

Medical-Legal 101: How doctors and lawyers work together to improve housing

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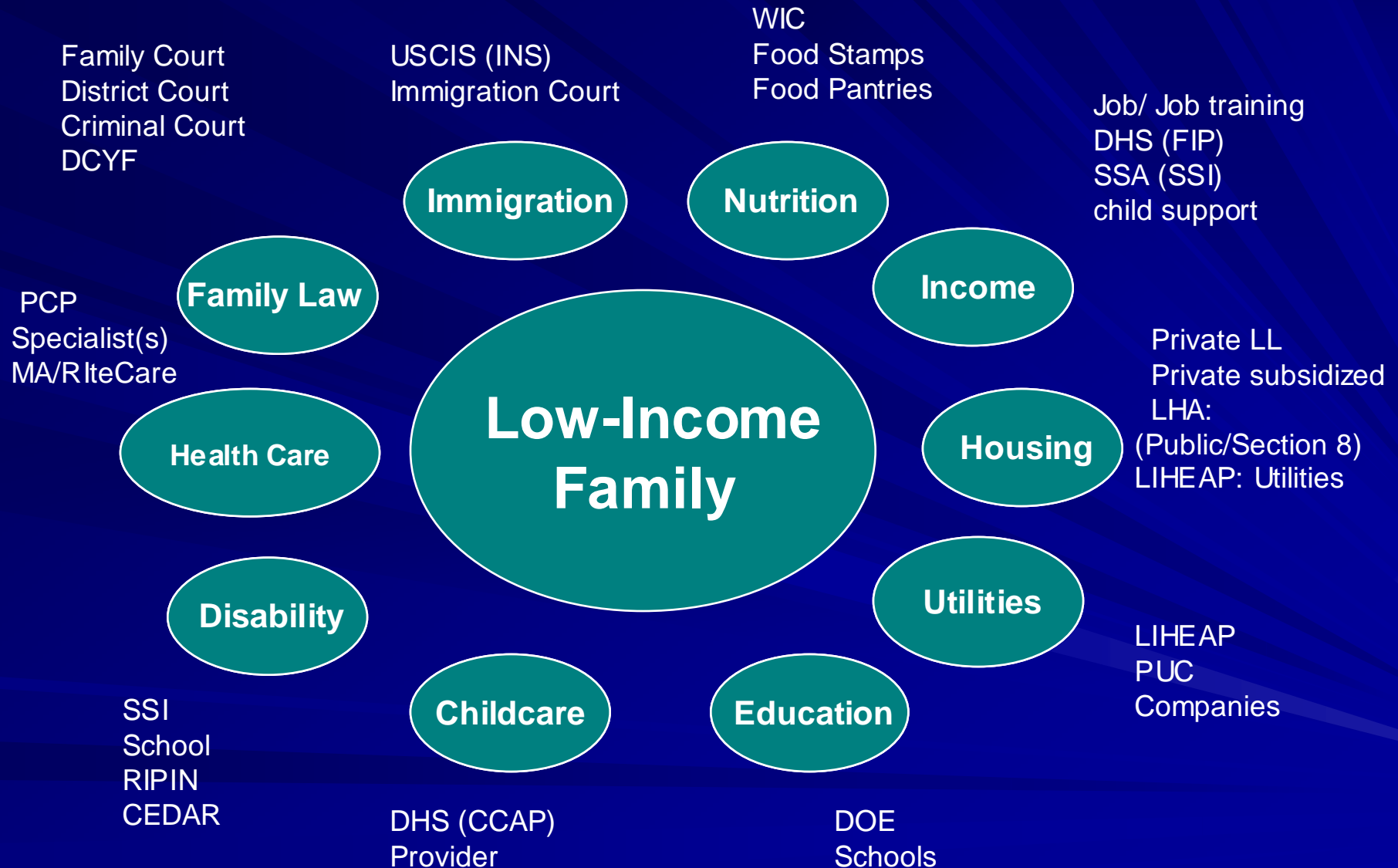
Objectives

- Understand the connections between housing and health in areas such as substandard conditions; housing affordability; and utility issues.
- Understand basic advocacy strategies used to improve housing conditions and address other housing problems of low income families.

Medical-Legal Partnerships

- First one founded at Boston Medical Center in 1993.
- Rhode Island's medical-legal partnership founded in 2002.
- Health care providers see legal issues that present as medical conditions.
 - e.g. Asthma and elevated lead levels are medical problems that doctors can treat, but they are often caused or exacerbated by poor housing conditions that are better addressed with the assistance of lawyers.

Multiple Needs and Interventions in Low-Income Families



Slide adapted from MLPC-Boston

Medical-Legal Partnerships

- Representation in individual cases
- Training for health care providers
- Systemic advocacy

Individual Cases

- Legal issues may present at a doctor's appointment (e.g. elevated blood lead level; concerns about heat; mold)
- With a medical-legal partnership, health care providers have easy access to legal help to address illness caused by illegal housing conditions and other non-biological causes.

Training

- MLPs provide training for health care providers.
- Health care providers identify issues attorneys can help with.
- Letters written by health care providers are more effective (learn “code words”).

Systemic Advocacy

- MLPs can identify legal barriers to child health and address them on a systemic level in a number of ways, including:
 - Education
 - Legislation
 - Litigation

Children need safe,
affordable housing

Affordable housing

- HUD 2007 fair market rent for 2 bedroom apartment in Providence, R.I. \$1014/mo. rmk4
- A family with one full time min. wage job (7.40/hr.) earns \$1273/mo before taxes.

Slide 10

rmk4

Final FY 2007 FMRs By Unit Bedrooms

Efficiency One-Bedroom Two-Bedroom Three-Bedroom Four-Bedroom

Final FY 2007 FMR \$795 \$869 \$1,014 \$1,214 \$1,546

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Slide 11

rmk1

118 Daboll Street; 3 family built 1893; on DOH lists of highest risk premises, so 3 or more kids w/ elevated bll (over 15) and 50% of kids there have elevated bll.

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Slide 12

rmk3

177 Wadsworth; built 1900; 3 family

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Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948)

Article 25.

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

...

Local laws and programs should protect low-income tenants

- Minimum housing codes
- Landlord-tenant laws
- Lead paint laws
- Public utility regulations
- Rent and utility assistance programs
- Weatherization and lead remediation programs
- Churches and other private charities

“Joe”

- Joe is a refugee resettled in Providence with his pregnant wife and toddler.
- Joe’s toddler had an elevated blood lead level; unclear whether from apartment or from home country.
- Still, apartment conditions were not satisfactory.
 - Old windows, lots of dust, hard to close or keep open.
 - Roaches and rats.

The law

- Sec. 13-184. Windows, doors and bulkheads.
Every window, exterior door and bulkhead shall be reasonably weathertight, watertight and rodent proof; and shall be kept in sound working condition and good repair.
- Sec. 13-188. Infestation.
Every dwelling, dwelling unit and all dwelling premises shall be **free of infestation** and shall comply with the applicable requirements of the rat control provisions.

What happened?

- Joe referred to RIMLPC by Lead Clinic Nurse at Hasbro Hospital.
- RIMLPC:
 - advised Joe about his legal rights.
 - helped Joe call code enforcement.
 - spoke to landlord about conditions.
 - helped Joe with FIP (welfare) and connected him with resources for job search.

Joe's family today

- Joe's landlord made the most important repairs. The apartment conditions are not perfect, but they are much better.
- Toddler's blood lead level dropped quickly. The new baby was never referred for an elevated blood lead level.
- Joe has a new job that pays more. He is saving money to move to a better apartment.

What a Med-Legal Partnership adds to lead hazard reduction (and other housing conditions cases)

- Health care provider can access legal services for patient.
- Patient can make housing decisions after fully informed about rights.
- Lawyer can help clients enforce rights, and can represent in court in affirmative (TRO) or defensive (eviction) cases.
- Lawyer part of team with doctor, VNA, social work, case manager, lead center, DOH, code enforcement.

Contact information

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