

Private hospitals program provides safe discharges for the homeless and saves money

August 28, 2012 | By *Kelsey Brimmer, Associate Editor*

LOS ANGELES – A newly released [report](#) documents the successes of a private hospitals program to safely discharge homeless patients and save money for the participating hospitals.

According to the report released last week by the National Health Foundation (NHF), a Los Angeles-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the healthcare needs of the underserved, the nearly two-year-old private hospitals program, the Recuperative Care Center of Los Angeles, has so far been used by 35 private Los Angeles hospitals, allowing for the safe discharge of homeless patients with an estimated total hospital savings over \$4 million.

The Recuperative Care Center, which is one of two recuperative care pilot programs in Los Angeles and Orange counties, provides participating hospitals with a location to discharge homeless patients who are not sick enough to remain in the hospital, but too sick for shelters.

NHF, in partnership with the Hospital Association of Southern California, began developing this program around five years ago in response to local outcries against hospitals' alleged patient dumping.

Prior to this program, private hospitals struggled with appropriate discharge options for their homeless patients, and as a result reported keeping homeless patients up to four days longer than medically necessary. The Recuperative Care Center provides homeless patients a safe and clean environment to recover where they can receive medical oversight, support in attending follow-up appointments and a connection to supportive services and housing options.

The program is sustained solely by fees paid by the participating private hospitals and receives no government funding.

"The program is 100 percent funded by the hospitals and their utilization of the program," said Kelly Bruno, chief operating officer at the NHF. "The program really sustains itself. It's the only program of its kind in the entire country that doesn't receive any outside funding."

According to the report, hospitals in Los Angeles County treat more than 18,000 homeless patients each year at a cost that contributes to the more than \$4 billion in uncompensated care that Los Angeles hospitals provide.

"At our program, we provide care for these patients for around 10 or 11 days, including medical care follow-up, education and a housing program. It saves the hospitals tremendously on both the front and back ends," said Bruno. "The hospitals are keeping the patients fewer days, and with proper discharge care, preventing avoidable readmissions. The primary way hospitals are saving money is through quicker discharges and not keeping patients longer because they had nowhere

else to go. Some patients would stay at the hospital for two weeks, and the hospitals are the ones eating those costs. It only costs the hospitals \$10 a day to keep a patient at our program."

In the last 22 months since the program first began, over 500 homeless patients have been admitted from private hospitals in Los Angeles, according to the report. Of those 500 homeless patients, 67 percent were discharged to some form of housing option and 10 percent of admitted patients were readmitted to the hospital.