

Advancing Health Equity: National Minority Health Month and MLK Community Healthcare's Innovative Approach

Insights

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April is National Minority Health Month (NMHM), a time dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of improving the health of racial and ethnic minority communities and reducing health disparities. Celebrated annually, NMHM highlights the disproportionate burden of premature death and illness faced by these groups and encourages action through health education, early detection, and disease control.

This year, the theme is "Advancing Commitments to Eliminate Health Disparities." In alignment with this theme, we recognize the extraordinary work being done at [Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital](#) (MLKCH) to address the healthcare needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in South Los Angeles.

MLK Community Healthcare's Street Medicine Department

In response to the severe healthcare challenges faced by the unhoused population in South LA, MLK Community Healthcare launched a [Street Medicine Department](#) in 2022. This initiative aims to break the cycle of severe illness and hospitalization caused by the lack of access to primary and specialty care among unhoused residents.

The program sends an interdisciplinary team of clinical care experts, social workers, and outreach specialists onto the streets to provide regular follow-up care to formerly hospitalized patients who are experiencing homelessness. This team performs essential health functions, from refilling prescriptions to providing wound care, and encourages enrollment in [CaAIM](#), a state program connecting Medicaid recipients to supportive services. [This short film](#) shows the vital work of the Street Medicine Department.

Challenges and Disparities

Homelessness in Los Angeles County is deeply tied to racial inequities, disproportionately affecting Black residents. Although Black people comprise only 9% of LA's population, they make up [31% of those experiencing homelessness](#). Recognizing these disparities, the [Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion \(ARDI\) Initiative](#) launched the [Black People Experiencing Homelessness \(BPEH\) Implementation Steering Committee](#) in 2021 to implement recommendations from the [Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority](#) (LAHSA) report on Black homelessness.

The MLKCH initiative addresses these systemic issues by providing critical healthcare services to the most vulnerable. With an [estimated shortage of 1,500 primary and specialty care physicians in South LA](#), the program is a vital resource for those who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

A Broader Mission

MLK Community Healthcare is committed to serving the medically underserved community of South Los Angeles. Since its opening in 2015, MLKCH has been recognized for its innovative approaches to quality, safety, and patient satisfaction. The Street Medicine Department is a testament to its mission to provide high-quality care and improve community health.

As we observe National Minority Health Month, it is essential to continue advancing efforts to eliminate health disparities and support initiatives like those at MLK Community Healthcare. By addressing the unique challenges faced by these underserved communities, we can work towards a more equitable healthcare system for all.