

Medical-Legal Partnerships to Prevent Homelessness in Sheridan County, WY

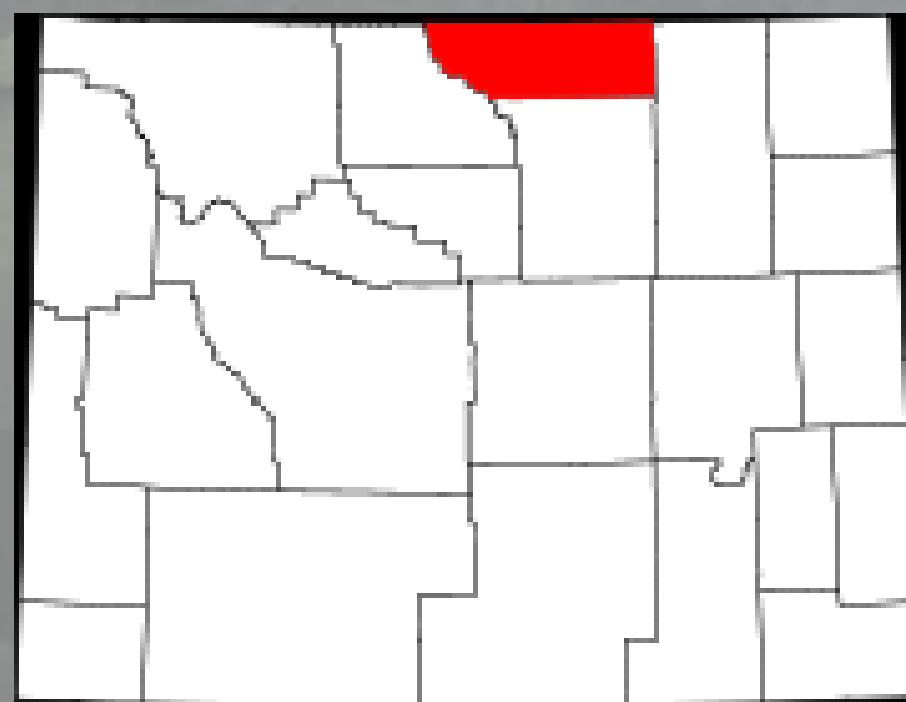
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Hypothesis

- Medical-legal partnerships (MLP) provide low-cost legal advice and prevent loss of shelter for imminently homeless clients.

Background

- Population: 30,485 in 2019
- Average home value 13% higher than state average
- Average income 16% lower than state average
- Industry energy production and agriculture
- Privately funded homeless shelter closed in 2017 due to lack of funding



Sheridan County is in northeastern Wyoming at the foot of the Bighorn mountains.



Special Thanks

- To Ben Abrams, outreach coordinator at Volunteers of America
- To Morgan Eliason, case manager at Sheridan Memorial Hospital
- To the physicians of Sheridan County

Community Profile: Assets

- Volunteers of America – Homeless Outreach Program
 - Provides prevention, rapid rehousing, and emergency shelter services
 - Hosts community events to raise funds and awareness
 - Partners with local churches and faith-based organizations
 - Receives funding from state and federal grants



- Tight-knit community willing to fund projects they view as important
- Local resources to assist with paying rent and utilities
- Some low-income housing units
- Medication assisted treatment clinic for drug use disorders

Literature Review

- 2016 study in Boston, MA retroactively compared outcomes for patients experiencing housing issues with and without MLP
 - Free legal counseling provided to patients
 - 83% with an MLP saw improvement while 64% without an MLP saw little to no change
- 2017 nationwide study surveyed the number and type of civil legal issues attributing to homelessness in homeless shelters
 - 90% of homeless individuals claim one or more civil legal issues
 - 60.4% of shelters believed MLP's would be beneficial to their organization

Conclusions

- Medical-legal partnerships provide a low-cost prevention method for homelessness in Sheridan.
 - Decrease cost burden and stigma associated with seeking legal help in a rural community
 - MLP's address other social determinants of health in addition to homelessness.
 - Improve overall health outcomes
 - Increase awareness of and access to existing resources, like the VOA
 - Potential challenges of bringing an MLP to Sheridan include funding and manpower.
 - Educate physicians and administrators on the cost-benefit ratio
 - Twelve-month trial with pre-trained MLP lawyer