

# “Helping Clients Address Their Legal Issues: Medical-Legal Partnerships”

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“The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don’t want, drink what you don’t like, and do what you’d druther not.”

--Mark Twain



# Social Determinants of Health

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- Conditions in an individual's physical and social environment that affect his or her health
- “The social determinants of health are the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics.”
  - *Social Determinants of Health Key Concepts, World Health Organization*



# Examples of Social Determinants

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## **Poor Housing Conditions**

- Lead poisoning
- Asthma
- Physical and mental disabilities and developmental delays
- Injury

## **Lack of Income; Public Benefit Denials**

- Hunger and malnutrition
- Low-birth weight
- Chronic health conditions
- Depression

## **Inadequate School Services**

- School failure
- Poor health behaviors



# A Look at Kane County...

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- 41,622 individuals are diabetic (2013)
- 78,040 individuals report having no health insurance (2013)
- 19% of children live in poverty (2013)
- 61,375 individuals live in poverty (2012)
- 52,249 residents report food insecurity (2011)



# Current Practice is Not Working

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- Doctors recognize – ***but are not trained to uncover*** – the link between social circumstances and disease.
- Social history focuses on health behaviors related to illness, ***not environmental contributions***.
- Public benefits programs designed to respond to social needs underlying health problems are inconsistently implemented.
- Lack of legal services attorneys to respond to overwhelming need.



# Medical-Legal Partnerships

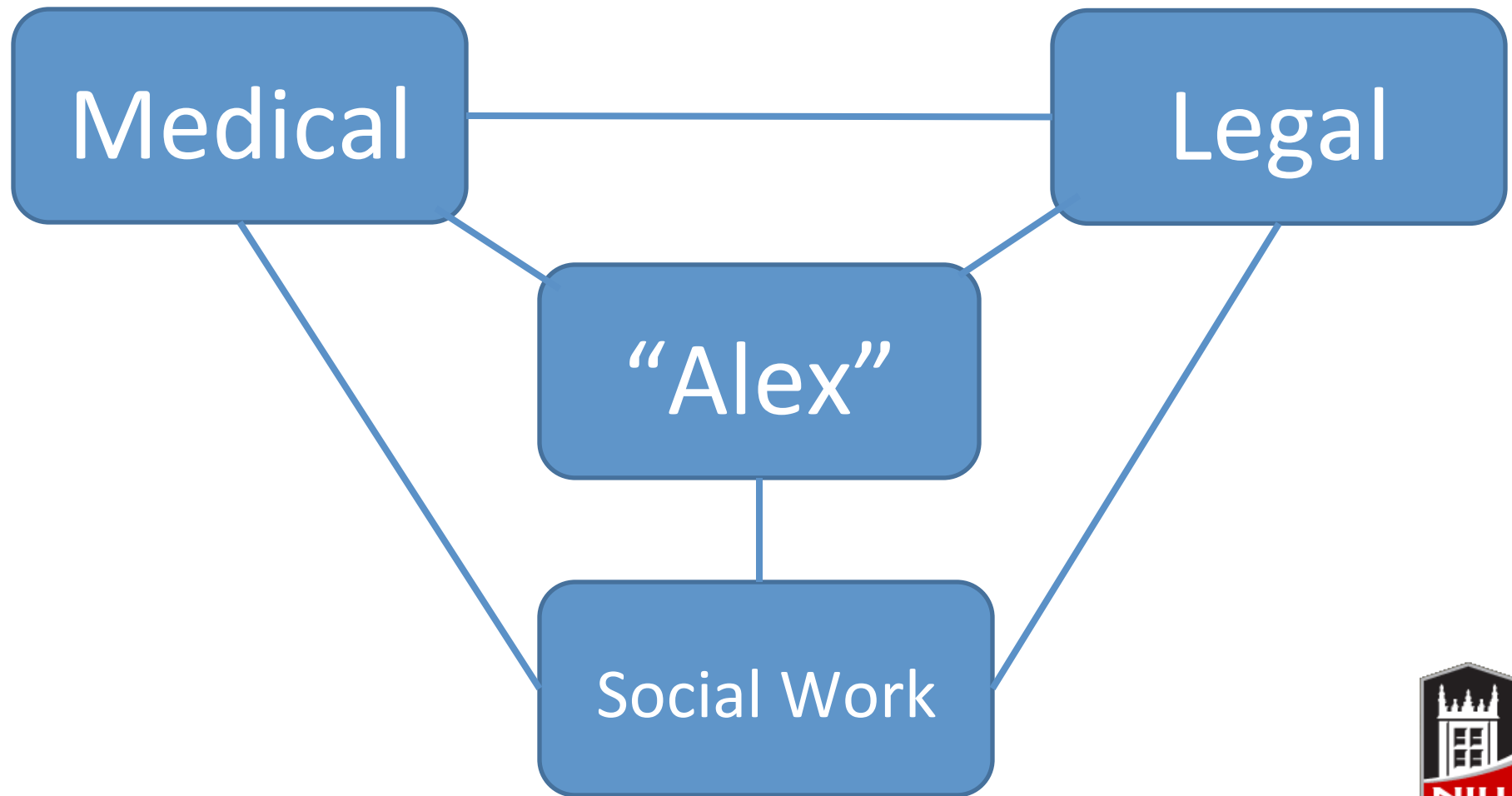
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- Medical-Legal Partnerships consist of health care providers, social workers, attorneys and other professionals who work together to remedy the non-medical sources of clients' health problems.
- Medical professionals are trained to identify legal concerns and refer clients to the advocacy team of attorneys and social workers who work on resolving these issues.
- The common goal is to promote the health and well-being of clients by addressing unmet social and legal needs.



# Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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# Examples of MLP Representation Areas

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**Housing:** eviction, habitability, utility advocacy

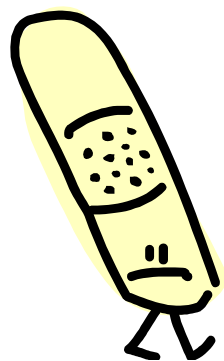
**Employment and public benefits:** SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP, TANF

**Family:** divorce, custody, visitation

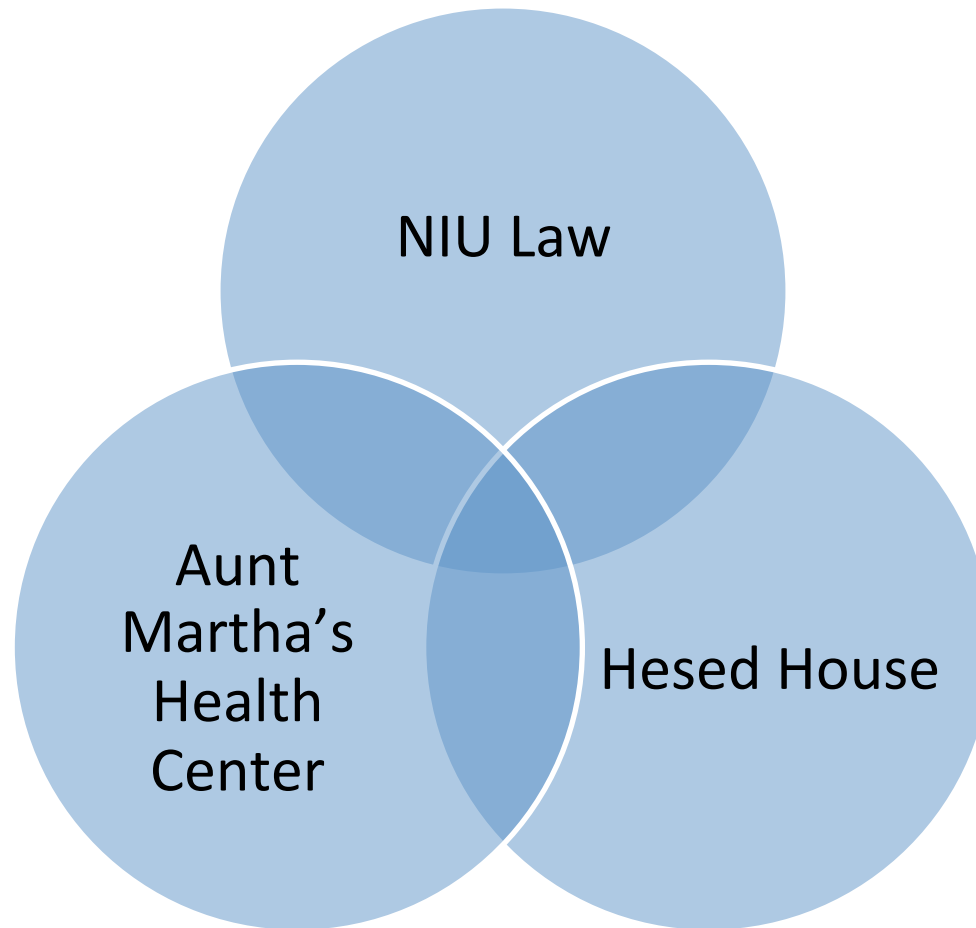
**Special education and disability advocacy**



# How Does the Health Advocacy Clinic Fit In?



# HEALTH ADVOCACY CLINIC Medical-Legal Partnership



# Health Advocacy Clinic Mission

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- Provides legal representation to clients, who are receiving health-related services from Aunt Martha's, in order to address socio-environmental barriers affecting their health and stability.
- Educates and trains NIU Law students to work collaboratively, develop and apply legal skills through client representation, and awaken in them a duty to use those skills to serve others.
- Develops and sustains inter-disciplinary relationships among healthcare providers, social workers, lawyers, and law students to holistically address client and patient needs.
- Seeks to address systemic legal and socio-environmental barriers affecting clients' health and stability through community and policy advocacy.



# Health Advocacy Clinic: Income Stability

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- Public Benefits
  - SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, Medicare
- Disability Income (SSI/SSDI)
- Medical Debt Forgiveness



# Income → Health

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Lack of Income is Linked to:

Hunger

Malnutrition

Low Birth Weight

Homelessness

Chronic Conditions

Poor Performance in School



# Referral System

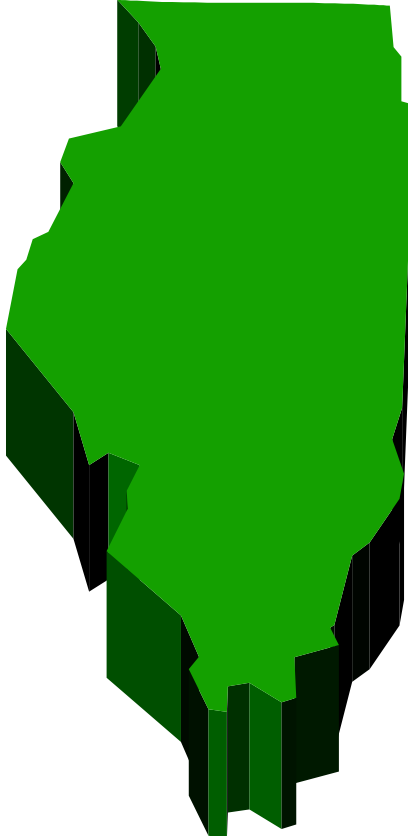
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- Aunt Martha's medical team screens for socio-environmental issues contributing to a client's poor health and refers the client to NIU Law's legal team.
- The NIU Law team partners with staff from Hessed House when the client is a former or current guest of Hessed House.
- The NIU Law team, with cooperation of other professions, works to resolve the unmet legal needs which impact the client's health.



# Other MLPs Throughout Illinois

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**Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership  
for Children**

**Health Justice Project**

**Medical-Legal Partnership of Southern  
Illinois**

**SIU Medical-Legal Partnership**

**East Central IL Medical-Legal Partnership**

<http://medical-legalpartnership.org/partnerships/#/states=118>





“I can easily write a prescription for an asthma-controller medication but cannot write a prescription to rid the child's home of the many toxins that contribute to a child's worsening asthma. I can refer a child to a mental-health provider but cannot write a prescription to decrease a child's exposure to toxic stressors such as interpersonal violence, bullying, and poverty.”



Daniel Taylor, M.D.



# Contact Us

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