

# Choice Neighborhoods

monthly news about investing in housing, people, and neighborhoods

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## Partnership Between Atlanta Housing and Morehouse School of Medicine Leads to Remarkable Health Improvements

This month's Spotlight article describes how Atlanta Housing partnered with Morehouse School of Medicine in its two Choice Neighborhoods sites to dramatically improve health outcomes for residents, many of whom have chronic health conditions. At University Homes, Atlanta's first Implementation Grant awarded in 2015, this partnership resulted in the percentage of residents with medical homes (defined as having a regular place of healthcare other than the emergency room) increasing from 72% to 100%. Atlanta's second Implementation Grant, awarded in 2023, is already demonstrating strong progress among former Bowen residents with medical homes rates rising from 50% to 86%. These results go beyond access to medical care and impact residents' economic mobility. Choice Neighborhoods residents often report health conditions as a major barrier to employment and struggle obtaining or keeping a job due to major illnesses, lack of dental care, or chronic conditions. And for senior residents aging within public housing, providing access to care helps maintain their well-being and ensures they can remain in their homes as their health needs change.

### How the Partnership Was Formed

Atlanta's first Choice Implementation Grant was awarded in 2015 and targeted University Homes, a public housing site that had previously been demolished and subject to a repositioning/redevelopment effort. The initial resident needs assessment indicated many of the former residents lacked a medical home and had difficulty accessing the medical services they needed, something which proved especially challenging for residents with chronic medical conditions requiring consistent care.

During the initial planning phases, the Atlanta Housing Executive Director met with several presidents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) located nearby, including Morehouse School of Medicine, to discuss the physical transformation of the neighborhood. Recognizing the unaddressed health needs of former University Homes residents, Atlanta Housing intentionally developed a relationship with Morehouse to align goals and explore what a health partnership could look like. Meanwhile, Morehouse had an organization-wide objective to serve the health needs of the broader Westside community and Atlanta region. This led to a mutually beneficial health partnership rooted in improving health outcomes among former University Homes residents.

Morehouse was well positioned to serve as the Health Lead because they could provide direct health services to local residents and tap into its network of partner health providers to provide service options convenient to where residents lived. The work also aligned with Morehouse's mission to serve the health needs of community and, through their Department of Community Health and Preventative Medicine, they would have the opportunity to expand services and leverage their relationship with Choice Neighborhoods to build further partnerships.

Through Choice Neighborhoods, Atlanta Housing selected Morehouse to serve as the Health Lead for both the University Homes Implementation Grant (now closed out) and the recently awarded Bowen Homes, five miles west of University Homes whose public housing residents were also dispersed due to earlier demolition.



*HUD presents Atlanta Housing with their FY23 Implementation Grant Award for Bowen Homes*

## **Structuring the Agreement**

Atlanta Housing uses a portion of the Choice Neighborhoods grant to fund several Morehouse staff positions that are dedicated to the Choice Neighborhoods efforts. The two parties have a contract that describes their relationship in detail, with Morehouse facilitating access to health care services and providing support for residents to navigate the health care system. This partnership is managed by a full-time program director at Morehouse for Choice Neighborhoods who is supported by medical practitioners and medical students. The contract outlines Atlanta Housing's expectations of Morehouse in terms of services and expected outcomes. It also includes details regarding logistical requirements like invoicing, training templates, and standardized monthly data reports. Morehouse and Atlanta Housing built in flexibility to amend the scope of work and contract based on evolving needs throughout the grant term.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Morehouse and Atlanta Housing work individually with residents to identify their needs, help them navigate and connect with the right health services, and conduct monthly care coordination meetings to ensure residents are getting the care they need. Atlanta Housing and Morehouse's success is largely due to their emphasis on a rapid response tailored for the unique needs of each resident and ongoing follow up.

## **Morehouse School of Medicine's Role**

The Morehouse team is led by a program director and supported by both a program coordinator and a community health worker who will be added in 2026 for additional support on the Bowen project. The current program director, Derrick Green, oversees day-to-day operations and works with Atlanta Housing leadership to develop new programs and seek partnerships with other service providers. The program coordinator oversees the referral process and follows up with residents working with Atlanta Housing's case managers. The community health worker will offer more targeted health education, programming, and community linkages to residents. These supports may include speaking directly with an insurance provider, helping to fill out paperwork for a disability application, and accompanying residents to doctor's appointments to help communicate health issues.

### **Atlanta Housing's Role**

Atlanta Housing's people project manager is responsible for overseeing the partnership and tracking outcomes with Morehouse and is supported by four case managers.

Atlanta Housing's case managers coordinate with Morehouse's program coordinator to refer residents with health needs and check in on residents' progress. The referrals are done via CaseWorthy, a case management software system procured by Atlanta Housing that allows partner access to receive and track resident referrals and progress. The case managers also host monthly resident advisory meetings to familiarize residents with supportive services, including health services available through Morehouse.



*Photo via Atlanta Housing Instagram*

### **Individual Referral Process**

Atlanta Housing's case managers work with each household to identify their baseline needs and help each resident create their own path toward reaching their goals. This includes health-specific issues, like whether they have a medical home, health insurance, dental or vision coverage, chronic conditions, or other unique health concerns.

When a case manager identifies a health need for a resident, they use CaseWorthy to send an alert to Morehouse's program coordinator. Once notified, Morehouse has forty-eight hours to accept the referral and connect that resident with the appropriate service provider within seven days. The case management software provides all partners with a record of communication and action steps for each resident.

The Morehouse program coordinator is responsible for connecting residents to health services and following up after their appointment. The program coordinator reaches out to residents to fully understand their health needs and provides various options for care. Morehouse has an extensive network of services they offer residents including in-house medical care and partnerships with other medical providers. They serve as a medical home for many residents living in the community through the Morehouse Medicine Lee Street facility, offering primary and pediatric care, telemedicine, and multi-specialty medical practices. For those lacking insurance coverage, they operate an interprofessional student-run clinic providing free direct patient care, telehealth services, community-based health screenings, and patient education. For residents who live outside the target neighborhood, they partner with other organizations like Grady Health System, which has clinics throughout the region. The Morehouse program coordinator follows up with residents to ensure they attended their appointment and received the medical care they needed.

Atlanta Housing case managers also check in with residents monthly to assess their progress and ensure they were successfully connected with a medical provider. For example, if residents haven't been connected to medical services or share additional health needs, the case manager coordinates with the Morehouse program coordinator to resolve any unaddressed needs.



*Farmers Market with University Homes residents*

### **Additional Coordination**

Atlanta Housing and Morehouse also coordinate outside of the individual referral process to further increase their effectiveness and responsiveness to resident needs. The Morehouse and Atlanta Housing Case Management Team meet monthly in care coordination meetings to discuss particularly challenging issues and find ways to advocate for residents collectively. At these meetings, Morehouse and Atlanta Housing review assessment results, share progress, and delve into health-related issues with service gaps. Morehouse staff and Atlanta Housing case managers work closely to resolve specific individual cases that require additional support. When potential solutions require forming new partnerships or finding additional resources, Atlanta Housing's resident resources coordinator and executive staff play a role, furthering the discussion at collaborative lead meetings. Once the community health worker begins, they will further reinforce health-related advocacy, support, and education so residents can be better health advocates for themselves, their families, and their community.

Atlanta Housing also facilitates "collaborative lead" meetings, where the health, workforce, and education leads collectively solve problems that overlap into multiple categories. For example, children's mental health or lack of transportation may impact school performance. Poor health also limits individuals' abilities to obtain and keep a job. In these meetings, Morehouse (as the health lead) teams up with Atlanta Public Schools and Communities in Schools of Atlanta (co-education leads) and the Urban League of Greater Atlanta (workforce lead) to review outcomes, complex cases, and to find holistic solutions that combine their resources. A few examples include teaming up during exposition events that

connect families to workforce offerings, tutoring, wellness services, and screenings under one roof. They also provide access to fresh produce through collective partners resources and a partnership with The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), Atlanta's regional transit authority, to offer transportation to and from jobs and medical appointments.



*Community Event (via Atlanta Housing Instagram)*

## **Adapting Programming to Resident Needs**

Morehouse's service delivery model emphasizes health care tailored to each individual's needs that is customizable and adaptable. To do this effectively, they focus on working closely with each resident and listening to their health concerns and needs. Issues that repeatedly came up as a concern were a lack of mental health services, dental and eye care, and navigating bureaucratic systems like Medicaid and disability applications. In response, Morehouse partnered with Families First to provide counseling and mental health services. This work required an educational component, because oftentimes, mental health carries a negative stigma. They also partnered with Georgia's Primary Health Care to offer mobile dental care services and another local organization to offer dental care on a sliding fee scale depending on income.

As Pamela Owunta, Atlanta Housing’s Senior Vice President for Choice Neighborhoods noted, “We don’t want to just ‘check the boxes’ in terms of meeting percentage goals for households insured or with a medical home; we want to help families manage existing chronic conditions and prevent chronic conditions.” This goal translated into a recognition that good health extends beyond health care, resulting in a broader set of services.

## Remarkable Results

The tailored health and wellness services provided through Atlanta Housing’s partnership with Morehouse has led to impressive results. All former University Homes residents now have a medical home, and although it is too soon to tell for Bowen (the grant was awarded in 2023), we already see promising results, with 86% of residents now connected to a medical home.

To achieve this, they used a model that goes beyond connecting residents with health services. They understand that helping residents navigate the health care and insurance systems, especially for those with chronic conditions who require regular care and visits with specialists, requires more assistance. To respond to this need, they provided residents with individual support and looked for ways to adapt their services to improve collective health outcomes for all residents. According to Morehouse Program Director Derrick Green, “By empowering residents to participate in their health and wellness journeys, build a healthy lifestyle, and become advocates for themselves, they build the foundation for becoming a multigenerational, healthy family.”



*Groundbreaking for Bowen Homes Phase I (via Atlanta Housing Instagram)*

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