

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research (TIER) conducted a mixed methods evaluation of the partnership between Healthy Families Massachusetts (HFM) and Medical Legal Partnership Boston (MLPB).

THE PROGRAMS

HFM: A statewide home visiting program for first-time parents under the age of 24 operating in 23 sites

MLPB: A legal aid and social justice organization that equips community providers with legal education and problem-solving insight that foster prevention and health equity

THE HFM-MLPB PARTNERSHIP

Through training and direct consultations with an appointed MLPB attorney, home visitors serve as conduits of legal information to help families solve problems and make legally informed decisions.

MLPB provides HFM with:

- Extensive trainings for home visiting staff
- Ongoing consultation with home visiting programs
- Legal triage for participants

EVALUATION AIMS

- 1 Learn about the broader systems of care in which home visiting participants are embedded
- 2 Describe the types of issues about which HFM staff consulted MLPB
- 3 Understand how the partnership has affected home visitors' work

METHODS

Sample

- 2,532 HFM participants active between 2021 and 2022
- 23 HFM staff members

Evaluation Activity	Description	Sample
Descriptive Analysis (Aim 1)	Examined parent data data from the program's management information system to understand how home visitors were working with MLPB as well as other providers	2,352 participants
Text field coding (Aim 2)	Examined a subsample of participants whose home visitors had consulted with MLPB; coded three home visit text fields: case topic area, issue type (e.g., denial of services, advocacy, and issue outcome (e.g., resolved vs. unresolved)	122 participants
Focus Groups (Aim 3)	Held focus groups with program directors and staff to learn about how MLPB has affected their work	23 staff members

RESULTS

1 HFM PARTICIPANT BROADER SYSTEMS OF CARE

TRACKING CONSULTATIONS

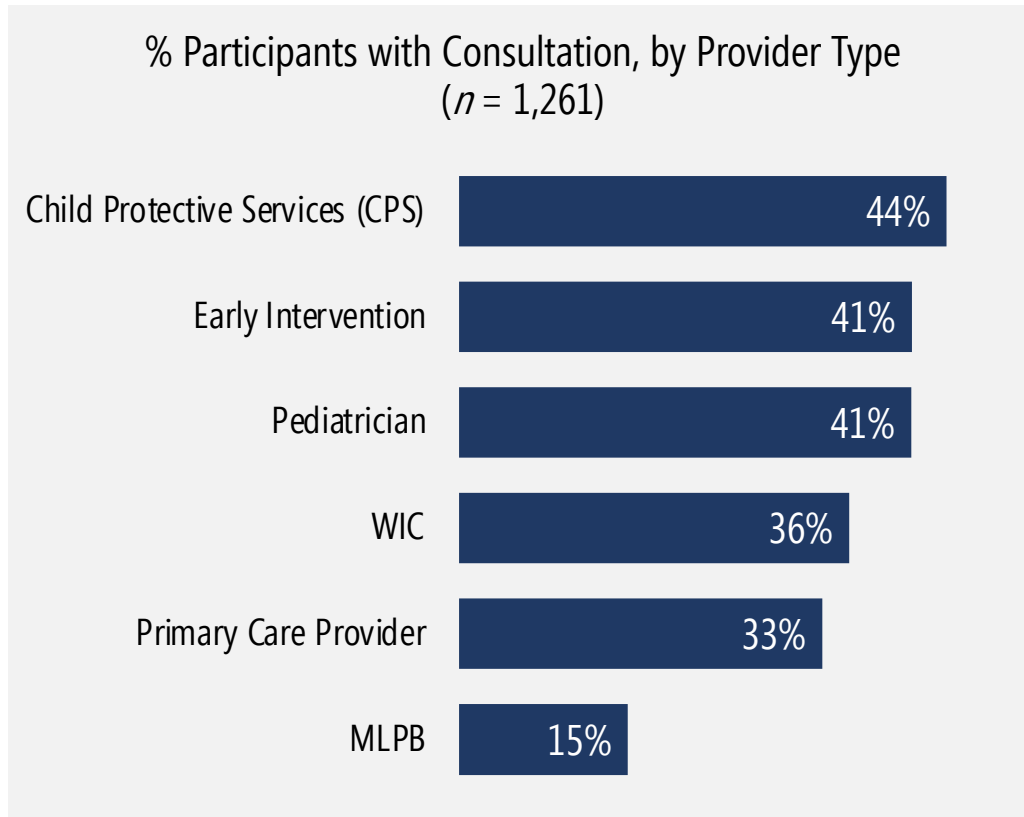
In 2021, a new field was added to the home visiting record to track consultations between home visitors and outside providers, including MLPB.

The screenshot shows a form for recording home visits. The highlighted section asks: "Did this visit include information related to a consultation or conversation the HFM program had with another organization (e.g., EI, DCF, MLPB, etc.)?". It has radio buttons for "Yes" (selected) and "No". Below this, it says "Please check all that apply and document details in the visit record" and lists checkboxes for DCF, MLPB, PCP (child), EI, WIC, and PCP (parents). DCF and MLPB are checked. There is also a field for "Other, Specify".

▶ Of the **48,405 home visits** that occurred between 2021 and 2022, **19%** included information about a consultation

▶ Of the **2,532 participants**, **50%** had at least one home visiting record that included information about a consultation with an outside provider

TYPES OF PROVIDERS CONSULTED BY HOME VISITORS



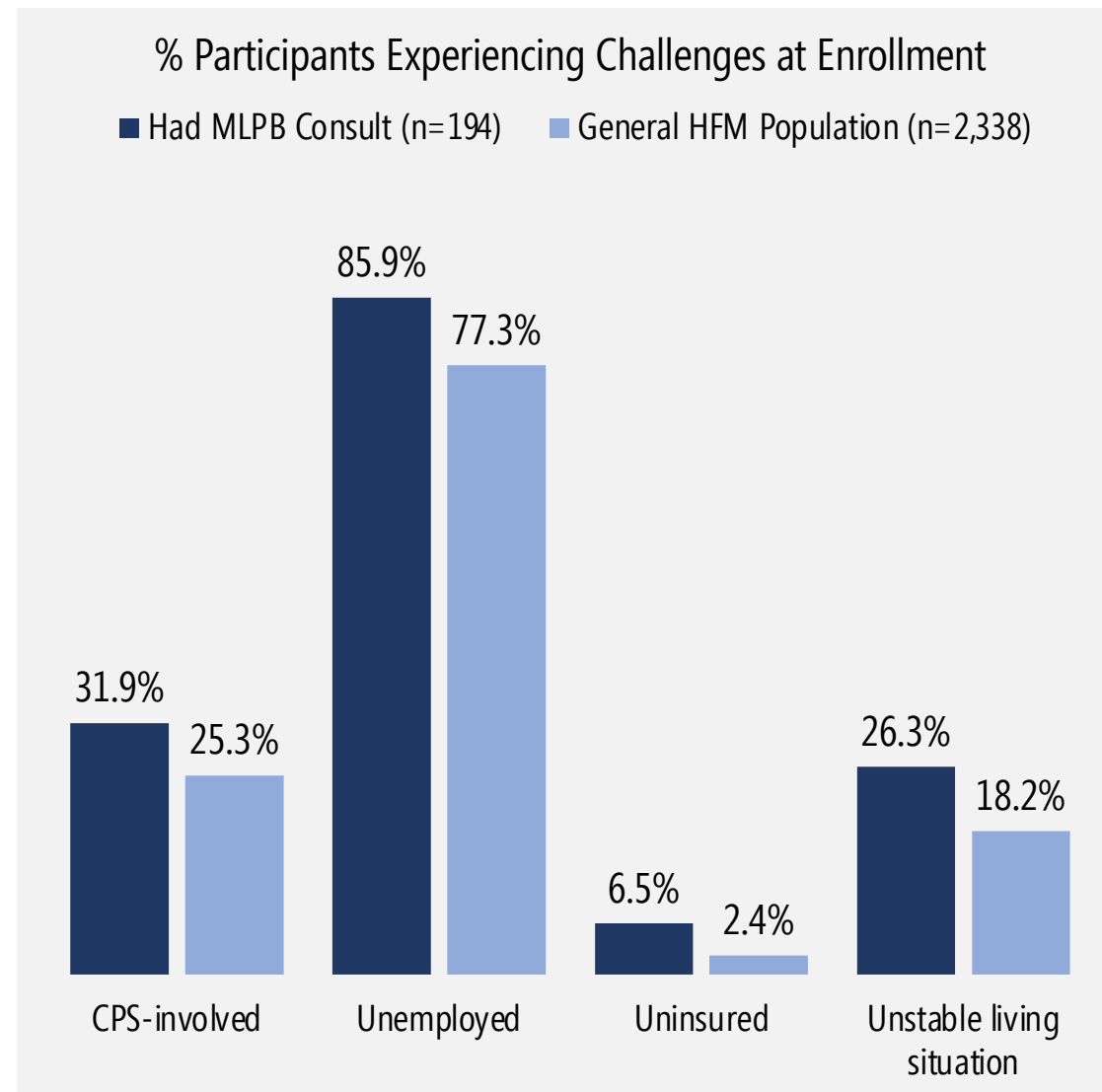
Note. Provider type is not mutually exclusive.

15% of participants had a home visiting record that included information about a consultation with MLPB

54% of participants had a home visiting record that included information about a consultation with a provider type other than the options provided with examples including other family support programs, DTA, housing, and childcare

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY PARTICIPANTS WITH MLPB CONSULTATIONS

When compared to the overall HFM population, participants with MLPB consultations were significantly more likely to experience challenges related to **CPS, employment, health insurance, and housing** at enrollment.

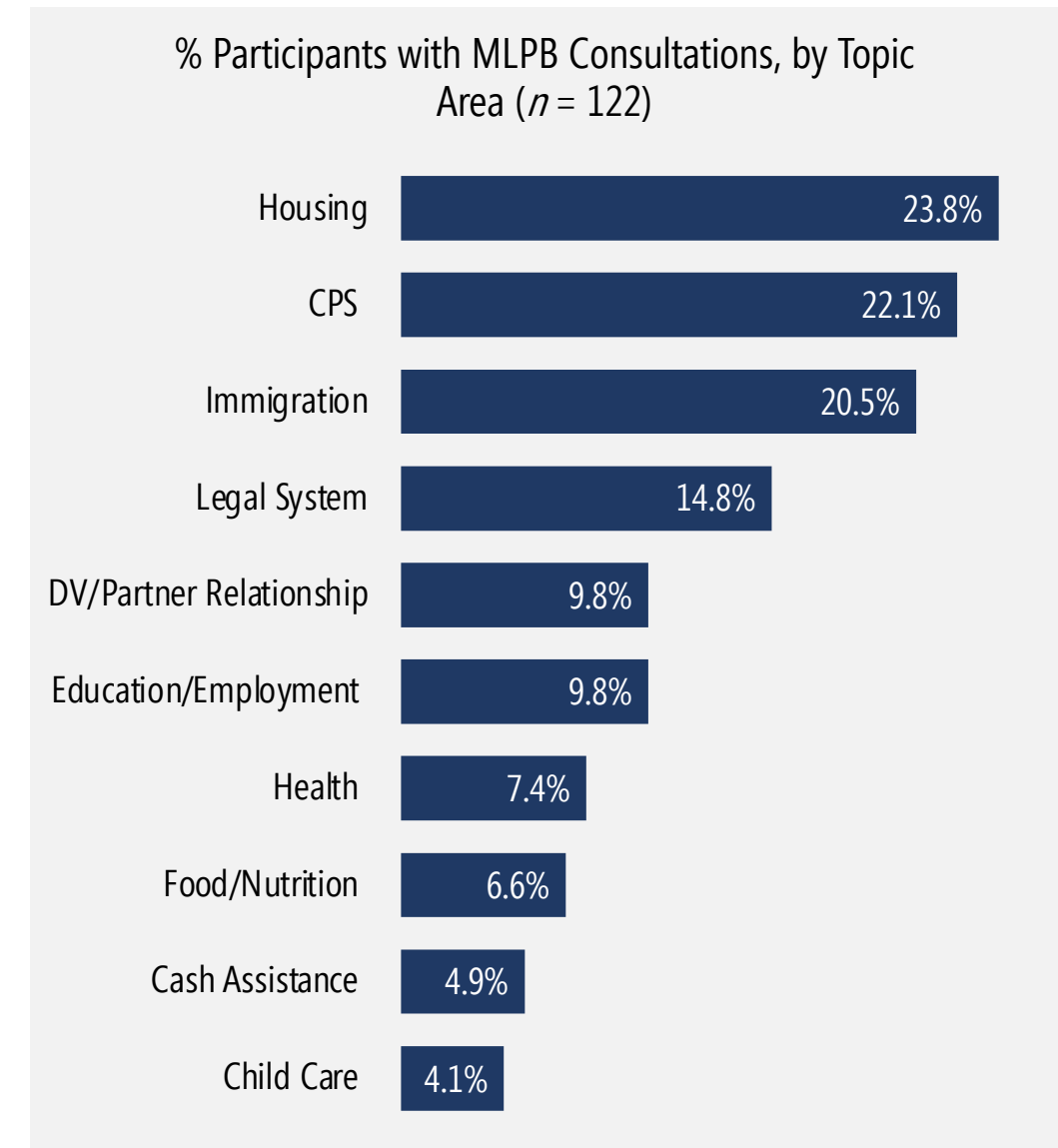


Note. No significant differences emerged by participant education status and experiences with substance use.

2 CHALLENGES MLPB HELPED ADDRESS

TOPIC AREA

The most pressing issues among participants for whom documentation of MLPB support was coded included **housing, CPS, and immigration**.



Note. Provider type is not mutually exclusive.

ISSUE TYPE

On behalf of participants, home visitors consulted with the MLPB lawyer about several issues:

- Equipping parents with the tools they need to stand up for themselves
- Helping parents get connected to resources
- Helping parents navigate the bureaucratic systems around applying for benefits
Figuring out why parents were denied services
- Addressing safety-related situations

The table below shows how each topic area mapped onto issue type.

Topic Area	Issue Type				
	Self-Advocacy	Connection to Resources	Bureaucratic Confusion	Denial of Services	Lack of Safety
Housing (<i>n</i> = 28)	42.9%	46.4%	10.7%	7.1%	7.1%
CPS (<i>n</i> = 25)	52.0%	28.0%	16.0%	4.0%	20.0%
Immigration (<i>n</i> = 25)	24.0%	32.0%	60.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Legal System (<i>n</i> = 17)	47.1%	11.8%	17.6%	11.8%	23.5%
DV/Partner Relationship (<i>n</i> = 12)	33.3%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	58.3%
Education/Employment (<i>n</i> = 11)	63.6%	9.1%	36.4%	9.1%	0.0%
Health (<i>n</i> = 9)	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	22.2%	0.0%
Food/Nutrition (<i>n</i> = 8)	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Cash Assistance (<i>n</i> = 6)	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	50.0%	0.0%
Child Care (<i>n</i> = 5)	20.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Average Percent	38.3%	32.7%	18.0%	13.3%	11.3%

Note. Issue type is not mutually exclusive; DV = domestic violence; legend: colors range from periwinkle (lowest percentage) to dandelion (highest percentage).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nearly, **40% of cases (38.3%)** focused on self-advocacy; **education/employment (63.6%)** and **CPS (52.0%)** were the highest
- Nearly **a third of cases (32.7%)** focused on connection to resources; **child care (100.0%)** and **housing (46.4%)** were the highest
- Nearly **a fifth of cases (18.0%)** focused on bureaucratic confusion; **immigration (60.0%)** and **education/employment (36.4%)** were the highest
- Only **13.3% of cases** focused on denial of services; **TANF/cash assistance (50.0%)** was the highest
- Only **11.3% of cases** focused on lack of safety; **DV/partner relationship (58.3%)** was the highest

CASE RESOLUTION

“Resolution” refers to the presenting issue, not the overall situation. For example, a resolution of a CPS issue could be that a parent finally was able to get a court date—not that she was able to reunify with her child. Still, since the intent of this program is to catch potential legal issues before they turn into crises, this resolution rate is a very positive finding.

▶ Of the **122 coded cases**, **87%** of the issues about which HFM consulted MLPB were resolved.

▶ The three types of cases with the highest resolution rates were **domestic violence (100.0%)**, **food/nutrition (100.0%)**, and **housing (96.6%)**.

▶ The three types of cases with the lowest resolution rates were **legal system (82.4%)**, **cash assistance (66.7%)**, and **child care (60.0%)**.

3 EFFECTS OF MLPB ON HOME VISITORS' WORK

INCREASED ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Connecting families to resources is an important and time-consuming aspect of home visitors' work. All HFM staff reported how helpful it was to have MLPB assist them in accessing, understanding, and explaining resources to families.

"Parental rights, medical bills, employment, employee rights, individuals who didn't get their last paycheck, emancipation for teen parents that we're working with, housing eviction notices, benefit questions about SNAP, a lot of resource connections we would otherwise have to scrounge around for."—Supervisor

INCREASED ABILITY TO ADVOCATE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Families' attempts to navigate public benefit systems are often hindered by bureaucratic confusion. Understanding these complex systems is crucial for home visitors to effectively advocate for families.

"In the beginning of the pandemic, we had a participant who gave the grandmother temporary custody of her child. Then when the pandemic happened the grandmother denied the mom even virtual visits. The courts were closed so the participant couldn't get a court date. We reached out to [MLPB lawyer] and she helped us get a virtual hearing to get virtual visits with the child. [MLPB lawyer] helped us find a workaround we didn't know about. We had gone to DCF first and they said the grandmother had the rights since she had custody, but through [MLPB lawyer], we also found out about the mom's rights."—Supervisor

HFM-MLPB PARTNERSHIP AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Through the extensive training structure, frequent contacts, and case-specific consultations, HFM staff develop their own competencies and expertise. They can now handle cases on their own that previously would have required MLPB consultation.

"[MLPB lawyer] built up the confidence in our team...it was impressive seeing the team learn the right questions to ask. Today consultations are more about in-depth complicated issues we haven't seen before. Home visitors know when to bring [MLPB lawyer] in and when they don't need to."—Supervisor

"Those other resources are for the participants. We feel like MLPB is our program. This is for us!" —Home Visitor

RECOGNIZING AND CALLING OUT SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE

HFM staff described multiple ways this partnership advances equity: (1) by enabling staff to help participants resist inequities through individual case triage, (2) by training staff to identify when participants' rights are being jeopardized and there is a potential legal remedy, and (3) by bringing broader systemic inequities to light.

"[MLPB lawyer] will sometimes say that a situation 'doesn't seem okay'... She'll say it seems bigger [than that one case]. She's not afraid to call out injustice when she sees it. I thought that was interesting because she's a professional and a lawyer, but she calls it the way it is. She's careful not to say something until she's sure. And she's so smart and trusted that we all trust her opinions. Other issues that come up are immigration, housing, shelter denials. Issues come to light because [MLPB lawyer] highlights them. It validates our sense that it's wrong. Yes, it is wrong."—Supervisor