



MEDICAL RESPITE CARE: DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Medical respite care is acute and post-acute medical care for people experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover from a physical illness or injury on the streets, but who are not ill enough to be in a hospital. These programs provide short-term residential services (often in a shelter or transitional program) coupled with support services and access to medical care.

Common characteristics of these programs include the following:

- Closes the gap between hospitals/emergency rooms and homeless shelters that do not have the capacity to provide medical and support services
- Provides a low-cost, high-quality and innovative discharge option to aid emergency room diversion and hospital discharge options
- Serves as an integral component of the Continuum of Care (CoC) for homeless services in any community
- Provides participants the opportunity to access medical and supportive services needed to assist their recuperation.
- Allows a length of stay determined by medical need and progress on an individual treatment level
- Provides continuity of care when clients are transitioning between hospital and home
- Engages participants in the process of their recuperation and discharge planning
- Allows a flexible service delivery model that reflects unique community needs, priorities, and resources
- Shows respect for human dignity by preventing unsafe and illegal discharges to the streets or shelters.

Medical Respite Care:

- Provides acute & post-acute medical care for people who are homeless and too ill to be on the street/in shelter, but not ill enough for hospital level care
- Shortens hospital lengths of stay, reduces readmissions, improves outcomes, lowers cost
- Differs from “caregiver respite,” skilled nursing facilities, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, hospice care, and supportive housing programs

Terminology: The term “medical respite care” may also be known as “recuperative care” in some health care systems. These terms are synonymous.

Further Resources on Medical Respite Care

- [Standards for Medical Respite Care Programs](#)
- [Medical Respite Care Program Directory](#)
- [Tool Kit](#) (research, template contracts, planning materials, etc.)
- [Respite Care Providers Network](#)
- Policy brief: [Medical Respite Care: Financing Approaches](#)
- Policy brief: [Medical Respite Care Programs & the IHI Triple Aim Framework](#)
- Policy brief: [Managed Care and Homeless Populations: Linking the HCH Community and HCH Partners](#)
- [Technical Assistance requests](#)

For more information about medical respite care,
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