

Beth Breslin

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Beth Breslin is a Staff Attorney and Policy Associate at LegalHealth, a division of the New York Legal Assistance Group. LegalHealth provides free legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers with serious health problems and trains healthcare professionals to recognize legal issues that may negatively affect medical outcomes. Beth Breslin is the co-chair of BPHC's Engagement Plan Work Group.

Picture a doctor's office. You might imagine physicians in white coats, nurses, stethoscopes, tongue depressors. But...a lawyer?

Actually, lawyers can play an important role in keeping patients healthy, says Beth Breslin, Staff Attorney and Policy Associate at LegalHealth, a division of New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). "We work with low-income, chronically ill people," Ms. Breslin explains, "including many Medicaid patients, whose poor health can have social causes that cannot be addressed without legal intervention."

LegalHealth embeds legal clinics within hospitals and healthcare facilities to target non-medical issues like housing, immigration, or insurance, which often become barriers to health. Providers are trained to identify patients with legal needs and refer them to LegalHealth attorneys, who deliver necessary legal services then and there. "LegalHealth enables providers to give more comprehensive care to their patients," Ms. Breslin says.

The direct services that LegalHealth and other divisions within NYLAG provide can also generate state-wide change by identifying the common challenges that many clients face, Ms. Breslin says. "At NYLAG, we can identify systemic problems and try to address them on a bigger level, through policy work or litigation."

Ms. Breslin is also involved in coordinating LegalHealth's involvement in New York's DSRIP program and in the Bronx Partners for Healthy Communities (BPHC) PPS. "Honestly," she says, "going into DSRIP, I was worried that the providers I interacted with were going to be cynical about another healthcare reform program. But people really seem to be excited about DSRIP, and feel that this is going to open the door to a new way of caring for patients. I was inspired by that."

This "new way of caring for patients" may empower LegalHealth to reach more Bronx residents struggling to manage their health, and reach more providers treating them. "There are unique issues in the Bronx. We can do a lot of good here," she says. "In an ideal world, we could provide legal services to all of the different patients and providers in the PPS," she continues. "DSRIP brings everybody together and to the table, so we can all coordinate care and spot health-harming legal issues for patients in our PPS."

Ms. Breslin is now the co-chair of BPHC's Engagement Plan Work Group, helping BPHC learn how to best engage Bronx residents and community-based organizations.

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