Leverage Medicaid Expansion to End Homelessness & Improve Health

Ensure that services for people living in supportive housing can be sufficiently billed to Medicaid

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Homelessness & housing instability is harmful to people’s health.

When the state legislature voted to expand Medicaid last year, it did so to create healthier people and save costs. Housing instability and homelessness exacerbate health problems and can be a significant barrier preventing individuals from accessing the health services they need to recover. At the same time, ill health can lead to homelessness and housing instability. Providing housing and services to people living with complex and chronic health problems will help achieve the state’s Medicaid expansion goals. Supportive housing is an evidence-based solution that helps people experiencing homelessness reach housing stability and improved health outcomes.

What is Supportive Housing?

Supportive housing is an affordable home combined with comprehensive primary and behavioral health services. The "support" in supportive housing can be compared to accommodations, such as wheelchair ramps for people who can’t walk up stairs. On-site staff assist residents with daily life challenges, such as providing nutritional support with daily meals, assisting with communication, and other everyday tasks.

Affordable housing with resident services is not supportive housing; rather, supportive housing provides a more specialized level of care. This evidence-based model reduces utilization of costly emergency, inpatient, and crisis services and results in improved client health outcomes.

Supportive housing serves people who need services in order to succeed in housing and who need housing in order to succeed in services. People living in supportive housing usually have a long history of homelessness and often face persistent obstacles to keeping their home, such as a serious mental health illness, chemical dependency, physical disability, or chronic medical condition.

Medicaid expansion can help end homelessness.

Prior to the Affordable Care Act, many chronically homeless adults, including those residing in supportive housing, were not eligible for Medicaid or had barriers in applying. In 2014, nearly all homeless persons will, by virtue of their incomes, be eligible for Medicaid, including ones already living in supportive housing.

If a Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit was created, then supportive housing providers could bill Medicaid for supportive services provided to eligible residents. This would allow more chronically homeless people to access these services, would improve the integration of behavioral and health services, and would help individuals with severe and chronic health conditions stay off the street and be in a healthy home.

What is the legislative solution?

This issue may be addressed outside the legislative process. Please check back at the Housing Alliance State Legislative Agenda webpage (wliha.org/advocacy/state) for more information about this as the 2014 session unfolds.


Special thanks to CSH: www.csh.org

Washington Low Income Housing Alliance www.wliha.org

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