of clients each year, including in Region 4, additional funding is needed to scale up to meet the true potential for Montanans vulnerable to overdose death. The MHJP needs support from the Region 4 MOAT, such as has been provided by Region Five MOAT, to implement services specifically for local OUD referrals, to add additional mental health care partners, and to incorporate client navigation services to help patients living with an OUD and co-occurring SUD/Mental Health condition. The MHJP will continue to prioritize diversifying funding to create long-term sustainability for the Recovery Project.

Do you have a Fiscal Agent*

No

Program Abstract

Program Description*

Describe the objectives of this project. Provide a detailed overview of the program, including its purpose, priorities & objectives, and intended results.

The purpose of the Region 4 MHJP-Recovery Project is to help OUD patients succeed in long-term recovery utilizing the evidence-based practice of addressing civil legal problems that directly impact SAMHSA's four major domains of recovery. The Recovery Project will prioritize a strength-based, patient-centered system of care by assisting Region 4 residents with an OUD and co-occurring SUD/mental health conditions, prioritizing high-risk populations, including families with children and at-risk youth and young adults. The intended

results will be to increase the number of clients with an OUD who receive civil legal services by directly partnering with Blacktail Health (a federally qualified health care center with locations in Region 4) and Aware (a non-profit mental health provider with locations in Anaconda and Whitehall). The Project will be fully integrated into MLSA's existing medical legal partnership and will add Aware as a partner. In 2025, MLSA handled 301 cases for clients living in Region 4, helping 710 clients and their family members, including 322 children. Of those cases, 29 were impacted by substance abuse, involving 72 clients and their family members.

To meet the legal needs of patients with an OUD, MLSA will dedicate 0.13 FTE attorney time to provide dedicated legal services to OUD clients and 0.07 FTE Intake Navigator time to provide legal advocacy, intake, support, and referral to OUD clients. The MHJP Supervising Attorney will provide staff supervision and mentoring. The Navigator will: (1) accept referrals and conduct intake interviews with local residents with an OUD; (2) support the Project Attorney with legal tasks; (3) refer OUD clients to other service organizations for additional supportive services; (4) build community outreach to Region 4 residents; and (5) collect and evaluate detailed outcomes about improved recovery, health, and legal outcomes. The Project Attorney will: (1) provide legal advice, limited scope services, and full representation to clients with an OUD on civil legal issues that impact their housing, safety, and economic stability; (2) work with local recovery service providers to build an active referral process for OUD clients; and (3) provide technical assistance to Aware and other referral partner staff on civil legal issues faced by people with an OUD. Project staff will conduct training with Aware staff and other referral partners to implement screening and referral tools to identify and refer patients with an OUD and a civil legal need.

The Project Attorney will provide legal services to OUD clients facing legal problems related to housing; family law; income support; domestic or intimate partner violence; access to health care; consumer law, including debt collection and garnishments, fraud, and financial exploitation; tax issues; expungements; and employment law.

Specific Goals*

Describe the primary goals your program seeks to achieve. For each goal, explain how the program intends to accomplish it.

The overarching goal of the MHJP-Recovery Project is to achieve better recovery outcomes for Region 4 residents living with an OUD by addressing their recovery-harming civil legal needs. MLSA has set the following measurable annual goals for Region 4:

(1) 1 consultation, training, and outreach per year for AWARE and other OUD recovery provider staff located in Region 4, provided by MHJP staff or MLSA Communications Manager;
(2) Project Attorneys provide legal services, including advice, limited scope services, and full representation, on 8 legal matters per year to Region 4 clients with OUD and co-occurring SUD/Mental Health conditions, meeting at least one achievable legal goal for each client;
(3) Project Navigator conducts intake interviews and provides navigation services with 6 referred patients in Region 4; and
(4) AWARE screens 75% of their new OUD/SUD recovery patients in Region 4 for civil legal needs.

The MHJP-Recovery Project will meet these goals by dedicating 0.13 FTE attorney time to provide legal services to OUD clients and 0.07 FTE Navigator time to provide legal advocacy, intake, support, and referral to OUD clients.

The anticipated results of these outcomes will be: (1) accurate screening of OUD patients for legal needs and referral to MLSA for services; (2) efficient triage of legal needs, assessment of eligibility, and level of services needed; (3) positive impact of OUD client/patient health and support of recovery; and (4) adding Aware as a

partner will enhance the long-term sustainability of better health outcomes for low-income, vulnerable, patients with OUD and co-occurring SUD/Mental Health conditions, including for families and children.

Through the MHJP-Recovery Project, the medical, mental health, shelter, and MLSA partners will work together to holistically address the health, social, financial, and environmental needs that otherwise can prevent OUD patients from staying in recovery, with a particular focus on building a sustainable program able to address OUD in Region 4 over the long term. This project will enable local healthcare providers, substance abuse support workers, and civil legal aid attorneys to work together to address the co-occurring health, social, and legal problems that directly impact the four major domains of recovery, strengthening local capacity to address these issues.

Evaluation Method*

Please explain in detail how you will gauge the effectiveness and overall impact of the program. What specific evaluation methods, tools, or metrics will you use to measure success.

MLSA will evaluate the MHJP-Recovery Project in Region 4 using a non-experimental mixed methods approach to determine whether Project goals and objectives were accomplished, and if Project implementation and processes are effective in producing the desired outcomes. MLSA will employ a formative evaluation to examine the implementation of the project to improve process, structure, and implementation of the project. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will assure depth, scope, and the dependability of findings. Through the evaluation process, MLSA will seek input and data from all partners and directly from clients for evaluation of impact on health-harming civil legal needs and better OUD recovery outcomes of patients and clients, using baseline data to compare against final outcomes.

Ten years of evaluation data from our medical legal partnerships proves that our clinic Medical Legal Partnership model works. In 2024 alone, 94% of MLSA's clients experienced improved health and/or stress after receiving legal services. MLSA's medical legal partnership clients received $251,773 in direct economic amounts and had an 83% success rate of maintaining public benefits such as Medicaid, TANF, SSI, SSDI, and SNAP; an 87% success rate on preventing eviction; and a 100% success rate on improving safety of domestic violence clients and reducing risk to children. MLSA as a whole, including the medical-legal partnership, had 482 clients impacted by substance use in 2025 – a number which we anticipate will grow once our outreach and referral system is set up to identify and serve people living with a OUD.

MLSA will annually compile the data described below to present, evaluate, and improve the project processes during the implementation to ensure the Recovery Project meets project goals in Region 4.

Data Source*

What data or evidence will you collect to show you are meeting your program goals? What specific information, metrics and documentation will you provide to demonstrate the program objectives have been achieved.

In order to assess project implementation and results, MHJP staff will track data on OUD clients served using MLSA's case management system and project management software to track client time, activities and levels of service provided, referrals, demographics, legal results, and outcomes. MLSA staff will also use outreach and training logs, activity logs, input descriptions, partner feedback forms, and client satisfaction surveys in order to track data.

The Project staff will seek input and data from Aware, Blacktail Health, Ag Worker Health, and other OUD referral partners on the effectiveness and usability of the referral and training process, in order to evaluate the Project implementation and impact on recovery for OUD patients in Region 4 counties. MLSA will

incorporate MLSA's 2025 baseline substance use data at the start of the project in order to determine the project's full impact. Healthcare partners utilize electronic health records to track health impact, legal needs screenings, and referrals. The sharing of all data is governed by the MHJP's confidential and sensitive information protocols, which recognize the importance of maintaining client confidentiality as well as the specific legal and ethical obligations of healthcare providers and attorneys.

Data tracking includes the number of OUD clients served and their demographics, along with outcomes: (1) Process Outcomes: number and location of healthcare partners; number of patients screened by partners versus total number of patients receiving care; numbers of patients referred by partners; partner feedback on Recovery Project implementation; numbers of outreach communications; patient and community awareness of legal services available; level of healthcare partner familiarity and trust of legal referral process and services; (2) Legal Service Outcomes: level of service provided; tangible and intangible client legal issue outcomes; client increased understanding of legal rights; economic benefit to clients; number of services supporting recovery domains of health, housing, connection, and purpose; and (3) Recovery Outcomes: legal services report of client mental health status; client self-report of mental health and recovery status; healthcare partner report of patient recovery and health status.

Awareness*

How do you plan to create awareness of this program? Briefly describe what action the program plans to take to create awareness in the community.

The Recovery Project's existing partnership with Blacktail Health and Ag Worker Health means that strong community relationships and awareness are built into the project foundation. MLSA will expand partnerships and outreach efforts to include Aware by establishing specific legal outreach, screening, and referral procedures that are customized to meet the needs of OUD patients. Although Aware staff already refer patients to MLSA, implementing specific procedures will enable MLSA to more effectively connect legal services with Aware's 377 Region 4 patients. MLSA and Aware have discussed the benefits of having dedicated legal staff available to serve OUD patients and Aware has signed a letter of commitment for the Recovery Project. MLSA will also add OUD-specific outreach, training, screening, and referrals to the current partners and will seek to establish relationships with other OUD service organizations. These healthcare providers play a crucial role in identifying OUD patients who need civil legal aid to support their recovery, with MLSA in turn able to connect referred patients with treatment providers such as Aware.

As the only general civil legal aid organization in Region 4, MLSA also works closely with other community service providers to connect with low-income Montanans, including those with OUD. These other partners include Safe Space in Butte, Women's Resource Center in Dillon, local district courts, local public libraries, and more. These relationships leverage the outreach strengths of multiple organizations and allow awareness of MLSA's services to reach the people with OUD who need them. MLSA outreach staff also attend local events and conduct presentations in communities throughout Region 4, while MLSA MHJP staff make regular site visits to existing healthcare partners in Region 4.

MLSA also uses technology to meet low-income Montanans from their own home. We regularly post articles to MontanaLawHelp.org and to social media to raise awareness, while traditional media outlets (including radio and newspapers) help spread information about our services. MLSA utilizes grants for GoogleAds which notify people of MLSA's services when they search for civil legal services in our core areas of housing, credit, public benefits, and domestic violence in Montana.

Additional Documents

Tax Exempt Organization*

By clicking this box you are confirming the applying organization is a tax exempt organization.

Yes

Tax Exempt Determination Letter*

Please upload a copy of the Organization 501(C)(3) Tax Exempt Determination Letter.

MLSA IRS 501c3 ltr 1967.pdf

Use this section to upload or explain any additional information regarding the program/organization. ie. a detailed budget projection, program/organization history, etc.

Upload #1

Mental Health Opioid Crisis Legal Partnership Factsheet.pdf

Upload #2

Upload #3

Additional Information

Because legal issues are often particularly complicated for low-income and vulnerable clients such as those with an OUD, MLSA needs additional funding to prioritize the referrals and legal services needed to support OUD recovery. Our hope is to build an annual recovery project in each MOAT region, and we have started already with funding in MOAT Region Five. Neither MLSA nor AWARE have the resources to partner together to screen all AWARE patients in Region 4 counties for OUD related legal needs nor to provide services to patients referred to MLSA. The existing MHJP Health Clinic partners do already screen patients for care and refer those with OUD related legal needs to MLSA. There is currently funding from the Health Clinic Partners and MLSA to provide advice only services to referred patients, but often times OUD related legal needs are complex and require full representation to achieve positive outcomes. The MHJP Recovery Project request will enable (1) AWARE and MLSA to form a partnership for screening, referral, and provision of legal services; and (2) full representation to current Region 4 Health Care Partners referred clients with OUD related legal needs. With these additional partnerships and services in place, the MHJP Recovery Project partners can work together to holistically address the health, social, financial, and environmental needs that prevent OUD patients from staying in recovery.

The budget is tailored to effectively provide civil legal aid recovery support, which makes a dramatic difference in patient outcomes, helping solve problems before they push patients with an OUD out of active recovery. In housing cases, tenants who are fully represented by an attorney win or settle their cases 96% of the time, compared to just 62% for unrepresented tenants, and are twice as likely to stay in their homes and four times less likely to use homeless shelters. (The Justice in Government Project, “Key Studies and Data About How Legal Aid Improves Housing Outcomes,” American University, 2019.) Domestic violence survivors see a similar improvement in outcomes: according to one study, 83% of victims represented by an attorney successfully obtained a protective order, compared to just 32% without an attorney. (“Supporting Survivors:

The Economic Benefits of Providing Civil Legal Assistance to Survivors of domestic Violence," Institute for Policy Integrity, New York University School of Law, July 2015.) For families impacted by OUD/SUD, access to civil legal aid can result in greater stability for children, with studies finding that when parents have access to legal services, child health, access to food, and access to income supports improved, while parents reported reduced stress and increased wellbeing (Weintraub. et al "Pilot study of medical-legal partnership to address social and legal needs of patients." Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 2010; Ryan et al. "Pilot study of impact of medical-legal partnership services on patients' perceived stress and wellbeing," Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 2012). Studies like these are why researchers at Georgetown and Johns Hopkins have found that medical-legal partnerships "benefit patients in substance use disorder recovery" by assisting them with legal needs that increase recovery capital across the four dimensions of SAMHSA's social determinants of health. (Girard, et al., How medical-legal partnerships help address the social determinants of mental health, Archives of Psychiatric Nursing 35, 2021.) Civil legal aid delivered through a medical-legal partnership gives people struggling with an OUD the legal tools they need to address their problems can help keep them in recovery.

The Recovery Project in Region 4 will focus on high-risk OUD populations, including people who inject drugs, people reentering the community from incarceration, pregnant, postpartum, and parenting people, Native Americans, people experiencing homelessness, people over age 50, and military Veterans. MLSA anticipates Montana OUD client outcomes will include the following: stabilized housing through eviction and housing matters, increased employment opportunities through driver's license and expungement matters, increase in feelings of purpose and connection by family law interventions to enable them to spend more time with their children, and increased financial stability through consumer and benefits cases.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- 2026 Budget Region 4 MOAT 6.10.2026 submission.pdf
- MLSA IRS 501c3 ltr 1967.pdf
- Mental Health Opioid Crisis Legal Partnership Factsheet.pdf

Montana Opioid Abatement Trust: Region 4
Montana Legal Services Association: Montana Health Justice Partnership - Recovery Project

	Calculated Budget	Cost per	Time Frame	Multiplier	Multiplier Type	Year
Personnel						
Staff Attorney	9,971	76,700	per year	0.13	Attorney FTE	1
Intake Navigator	3,402	48,600	per year	0.07	Non-Attorney FTE	1
Fringe Benefits						
Staff Attorney	3,172	32%	Fringe %			
Intake Navigator	1,378	41%	Fringe %			
Total Personnel	**$ 17,923**					
Non-Personnel						
Travel						
Mileage (used on gas & maintenance of MLSA owned vehicle, reimbursement, or rental vehicle)	218	0.725	cents/mile	300	miles per year	1
Lodging (2025 MT rate)	132	132	per night	1	nights	1
Per Diem (Last Day)	110	55	1st & last	2	days	1
Supplies						
Printing	20	100	per year	0.2	FTE	1
Office Supplies/Postage	20	100	per year	0.2	FTE	1
Other Costs						
Library	70	350	per year	0.2	FTE	1
Translation Services	150	750	per year	0.2	FTE	1
Computer Assisted Legal Research Services	112	864	per atty annually	0.13	Attorney	1
Client/Litigation Costs	150	750	per year	0.2	FTE	1
Online and media outreach	800	4,000	per project	0.2	FTE	
State, Local & Tribal Bar Fees	90	695	per atty	0.13	Attorney FTE	1
Total Non- Personnel	**$ 1,872**					
Total Direct Costs	**$ 19,795**					
Indirect Costs						
MLSA's Rate for 2025 is 30.94%	5,545	30.94%				
Total Budget	**$ 25,340**					

U. S. TREASURY DEPARTMENT
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

DISTRICT DIRECTOR
P. O. BOX 1177
HELENA, MONTANA 59601

FEB 2 - 1967

IN REPLY REFER TO
Form L-178
Code 414:ME
HEL:EO:67-3

Montana Legal Services Association
Room 608, Power Block
Helena, Montana 59601

PURPOSE	Charitable and Educational
ADDRESS INQUIRIES & FILE RETURNS WITH DISTRICT DIRECTOR OF INTERNAL REVENUE	Helena, Montana
FORM 990-A REQUIRED	ACCOUNTING PERIOD ENDING
[X] YES [ ] NO	June 30

Gentlemen:

On the basis of your stated purposes and the understanding that your operations will continue as evidenced to date or will conform to those proposed in your ruling application, we have concluded that you are exempt from Federal income tax as an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Any changes in operation from those described, or in your character or purposes, must be reported immediately to your District Director for consideration of their effect upon your exempt status. You must also report any change in your name or address.

You are not required to file Federal income tax returns so long as you retain an exempt status, unless you are subject to the tax on unrelated business income imposed by section 511 of the Code, in which event you are required to file Form 990-T. Our determination as to your liability for filing the annual information return, Form 990-A, is set forth above. That return, if required, must be filed on or before the 15th day of the fifth month after the close of your annual accounting period indicated above.

Contributions made to you are deductible by donors as provided in section 170 of the Code. Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers or gifts to or for your use are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes under the provisions of section 2055, 2106 and 2522 of the Code.

You are not liable for the taxes imposed under the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (social security taxes) unless you file a waiver of exemption certificate as provided in such act. You are not liable for the tax imposed under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act. Inquiries about the waiver of exemption certificate for social security taxes should be addressed to this office, as should any questions concerning excise, employment or other Federal taxes.

This is a determination letter.

Very truly yours,

Nelson L. Seeley

Nelson L. Seeley
District Director

Opioid Use in MT

HOW CIVIL LEGAL AID HELPS PATIENTS AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS

Drug overdose deaths are the third leading cause of injury related death in Montana.[1] Since 2000, the rate of prescription drug overdose deaths has doubled, with more than 700 deaths from opioid overdoses alone. Substance use and mental illness of parents have serous impacts on the health and well-being of pregnant women, infants, and children in Montana. Of the more than 3,200 Montanan children in foster care in 2016, 64% were removed from the home for reasons related to parental substance abuse. Among Medicaid patients, the percentage of infants with perinatal drug exposure increased from 3.7% in 2010 to 12.3% in 2016.[2]

Policymakers know the current epidemic requires a multi-disciplinary response that includes law enforcement, doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, social workers, and case managers, but civil legal aid providers are also essential partners in solving one of Montana's most pressing public health issues.

Studies have shown...

Legal aid helps with child support, custody, adoption, and guardianship when parents are unable to care for their children:

- When parents have periods of intense drug use, children may not be properly fed, clothed, or cared for.[3]
- Children of addicted parents experience dramatically higher rates of medical, behavioral, and psychological issues as a result of trauma experienced in an unstable home [4]
- Representation of caretakers almost doubled the speed to adoption and doubled the speed to legal guardianship.[5]

Impact of Civil Legal Aid

Legal aid can also help reduce burdens on the child welfare and health care system, improve health of children, and reduce stress of patients in recovery.

- Representation leads to cost savings for foster parents, subsidies for children's medical care, case benefits, and the expense of monitoring foster families.[6]
- When parents have access to legal services, child health, access to food, and access to income supports improved,[7] while adults reported reduced stress and increased wellbeing.[8]
- When civil legal needs were addressed, inpatient and emergency department use dropped 50 percent and health care costs decreased 45%. [9]

How the Montana Health Justice Partnerships Helps Address the Opioid Crisis

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration identifies health, home, purpose, and community as four essential components to recovery from drug addiction.[10] Because legal aid can help individuals with opioid-related substance use disorders to secure housing and health care services, ensure their children are cared for, escape domestic violence, and remove obstacles to employment, the Montana Health Justice Partnership increases the likelihood of recovery.

- By working to solve the legal issues that impact patient health – such as unsafe housing, family violence, and denial of earned benefits – the Montana Health Partnership helps strengthen family stability and increases access to safety net programs to prevent further substance abuse related problems.

- The Montana Health Justice Partnership can help grandparents and other extended family members to have the legal tools to care for children whose parents suffer from opioid addiction.

- The Montana Health Justice Partnership can also help opiate-addicted pregnant women address legal needs related to homelessness, human trafficking, domestic violence, and access to benefits.

- Cross-training between the Health Clinics and MLSA ensures that attorneys and paralegals better understand substance use disorders, and nurses and social workers learn how to spot problems with possible legal solutions and make referrals.

A Helping Hand

"Robert" (not his real name) reached out to MLSA through our medical legal partnership. His adult child, who struggled with staying in recovery from substance use, asked him to take custody of his grandchild. With the attorney's help, Robert filled out the guardianship paperwork and felt prepared to continue the case on his own. The court had never ruled in favor of a guardianship unless an attorney was involved. Afraid that he would lose custody of his grandchild to foster care, Robert called his attorney back.

MLSA reopened Robert's case, helping him file the paperwork and get a court date. With the medical legal partnership attorney by his side, Robert appeared in court and was successfully granted guardianship of his grandchild. MLSA also helped Robert with receiving income supports to help take care of his grandchild. Thankful and relieved, Robert could now rest easy knowing he could support his adult child to reduce his stress levels and keep his grandchild out of foster care.

[1] OESS, Drug Poisonings 2003-2014; [2] MLSA acknowledges the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, the Justice in Government Project, and the Montana HealthCare Foundation for statistics and text used in this factsheet. [3] Barnard, M. & McKeganey, N. (2003). The impact of parental problem drug use on children, Addiction, 99, 552-559, p. 553; [4] Shulman, L., Shapira, S. R. & Hirschfield, S. (2000) Outreach developmental services to children of patients in treatment for substance abuse. American Journal of Public Health, 90, 1930-1933; [5] Courtney, M. E. & Hook, J. L. (2012). Evaluation of the impact of enhanced parental legal representation on the timing of permanency outcomes for children in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 34, 1337-1343; [6] Zill, N. (2011, May 19). Adoption from foster care: Aiding children while saving public money. Brookings Institution; [7] Weintraub, D., Rodgers, M., Botcheva, L., Loeb, A., Knight, R., Ortega, K., Heimbach, B., Sandel, M., & Huffman, L. (2010). Pilot study of medical-legal partnership to address social and legal needs of patients. Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 21(2), 157-168; [8] Ryan, A. M., Kutob, R. M., Suther, E., Hansen, M., & Sandel, M. (2012). Pilot study of impact of medical-legal partnership services on patients' perceived stress and wellbeing. Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 23(4), 1536-1546; [9] Martin, J., Martin, A., Schultz, C., & Sandel, M. (2015, April 22). Embedding civil legal aid services inc are for high-utilizing patients using medical-legal partnership. Health Affairs; [10] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2017, September 20). Recovery and Recovery Support.

Medical Legal Partnerships

Addressing social determinants of health in Montana through collaboration with civil legal aid

MLSA
Montana Legal Services Association

Where a person works, the state of a person's housing, what a person eats, a person's level of stress and a person's vulnerability to crime, injury and discrimination all affect physical and mental health. **By acting together, mental health providers, healthcare providers, and legal aid lawyers can address these social determinants of health and create better physical, mental, and social outcomes for individual patients.**

LEGAL PROBLEMS ARE HEALTH PROBLEMS

Income

Legal aid can appeal denial of food stamps, disability benefits, and healthcare coverage; dispute illegal debt collection; and help file for bankruptcy

Employment & Education

Legal aid can secure or enforce specialized education services, remedy employment discrimination, and enforce workplace rights

Housing and Utilities

Legal aid can help enforce habitable living conditions, prevent eviction or foreclosure and protect against utility shut-off

Personal Safety

Legal aid can secure restraining orders, a divorce, and parenting plans for domestic violence survivors, breaking the cycle of abuse.

Who has civil legal problems?

A 2014 Study by the Montana Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission reported that 9 out of 10 Montanans under 200% of poverty who have a legal problem have not received legal assistance for that problem. In 2022, Montana Legal Services Association handled 4,949 cases, helping 12,137 clients and their families (including 5,688 children) access equal justice and improve health. Meanwhile, research shows that 60% of health is determined by social/environmental factors and 1 in 6 people nationally need legal care to be healthy.

Support for Addiction Recovery, Resilient Parenting, and Mental Health

MLSA provides the tools and services Montanans and their children need to access education, reduce family violence, reduce evictions, improve health, and participate in federal safety net programs. When parents have access to legal services, child health, access to food, and utilization of income supports improved, while parents reported reduced stress and increased wellbeing. People with Severe and Disabling Mental Illness can access guardianships, powers of attorney, and income supports to meet their goals. Legal Aid can help individuals with substance use disorder secure housing, access health care services, ensure children are cared for, escape domestic violence, and remove obstacles to employment.

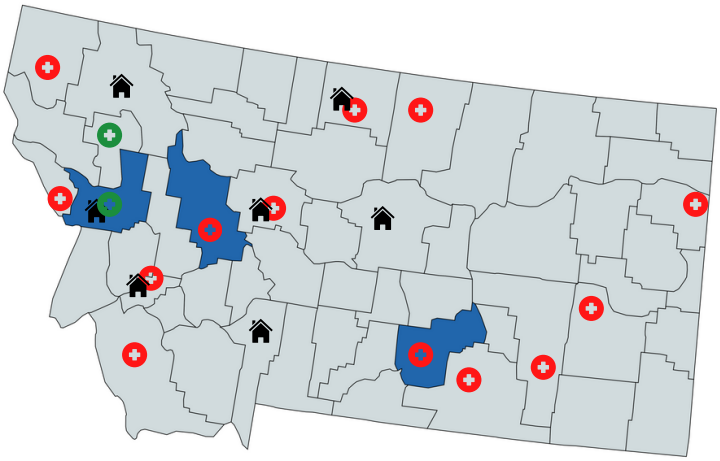
Collaboration potential

Medical Legal Partnerships are a proven, effective model to improve health and reach our most vulnerable community members. The Montana Health Justice Partnership has a 50% reach into rural communities. In its first year, the medical-legal partnership resulted in a 184% increase in legal services provided in Lincoln County and 177% in Hill County. Nationwide, other medical legal partnerships integrate legal services into existing demonstration models or contracts for specific types of Medicaid patients, while others offer broad financial support to ensure legal services are available to all patients

How can we fund MLPs in Montana?

In 2014, the federal Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) recognized civil legal aid as an enabling service that health care providers can include under their federal grants. In at least seven states, funding for legal services is included in a Medicaid managed care contract or other value-based payment arrangement or innovative delivery system reform model. Other grants exist to help pilot a medical legal partnership while partner cost-share is determined.

Montana Legal Services Association Medical Community Initiatives



- MLSA Office Locations (Helena, Missoula, Billings)
- Montana Health Justice Partnership Health Center Sites
- Providence St. Patrick's Medical-Legal Partnership
- Resilient Parenting Project referral sites

Montana Health Justice Partnership

MLSA partners with the Montana Primary Care Association, and seven Federally Qualified Health Care Centers. Since 2015, this MLP has expanded its reach from four to seven FQHCs. Health partners have decided to increase financial contributions based on positive health impact for patients.

Providence St. Patricks Hospital MLP

The Providence MLP is a Medical-Legal Partnership between MLSA and St. Patrick's Hospital in Missoula. Our MLP attorney works closely with the hospital as well as community organizations such as the Western MT Mental Health System to house the most vulnerable in our community.

Resilient Parenting Project

The Headwaters Project works to connect early childhood providers with legal information, resources and access to MLSA services. Service providers include Human Resource Development Councils, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and Home Visiting Programs.

Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

YHDP is a new national initiative designed to reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness. In Montana, HUD has selected 13 different grantee organizations that are working across disciplines in new and innovative ways to support our youth struggling in homelessness.

Sources and Additional Information

*Funding Medical Legal Partnerships: https://medical-legalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Financing-MLPs-View-from-the-Field.pdf; MLPs and Early Childhood Systems: https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Legal-Partnering-for-Child-and-Family-Health.pdf; Medical-Legal Partnership in Primary Care: Moving Upstream in the Clinic: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6506975/; Administration for Children and Families: Civil Legal Advocacy to Promote Child and Family Well-being, Address the Social Determinants of Health, and Enhance Community Resilience https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/im2102.pdf

MLSA Montana Legal Services Association

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