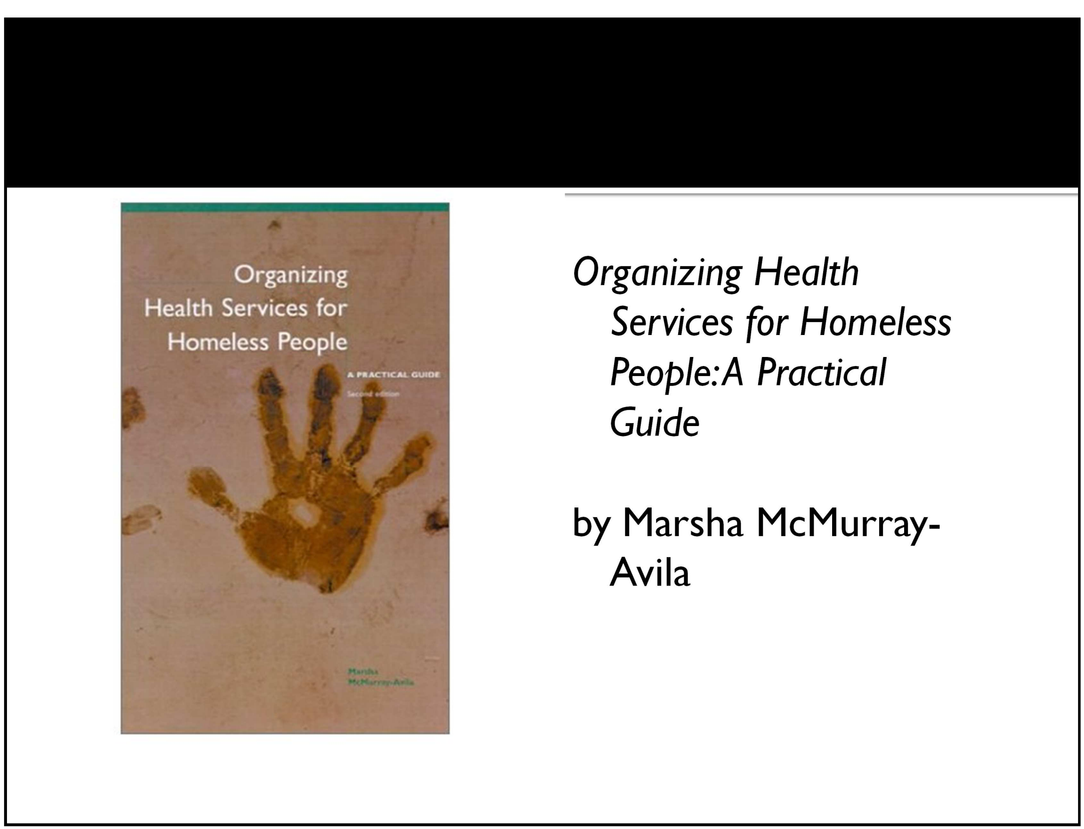
This section provides a brief overview of crucial elements that the earliest HCH projects learned to incorporate into their models of care.

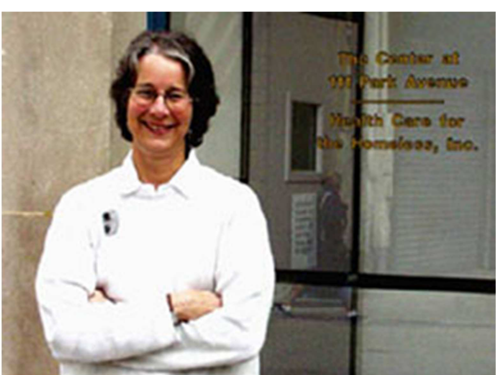


The early Health Care for the Homeless experience was recounted in 1991 in Marsha McMurray-Avila's book *Organizing Health Services for Homeless People: A Practical Guide.* The book is in its second edition and is available from the National Council and from on-line booksellers. The key elements of HCH practice that Ms. McMurray-Avila described remain important today, and will be explored in course modules that follow this brief summary, taken directly from the book.

Abby Lehrman, BS, outreach worker,
San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium

HCH physicians, nurses, social workers, and others skilled at making connections with homeless people (often including persons who have experienced homelessness themselves) seek out and bring care to homeless people wherever they are -- in encampments, under bridges, on the streets, in jails, at soup kitchens, and other service sites.

Service locations



Betty Schulz, CPNP, RN stands in front of the
Mercy Children's Health Outreach Project in Baltimore

HCH clinics are located in or near shelters and other places where homeless people congregate.

Designed for Accessibility

- Extending hours
- Providing transportation
- Using sliding payment scale

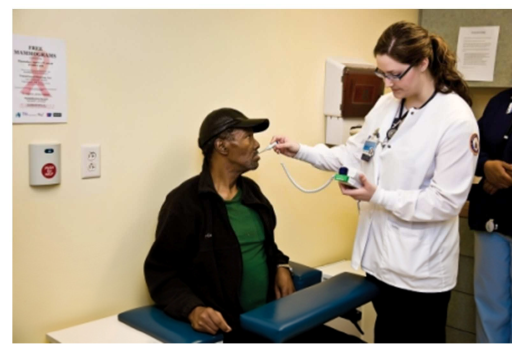


Photo courtesy of Care Alliance HCH, Cleveland, OH

HCH projects focus on accessibility of services for their clients, sometimes operating on evenings or weekends, providing transportation and other enabling services, and adjusting fee schedules for people who simply cannot pay even small amounts.

Sensitivity

Celelia at St. Francis House in Boston. Photo by James O'Connell, MD

- Engaging individuals who are homeless often involves overcoming significant fear and suspicion
- A patient, nonjudgmental, persistent approach is often required

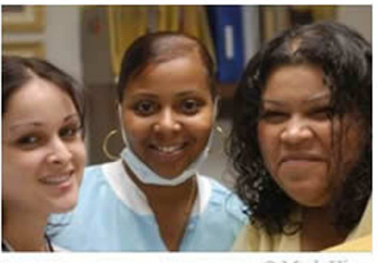
HCH staff endeavor to understand the unique circumstances and stresses associated with homelessness. They understand that the process of engaging individuals who are homeless often involves overcoming significant fear and suspicion, and that a patient, nonjudgmental, persistent approach is often required.

Comprehensive services

- Understand health care and other basic needs are interrelated
- Use multidisciplinary clinical teams
- Integrate primary care with the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders
- Secure housing, entitlements, and jobs

HCH providers understand that health care and other basic needs are interrelated, and strive to address each client's needs holistically through the use of multidisciplinary clinical teams. Integration of primary care with the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders is a hallmark of HCH practice, and efforts to secure housing, entitlements, and jobs are intrinsic to this approach.

Referrals



Onsite and referral resources

Coordination of a wide range of onsite and referral resources receives particular attention in the HCH approach to care.

Clinical adaptations

One example of clinical adaptation tools available through the Clinicians' Network.

- Prescribing simple medical regimens with few side effects
- Screening for common problems

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

HOMELESSNESS AND HEALTH:

Challenges to Care

YOUR LOCAL CONTACT:

To promote favorable clinical outcomes, HCH providers have developed techniques such as prescribing simple medical regimens with few side effects, or screening for common problems during the first encounter with a client.

Client involvement

Boston CAB members at their monthly meeting
Photo by Sharon Morrison

HCH projects are careful to involve their clients in developing realistic treatment plans, in the governance of their agencies, in evaluating the efficacy of homeless services, and in advocating for service improvements and policy change.

Broad Applicability of the Model

- Can be adopted or modified by:
  - Emergency shelters
  - Community health centers
  - Hospitals and public health

Report of the RWJ Demonstration Project in the Newsletter of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

RWJF Presents Federal Officials with Guide to Homeless Care

Foundation staff members presented U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) officials with a guide to health care for the homeless as the government began to implement the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (PL 100-77) in February.

The guide is based on the Health Care for the Homeless Program, a $25 million national initiative jointly funded by the foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts. The program will conclude later this year.

Prepared at the request of PHS officials, the guide responds to 23 questions about the following aspects of the program:

- Project management and the role of community coalitions;
- Effective organization of health care services for the homeless;
- Recruitment and training of project staff members;
- Strategies for coordinating health and social services;
- Successful patient outreach efforts and patient transportation; and
- Community relations.

According to Harold Dame, who directs the federal health grants program for PHS, "The Johnson/Pew projects have become the national model for providing health care to the homeless. At the same time, they serve as their respective communities' social conscience by focusing awareness on this critical need."

Program Served as Legislative Model

The guide represents the latest foundation contribution to the development of

The HCH approach to care described in these slides is one that can be adopted or modified by a variety of community service providers such as emergency shelters, community health centers, hospitals, and public health departments to meet the health needs of displaced persons.