

Street medicine and HIV access

What is street medicine and why is it important for people with HIV?

[Street medicine](#) is the delivery of health services directly to the unsheltered population. The model acknowledges and lifts up the strength and dignity of unstably housed individuals being served and requires providers to approach care delivery with trust building, humility and solidarity. Street medicine involves meeting would-be patients exactly where they are: on the street. For people with HIV, this means leaving the four walls of a clinic, carrying supplies in backpacks, and dispensing medications, drawing blood for labs and providing other HIV services outside on the street.



Let's Talk HIV

Let's Talk HIV: Why Medicaid Matters, is a podcast series from HIVMA. For 2025, each episode in the series focuses on a different aspect of Medicaid or the Affordable Care Act (ACA), why it matters for people with HIV, and how HIV providers can work to protect access to coverage.

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How can Medicaid support street medicine programs?

Because street medicine programs provide care in a nontraditional setting (the street), it has historically been difficult for providers to bill Medicaid and other payers for it. In 2023, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services – the federal agency that oversees Medicaid – took an important step to make it easier for street medicine programs to bill Medicaid by [establishing a place of service code](#) for street medicine. However, state Medicaid programs and Medicaid managed care plans are still working to implement this change, including creating billing guidance for providers to help them navigate Medicaid billing and reimbursement.

State Medicaid programs have also taken advantage of federal Medicaid flexibilities, such as 1115 demonstration projects that allow states to test out innovative payment and delivery models. In recent years, many of these demonstration projects have included new pathways for state Medicaid programs and Medicaid managed care plans to cover non-traditional services that better address social determinants of health, including housing services. These demonstration projects have meant that street medicine programs can provide additional Medicaid covered services to unhoused populations, including housing, nutrition, employment, and linkage services.

How could cuts to Medicaid and other federal policies impact street medicine and the people street medicine programs serve?

Medicaid is the largest source of insurance coverage for people with HIV, providing coverage for over 40% of nonelderly people with HIV. It is also a critical payer for street medicine programs. In July 2025, Congress passed a budget bill that will [cut nearly \\$1 trillion](#) from Medicaid over 10 years, resulting in millions of beneficiaries losing coverage. Cuts of this magnitude, coupled with recent announcements from CMS [rescinding previous guidance](#) on demonstration projects focused on social determinants of health, will result in both significant coverage losses and the loss of a funding source critical to the sustainability and expansion of street medicine programs.

In addition to Medicaid cuts, the White House released an [executive order](#) July 24, 2025, calling for the forced commitment of people who are unhoused and undercutting the highly effective and evidence-based harm reduction approaches proven to prevent overdose deaths, treat addiction and stop the transmission of HIV and other infectious diseases. The executive order disavows a [“housing first”](#) approach to health care, which has [proven effective](#) at improving housing stability and an intervention providers see as an important step to addressing other health and social needs. While the executive order does not call out street medicine programs specifically, erosion of harm reduction funding and an approach that criminalizes people who are unhoused will impact the ability of street medicine programs to provide care and treatment to people on the street.

Learn More

- [Street Medicine Institute](#)
- Center for Health Care Strategies, HIVMA, [Financing Mechanisms for Street Medicine and Other Low-Barrier Models of Care](#)
- Center for Health Care Strategies, [Partnerships for Action: California Health Care & Homelessness Learning Collaborative](#)
- HIVMA, [Denying the effectiveness of harm reduction will be costly to efforts to End the HIV Epidemic](#)
- National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, [New executive order calls for arresting and institutionalizing unhoused people](#)
- HIVMA, [Budget reconciliation bill: A big setback to our nation's health](#)

Take Action!

Contact your state Medicaid program or Medicaid managed care plans to ask them to provide guidance on how street medicine providers can bill Medicaid for services.

[Find Your state Medicaid director contact](#)

Contact state and federal legislators and ask them to preserve funding for and commitment to harm reduction and housing first programs.

[Find Your State Legislators](#)