

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.¹

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.²

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

1. [Standards for Medical Respite Care](#)
2. [Medical Respite/Recuperative Care Literature Review](#)
3. [Medical Respite/Recuperative Care Program Directory](#)
4. [Respite Care Providers' Network](#)
5. [Tool Kit \(research, template contracts, planning materials, etc.\)](#)
6. Policy brief: [Medical Respite Care: Financing Approaches](#)
7. Policy brief: [Medical Respite Care Programs & the IPH Triple Aim Framework](#)
8. White paper: [Medicaid & Managed Care: Financing Approaches for Medical Respite Care](#)
9. [Technical Assistance Requests](#)