



New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation  
Office of Communications and Marketing  
125 Worth Street, Suite 512, New York, NY 10013  
212-788-3339 Fax 212-788-3673

 Facebook.com/nycHHC  Twitter.com/HHCnyc

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Contact: HHC press office, 212.788.3339  
New York Legal Assistance Group, 212.613.5019

## **HHC Expands Medical-Legal Partnership to Offer Hospital-Based Legal Services to Low-Income Patients**

*Will Open New NYLAG LegalHealth Clinics at Metropolitan Hospital Center in Manhattan, Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn; and Queens Hospital Center*

NY, NY (March 19, 2014) - The New York City [Health and Hospitals Corporation \(HHC\)](http://www.nyc.gov/hhc) today announced the expansion of a medical-legal partnership that will offer free hospital-based legal assistance to thousands of low income HHC patients who need help getting food stamps, unemployment benefits, avoiding evictions, obtaining visas and navigating other immigration matters. Under a new agreement, HHC will renew and expand the services of LegalHealth, a division of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), to continue services at eight HHC hospitals and open new legal clinics at Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn, Metropolitan Hospital Center in Manhattan and Queens Hospital Center.

"Medical care alone is not enough to address the complex health needs of many of our patients," said Ross Wilson, M.D., HHC Chief Medical Officer. "LegalHealth has become an integral member of the HHC healthcare team. They are a true partner in our ability to combat the underlying social threats to good health."

"We value this longstanding and growing partnership with HHC. The legal services we provide furthers HHC's commitment to combatting the social determinants of health," said Randy Retkin, Director of LegalHealth. "Our aggressive legal advocacy explores all legal remedies for patients -- from receiving protection from an abusive spouse to becoming eligible to receive life-saving transplants. Our legal intervention increases stability of patients and improves quality of life."

LegalHealth will offer weekly half-day legal clinics for patients on site at all 11 HHC hospitals and provide quick access to attorneys dedicated to supporting patient cases, including court appearances, legal research and preparation of immigration filings. In addition to onsite free legal clinics, LegalHealth trains health care professionals to recognize legal issues that may negatively affect medical outcomes. That helps HHC doctors, social workers and other staff make appropriate referrals to the on-site lawyers from the legal services team. LegalHealth has already handled 15,500 legal matters on behalf of more than 10,000 patients at eight HHC hospitals since 2002. Immigration, public benefits and housing issues are the top three problem areas that generate the most referrals.

## **Patient Success Stories:**

### **Maria**

A single mom with three kids with breathing problems. As the HHC Woodhull Hospital medical team addressed the needs of the youngest, an infant with frequent ER visits who had been on and off a nebulizer, they also inquired about conditions in the building they lived in. What they learned was more than a doctor can fix. Overrun with vermin, the building had mice, rats and roaches that crawled inside the baby's crib. Management never did more than put steel wool into the holes of the walls. Doctors referred her to the on-site LegalHealth lawyer at the hospital. The lawyer put the building management on notice for the poor conditions and stood ready to take it to court. As a result, the holes were repaired, the vents were cleaned, and the building exterminated.

### **Violet**

As a patient at HHC Kings County Hospital Center who came to the United States from Jamaica with a green card when she was in her 70's, she was referred to the hospital-based legal clinic by her geriatric specialist. She needed help with immigration issues and didn't know what her options were, or for what benefits she might be eligible. The LegalHealth team established that Violet was just a few months away from citizenship eligibility. They helped her pass the citizenship test. As a citizen, Violet is now eligible to receive SSI benefits.

### **Allen**

He was in relatively good health until he developed a tumor and began radiation treatments at HHC Bellevue Hospital Center. When he was not in the hospital, Allen was exhausted and sick from his treatments. He was only able to work a day or two per week for a few hours at a time at his job as a Manhattan hotel agent. Bills began to pile up and Allen fell behind on his rent. With the LegalHealth attorney's help Allen and his family were able to gain access to food stamps and short-term disability – providing him and his family with enough resources to cover their expenses during Allen's treatment and recovery.

“HHC social workers in particular witness first-hand how social and economic crisis can impact patient health. Our hospitals and healthcare centers often serve as a sanctuary and a gateway to other services in the community even when their problems are not exclusively medical,” said Sandra Chaiken, Director of Social Work at HHC Jacobi Hospital and HHC North Central Bronx Hospital. “This medical-legal partnership model allows us to efficiently deploy our resources and focus on meeting the patient's health and psychosocial needs while the onsite LegalHealth team can address those problems that have legal remedy. This is a powerful combination that makes a deep impact in people's lives.”

Under the new, five-year agreement, HHC will pay LegalHealth \$825,000 per year. The contract was approved by the HHC Board of Directors on March 27. This program is subsidized by a grant from the Robin Hood Foundation.

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### **About HHC**

The New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) is a \$6.7 billion integrated healthcare delivery system with its own 420,000 member health plan, MetroPlus, and is the largest municipal healthcare organization in the country. HHC serves 1.4 million New Yorkers every year and more than 475,000 are uninsured. HHC provides medical, mental health and substance abuse services through its 11 acute care hospitals, five skilled nursing facilities, six large diagnostic and treatment centers and more than 70 community based clinics. HHC Health and Home Care also provides in-home services for New Yorkers. HHC was the recipient of The Joint Commission's John M. Eisenberg Award for Innovation in Patient Safety and Quality. For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/hhc](http://www.nyc.gov/hhc) or find us on [facebook.com/nycHHC](https://www.facebook.com/nycHHC) or [twitter.com/HHCnyc](https://twitter.com/HHCnyc).

**About NYLAG**

The New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) provides free civil legal services to New Yorkers who cannot afford private attorneys. Founded in 1990 on the premise that low-income individuals can improve their lives significantly if given access to the justice system, NYLAG has a comprehensive range of services and core practice areas. For more information, go to [www.nylag.org](http://www.nylag.org) or find us on [facebook.com/NYLegalAssistanceGroup](https://www.facebook.com/NYLegalAssistanceGroup) or [twitter.com/NewYorkLAG](https://twitter.com/NewYorkLAG). LegalHealth, a division of NYLAG, is the largest medical-legal partnership in the nation. Since its inception in 2001, it has assisted more than 22,000 low-income clients and trained over 10,000 health care professionals. The partnership unites legal and medical professionals to improve the lives of low-income people with serious health issues. For more information, go to [www.legalhealth.org](http://www.legalhealth.org) or find us on [facebook.com/LegalHealthNY](https://www.facebook.com/LegalHealthNY) or [twitter.com/LegalHealthNY](https://twitter.com/LegalHealthNY)