



## How Boston Medical Center's THRIVE Call Center Partnered with findhelp to Support Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Executive Summary

Boston Medical Center (BMC) is a non-profit academic medical center that functions as the largest safety-net hospital and busiest provider of trauma and emergency services in New England. At the start of 2020, BMC staff faced the COVID-19 pandemic head-on and worked tirelessly to help patients who were diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus.

As COVID-19 cases continued to rise, BMC staff members joined forces to provide patients with information and resources to address both their medical and social needs, efforts that were largely supported by the THRIVE Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) Call Center. Staff at the call center use the [THRIVE Directory](#), powered by findhelp, to identify critical social service programs and resources that help patients access food delivery or pay their bills. Between October 10, 2020 and March 29, 2021, the THRIVE SDoH Call Center served 312 patients and made 478 referrals.

### About Boston Medical Center

[Boston Medical Center](#), located in the South End neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, is a private, 514-bed, academic medical center and the primary teaching affiliate for Boston University School of Medicine. More than half of BMC patients come from underserved populations, such as the low-income and elderly, who rely on government payers like Medicaid, the Health Safety Net, and Medicare for their coverage and 32 percent do not speak English as a primary language.



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EXCEPTIONAL CARE. WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

Seeing more than one million patient visits a year in over 70 medical specialties and subspecialties, BMC physicians are leaders in their fields with the most advanced medical technology at their fingertips. BMC staff have a well-established history of developing novel programs to help vulnerable patients that become models for national healthcare organizations, such as the Food Pantry, StreetCred, and the Violence Intervention Advocacy programs.

### About the THRIVE SDOH Screening and Referral Program

In 2017, BMC developed the THRIVE Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Screening and Referral program to improve overall patient health by identifying and addressing detrimental social factors preventing patients from thriving, such as unstable housing, food insecurity, financial instability, and other issues. These unmet social needs contribute to poor health outcomes, increased risk of chronic diseases, and unnecessary hospitalizations. Through the THRIVE screener, patients identify their social needs, and BMC staff refer them to both resources at BMC and in the community using the THRIVE Directory (powered by findhelp).



## Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a rapid surge in unmet social needs due to: prolonged health implications for those who contracted the virus; new quarantine measures; transitions to remote work; and an increased number of furloughs and job losses. BMC Thrive program leadership anticipated that additional help would be needed to address the increased demand. To support patients with COVID-19, the hospital assigned a medical response team to call recently-diagnosed patients to inform them of safety protocols (quarantining, physical distancing, etc.). This team quickly learned that many patients, especially socioeconomically disadvantaged patients, were finding it very challenging to adhere to these protocols. The staff making these calls needed more guidance and training to support patients' unmet social needs to help them heal faster and prevent the spread of the virus.

## Collaborating to Help Patients Facing COVID-19

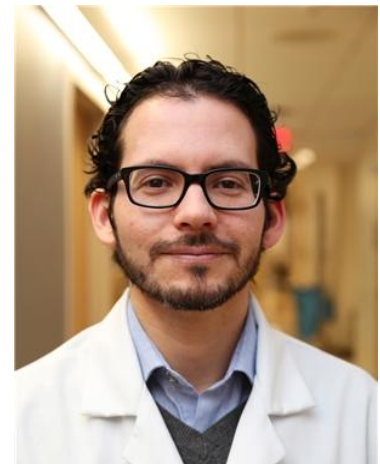
To solve these problems, the Ambulatory Clinical Response Team and Boston University's (BU) School of Medicine's student leads from the THRIVE Program brainstormed the best workflows to help patients with COVID-19 receive help while keeping staff healthy and safe. Led by BU School of Medicine students Berit Lindell, Divya Satischandra, and Kirsten Mojzisek, and supported by BU School of Social Work students, the group developed the THRIVE SDoH Call Center.

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**The THRIVE call center started with medical students calling patients diagnosed with COVID-19, but we quickly realized they needed more support and training to connect patients with resources. Social work students helped bring all of these other skills to the table: how to build rapport and how to talk to patients who are struggling with adverse social circumstances.**

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*Dr. Pablo Buitron de la Vega, assistant professor at the School of Medicine and a primary care physician at BMC*



## How findhelp meets Boston Medical Center's Needs

Findhelp's comprehensive database of social care programs makes it simple for THRIVE SDoH Call Center staff to find local, relevant resources for their patients. To support BMC's diverse patient population, the platform allows staff to share referral information with patients in their preferred language via print, email, or text message. As programs modify their services and operations in response to the pandemic, findhelp's Data team works diligently to keep information updated and add new programs and resources as they arise, a critically important service with the rapid changes happening in response to the pandemic.



## The THRIVE SDoH Call Center's Workflow



BMC nurses call patients to **notify them of their positive COVID-19 diagnosis, provide guidance about current safety protocols, and ask about social needs** that may make it challenging to adhere to such protocols



If the patient indicates that they need assistance with social needs and are looking for help, **the nurse refers them to the THRIVE SDoH Call Center**



**The student sends program information to the patient** via email or text, all while working from home. To ensure patients are getting the help they need, **students check in two weeks after the initial call** and document updates in the patient's medical record



**Social work and medical students** staffing the THRIVE SDoH Call Center receive those referrals, further assess the patient's needs, and **connect them with community and hospital resources** using BMC's version of findhelp's platform, [THRIVE Directory](#)

## Results of Partnering with findhelp

*"It's not just about symptoms but improving their health and well-being by considering the environment in which they live and work,"* says Dr. Linda Susan Sprague Martinez, Chair of Macro Practice & Associate Professor at BU School of Social Work. The main goal of the THRIVE SDoH Call Center is to respond to patient requests for help with social needs and connect them with the community organization that provides the services or resources that meet their specific needs. findhelp offers BMC staff an easy way to find the right resources available to a patient and a means to safely refer them to those community resources.

Through their findhelp platform, **BMC staff served 312 patients and made 478 referrals** in six months. Patients were most often referred to government programs (188 referrals), followed by hospital organizations (133) and local nonprofits (70), and the most common need was food security. The call center received an increase in calls between December 2020 and January 2021, but they've received fewer inquiries since the release of the COVID-19 vaccine. BMC plans to expand the THRIVE SDoH Call Center program beyond COVID-19 patients to continue streamlining the way they provide resources to the people they serve.

## Want to learn more?

[Schedule a demo](#) with one of our team members to see how findhelp can benefit your organization.