

Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program

1 Please describe your organization briefly, including mission statement, activities, size, etc.

The Face of Health Care for Boston's Homeless Men, Women, and Children

Since its founding in 1985, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP) has been guided by a simple but compelling mission – to provide and assure access to the highest quality health care for Boston's homeless men, women, and children. Through its 20+ year history, the goals of this nationally emulated model of innovative and cost-effective care have remained the same: 1) to integrate its services for homeless people in shelters and on the streets with the care offered in Boston's traditional health care system, and 2) to be a catalyst within the traditional health care system, making services more accessible and responsive to the needs of homeless patients.

For more than 20 years BHCHP has integrated its care with Boston's renowned academic medical centers and community health centers. BHCHP maintains strong ties with this medical community, operating daily primary care clinics for homeless patients at three major hospitals – Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston Medical Center, and Lemuel Shattuck Hospital. To supplement these bustling hospital-based clinics, BHCHP clinicians deliver direct care in over 70 unconventional locations – in shelters and soup kitchens, under bridges, along back alleys, and even behind the backstretch barns of a local thoroughbred racetrack. Additionally, BHCHP runs a unique 90-bed medical respite program at the Barbara McInnis House. This innovative and nationally recognized program provides sophisticated medical and nursing care for homeless individuals when they are too sick for shelters or the street but not sick enough to warrant an in-patient hospital stay.

Dedicated Staff and a Strong Volunteer Initiative

Across its many sites, BHCHP employs a staff of over 300 people. This staff is professionally and demographically diverse, bringing a rich mix of medical, dental, nursing, behavioral health, and social service skills to address the various needs of our clientele. Over half of all staff members hold professional degrees. BHCHP also has many opportunities for volunteer and corporate involvement and attracts a wide variety of individuals and groups – nearly 100 regular volunteers and interns each year. To coordinate these efforts, BHCHP employs a Manager of Volunteer Services & Community Relations, who works with program directors to identify areas of need, recruit and train volunteers, and develop appropriate volunteer placements.

Homeless Health Disparities

Homelessness affects men, women, and children of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. This community defies stereotypes and can be grouped together based only on their shared conditions of extreme poverty and the lack of safe and affordable housing.

Homelessness complicates the management of chronic illnesses, makes health care harder to access, presents obstacles to health care providers, and confounds delivery systems, making a program like ours essential. For many homeless people, health care becomes a distant priority amid the relentless daily struggles for food, clothing, and shelter. Untreated conditions often escalate into health care emergencies requiring prolonged hospital stays or treatment in a hospital emergency room. These points of care have great social costs including increased tax burdens, elevated medical insurance rates, and reduced resources in urgent care facilities.

By providing accessible primary care services for homeless people, BHCHP helps to avoid some of the substantial costs of care deferred or care denied. BHCHP has extensive experience addressing the special needs of homeless people, understanding the medical complexity and individual histories of our patients, and

providing an unparalleled spectrum of care. This experience allows us to fill gaps in care for homeless men, women, and children that would otherwise go unaddressed.

BHCHP now provides high quality health care for over 9,000 of our community's most vulnerable citizens each year. With services at more than 70 sites across the city, BHCHP has evolved as the largest and most comprehensive health care for the homeless program in the country.

2 Describe **in detail** the work or project an intern will do, **please be as specific as possible**.

BHCHP's Research Department

The BHCHP Research Department was created with the goal of fostering research, evaluation, and quality improvement within the Program. By tapping the wealth of experience and information within BHCHP, the department seeks to be a resource for various teams to evaluate their practices. We also work to engender research ideas and projects that will shed light on local and national issues surrounding the health care of homeless individuals and families. As such, the department supports and encourages research efforts, both by conducting research and by providing technical support to other teams within BHCHP in the design and implementation of an array of research projects.

The department has four principal objectives:

1. to measure and evaluate the accessibility, quality, and delivery of health care services;
2. to monitor health care outcomes;
3. to serve as a catalyst for change and a mechanism for advocacy in the realm of policy and practice; and to ensure the recruitment, retention, and professional development of clinical staff.

Internship Opportunity

During the fall of 2005, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program and HomeStart, a local housing provider, were awarded funding to create the Housing First Initiative. This unique program will house 24 individual adults, selected from cohorts of chronically homeless and street dwelling men and women that the program's Street Team has been following for the last seven years.

We are evaluating this program by collecting data in the form of a semi-structure interview with participating patients at or after 12 months of being housing. Follow up interviews will be conducted annually for the next five years for those tenants still housed. Interviews occur wherever the individual is most comfortable. In addition, chart reviews will be done to evaluate service utilization patterns of emergency and inpatient wards and detoxification units.

We are also reviewing the Boston Medical Center and BHCHP medical records to determine utilization of medical systems (hospitals, detoxification units, number of home visits per months to each housed participant), and following primary care health indicator measures. Indicators of interest are as follows: yearly influenza vaccination; yearly PAP smear; yearly PPD testing; Pneumovax vaccination; mammogram yearly for those eligible; HCV screening and, if needed, treatment; HepA vaccination; and cholesterol screening within 5 years, and those with mental illness connected with mental health services or documented refusal. We will also request Medicaid utilization data for the time period encompassing 12 months prior to the subjects housing and for the first 5 years post date of housing.

It is anticipated that the Princeton intern would play a key role in conducting this evaluation. Contingent upon the intern's interest and the timeline of the project, he/she would have the opportunity to engage in patient interviewing, chart review, data analysis and/or presentation of findings.

While the project will provide the intern with ample opportunity to learn about systems of care for homeless persons, this "desk learning" will be complemented by time shadowing providers and clinical teams as they

provide care to their homeless patients. In this way, it is our hope that the intern's learning experience will come alive.

3 Describe any particular skills, background, or qualities you are seeking in an intern

Qualifications:

- Computer skills; including data base development and word processing.
 - Interpersonal, verbal and written communication skills.
 - Highly motivated and self directed; comfortable in a variety of settings, from accompanying providers as they care for people on the street to attending meetings with hospital partners.
 - An interest in learning about homeless and multicultural issues and the complex health problems of homeless patients, as well as an interest in learning about both hospital and health care for the homeless program model of care.
- There are required dates for this internship. Internship must start on _____ and end on _____ or most include the period _____.
- Start and end dates for the internship are flexible.

The expected working schedule for this internship:

Begin 9 a.m. End 5 p.m.

Lunch break: Length flexible specific time flexible