

August 21, 2020

To the Healthcare Reform Taskforce Committee,

University of Utah Health is fully supportive of the 1115 Medicaid waiver for medical respite care.

University of Utah Health is committed to caring for all members of our community. We strive to provide continuity of care – care that extends outside our hospitals and clinics. To provide that continuity, we collaborate extensively with community-based organizations. Whether it's housing, access to food, or post-acute care, our community-based partners often fill the gaps of care in our system. Increasingly, we are becoming keenly aware of how the social determinants of health have a profound impact on one's health. One particularly compelling area that protects our most vulnerable populations is medical respite care.

Respite care is care for people experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover on the streets. Respite care focuses on connecting patients to the appropriate site of care. Rather than prolonging a hospital stay, often it makes more sense for a patient to recover in a lower cost site with an appropriate level of care (e.g. home health). This is not only a compassionate solution; it is also a fiscally responsible one as well.

As an example, our Hospitalists recently discharged a homeless patient with Medicaid to The Inn Between to receive hospice services. He passed away with dignity – he had a bed to rest in, a roof over his head, and people to provide comfort. Without this service, he would have likely ended up with several more ER visits and a hospitalization – huge expenses relative to a short stay at a step-down site of care like The Inn Between. What's more, is that he would have died alone on our streets – an avoidable tragedy. Our own internal data clearly demonstrate that getting very high-risk individuals housing leads to a reduction in healthcare utilization saving our system, and ultimately all consumers of healthcare, unnecessary costs.

University of Utah Health supports the 1115 Medicaid waiver to provide funding for respite medical care. Reimbursement for respite care not only reduces waste and avoidable costs, it gives our health system a path to provide compassionate care for our most vulnerable populations.



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Respectfully,

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