



Outreach and Health Ministry Program

Street Medicine Program

The Night Ministry's Street Medicine Program addresses the health care needs of some of the most vulnerable members of the Chicago community living in parks, forest preserves or alleys, under viaducts, or alongside roadways across the city. The innovative program was the first in Chicago to bring health care and other supportive services directly to homeless populations who have the most difficulty accessing traditional resources where they are living.



Background

Nearly one in ten Chicago residents has no health insurance.¹ Many of these uninsured individuals also experience homelessness. For some, a chronic health condition or an acute medical crisis health condition has led to the loss of work, which can trigger the loss of housing and health care coverage. For those with insurance, often through Medicaid or Medicare, lack of transportation, limited clinic hours, geographic isolation, and other factors can hinder access to medical care. Meanwhile, existing health care challenges can be exacerbated by the conditions of homelessness, which also make it difficult to treat high blood pressure, asthma, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and other conditions which are highly prevalent among homeless populations.

The Program

The Street Medicine Program's mobile approach allows The Night Ministry to respond agilely to the health care needs of unsheltered Chicagoans. The Street Medicine Teams, consisting of a Nurse Practitioner or Volunteer Physician, Case Manager, and Outreach Professional, regularly visit more than 30 sites across Chicago to provide triage and non-emergency medical treatment as well as food, hygiene supplies, and survival essentials such as socks, underwear, shoes, and winter gear. In addition, a Substance Use Advocate position assists clients asking for help with stopping or reducing alcohol or drug consumption. Team members also link clients to primary care and resources for housing and other supportive services.



The Street Medicine Teams are out on the streets six to seven days a week, most days in the morning and afternoon or evening. A dedicated phone line allows clients to contact the Teams directly to request services and provide updates on locations. A new customized van is designed with space flexible enough to accommodate private, in-vehicle consultations between clients and staff, which is especially important during inclement weather. The van has a medical refrigerator, organized storage space for supplies, and exterior lighting that provides illumination under Lower Wacker Drive, a frequently visited site, and at night.

The Street Medicine Program has been recognized for its unique approach. Most recently it was awarded the Anne M. Davis Mobile Health Award by the VNA Foundation.

Partnerships

The Night Ministry's Street Medicine staff have built relationships with hospitals, health care providers, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers across the city to facilitate further care for Street Medicine clients. Much of the food and many of the supplies distributed by the Team are donated by local organizations such as businesses, congregations, and community groups as well as individuals and families.



Program Achievements and Outcomes in Fiscal Year 2020

- The Street Medicine Team made 9,315 outreach contacts with homeless and medically vulnerable individuals
- Nurse Practitioners and Volunteer Physicians made 1,067 health assessments and cared for 289 conditions that otherwise would have gone untreated
- The Street Medicine Program prevented 166 visits to the emergency room, saving the public health care system more than \$153,000
- Members of the Street Medicine Team distributed 8,746 sack lunches and 4,905 hygiene kits

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. *2018 American Community Survey*, 2019.

The Night Ministry is a Chicago-based nonprofit that provides housing, health care, and human connection to individuals experiencing homeless or poverty. For more information, please visit www.thenightministry.org or call (773) 784-9000.