

An Innovative Approach to Addressing the Medical and Legal Needs of Individuals with Disabilities

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Introduction

The current study examines the geographic locations of medical-legal partnerships (MLP), Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LENDs), and University Centers for Excellence in Development Disabilities (UCEDDs) across the country in an effort to identify an innovative and sustainable method for addressing both the medical and legal needs of individuals with disabilities in an interdisciplinary way. There are 28 states throughout the country that have an MLP, a LEND, and a UCEDD. Of the 28 states with all three resources, there are only 18 cities where all three programs are co-located. Of the 18 cities, there is only one location where all three are housed within the same entity: Kennedy Krieger Institute, in Baltimore, Maryland. Kennedy Krieger is an internationally recognized institution dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with developmental disorders of the brain, spinal cord, and musculoskeletal system through patient care, research and professional training, special education, and community services.

What are MLPs?

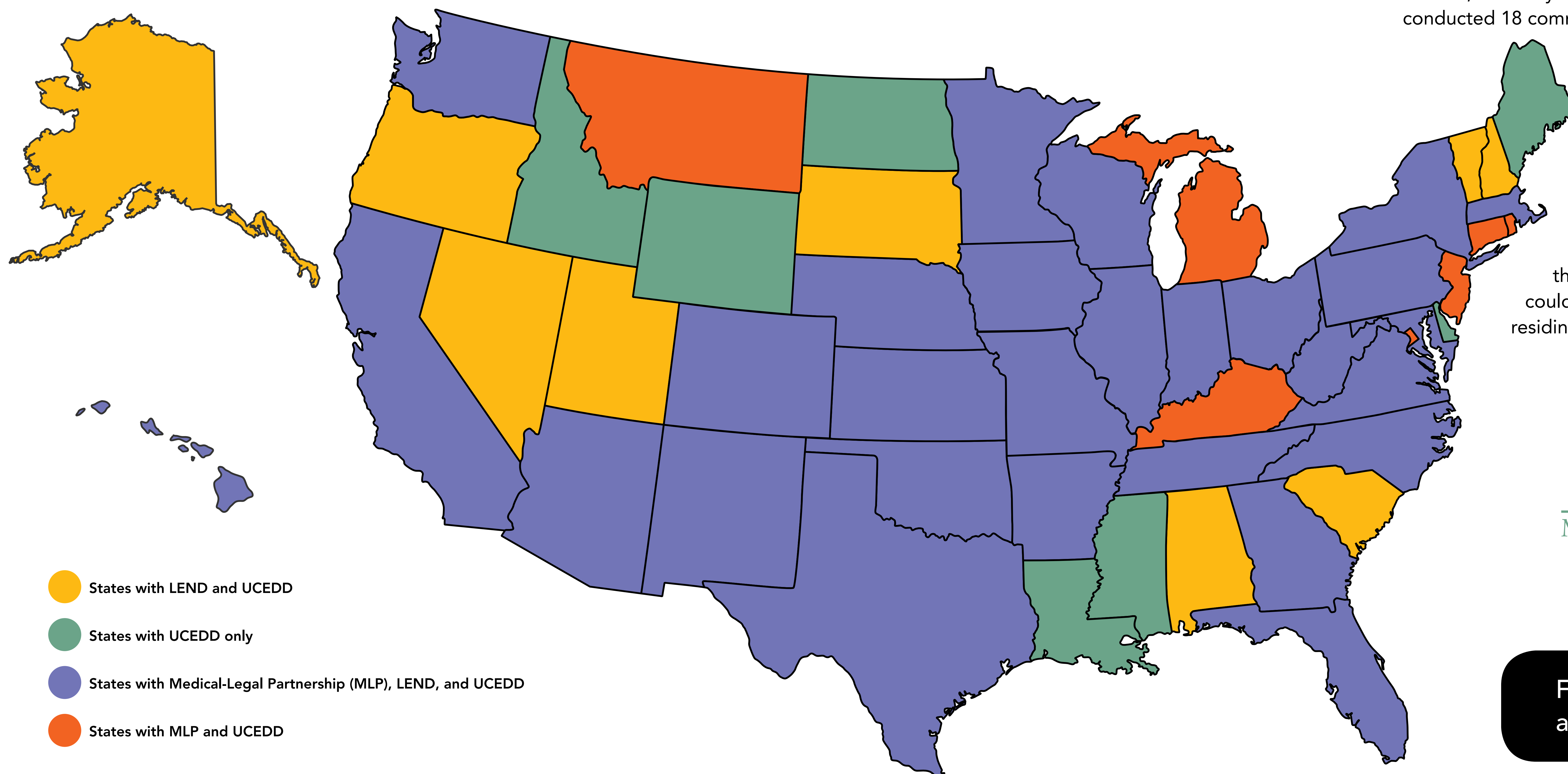
Typically, MLPs are community-based partnerships comprised of at least one legal institution and one health care institution in the community with the common goal of improving the health and well-being of low-income, medically underserved patients. Since the early 1990s, the creation of MLPs has been viewed as an innovative way to bring doctors and lawyers together to address the complex needs of low-income individuals in urban areas, and to help improve health outcomes by addressing the social determinants of health. The MLP network has grown significantly since that time, but challenges still exist. Aside from identifying the most appropriate clinical setting to host an MLP, the greatest challenge is identifying a sustainable funding source for these programs. Most MLPs receive initial funding through foundation and donor support; however, relying on these types of support is challenging in tough economic times. Now, more than ever, it is critically important that MLPs align their services with programs that are more sustainable, such as LENDs and UCEDDs.

Maryland Programs: MLP, LEND, and UCEDD

Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy and Law) at Kennedy Krieger Institute is a medical-legal partnership dedicated to providing free advocacy and legal services to low-income families and children with disabilities. Since its inception, Project HEAL has closely aligned advocacy and legal services with the Institute's LEND and UCEDD in an effort to provide trainees with a more interdisciplinary approach to addressing their patients' needs, as well as a more innovative approach to the delivery of community-based services for individuals with disabilities. Each year, Project HEAL provides LEND trainees with a variety of advocacy training programs on a host of policy and legal issues that affect their patients and families. Additionally, Project HEAL provides civil legal representation and brief advice to hundreds of low-income families and children with disabilities across the state of Maryland on a variety of legal matters (e.g., special education, public benefits, guardianship and less restrictive alternatives, and transition).

Collaboration of MLP, LEND, and UCEDD

In 2011, the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) conducted 18 community-based forums to more accurately identify the needs of Marylanders with developmental disabilities. In every region across the state, individuals reported that access to advocacy and legal services was a critical need. Collaboratively, MLPs, LENDs, and UCEDDs may have a significant impact in the lives of individuals with disabilities by providing comprehensive medical and legal services, while simultaneously providing invaluable training to future generations of clinicians. Based on our study, it appears that MLPs, LENDs, and UCEDDs in at least 18 cities could collaborate to fill a current unmet need for individuals residing in those areas.



Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities
at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Maximizing Potential. Creating Change.

For more information, visit our website
at mccd.kennedykrieger.org.