



Princeton  
Internships in  
Civic  
Service

## PICS 2010 Internship Description

**Organization Name:** Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program

**Internship Location:** Boston, MA

**Required Dates:** Yes  No

**Housing Will Be Available to Intern:** Yes  No

**Expected working schedule for this internship:**

Start Time: varies am                      End Time: varies pm  
Lunch break: varies (duration)                      (specific time, if applicable)

**Additional Information**, if necessary: There may be some opportunities available outside of a typical 9am-5pm schedule, but we work within the intern's availability.

### Organization Description

*Please describe your organization briefly, including mission statement, activities, size etc. Please also explain the benefit that will be derived by your organization by sponsoring a Princeton intern.*

#### *The Face of Health Care for Boston's Homeless Men, Women, and Children*

Founded in 1985 as one of the first Health Care for the Homeless programs in the country, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP) is committed to a singular, powerful mission—to provide and assure access to the highest quality health care for Boston's homeless men, women and children. BHCHP maintains strong ties with the medical community, operating daily hospital based primary care clinics for homeless patients on the campuses of Massachusetts General Hospital and Boston Medical Center. In addition, BHCHP's multi-disciplinary teams deliver direct medical, dental and behavioral health services to homeless men, women, and children in over 80 unconventional locations – in shelters and soup kitchens, under bridges, along back alleys, and even behind the backstretch barns of a local thoroughbred racetrack. BHCHP also runs a unique 104-bed medical respite program that provides sophisticated, round-the-clock medical and nursing care for homeless individuals when they are too sick for shelters or the street but not in need of a costly inpatient hospital stay.

BHCHP has extensive experience addressing the special needs of homeless people. We understand the medical and social complexity of our patients and the obstacles of life without safe and reliable housing. This expertise allows us to care for nearly 11,000 of our community's most vulnerable citizens each year, making BHCHP one of the largest and most comprehensive health care for the homeless programs in the country.

#### *Dedicated Staff and a Strong Volunteer Initiative*

Princeton Internships in Civic Service is administered by the Princeton University Class of 1969 Community Service Fund.

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## Princeton Internships in Civic Service

Across its many sites, BHCHP employs a staff of over 300 people. This staff is professionally and demographically diverse, bringing a rich mix of medical, dental, nursing, behavioral health, and social service skills to address the various needs of our patients. Over half of all staff members hold professional degrees. BHCHP also has many opportunities for volunteer and corporate involvement and attracts a wide variety of individuals and groups – nearly 100 regular volunteers and interns each year. To coordinate these efforts, BHCHP employs a Manager of Volunteer Services & Community Partnerships, who works with program directors to identify areas of need, recruit and train volunteers, and develop appropriate volunteer placements.

### Homeless Health Disparities

Homelessness affects men, women, and children of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. This community defies stereotypes and can be grouped together based only on their shared conditions of extreme poverty and the lack of safe and affordable housing.

Homelessness complicates the management of chronic illnesses, makes health care harder to access, presents obstacles to health care providers, and confounds delivery systems, making a program like ours essential. For many homeless people, health care becomes a distant priority amid the relentless daily struggles for food, clothing, and shelter. Untreated conditions often escalate into health care emergencies requiring prolonged hospital stays or treatment in a hospital emergency room. These points of care have great social costs including increased tax burdens, elevated medical insurance rates, and reduced resources in urgent care facilities.

By providing accessible primary care services for homeless people, BHCHP helps to avoid some of the substantial costs of care deferred or care denied. BHCHP has extensive experience addressing the special needs of homeless people, understanding the medical complexity and individual histories of our patients, and providing an unparalleled spectrum of care. This experience allows us to fill gaps in care for homeless men, women, and children that would otherwise go unaddressed.

### Benefits of a Princeton Intern

BHCHP has been fortunate to host a Princeton intern for the past three summers and their contributions to the agency have been numerous. First and foremost, with a very small research department our Princeton interns have allowed us truly expand the amount of work that can be accomplished. With multiple research projects in progress, having an intern enables us to dedicate the time and resources to the Housing First project that would not otherwise be possible. It is also valuable to have a fresh perspective when conducting research. Our previous interns have done a remarkable job learning about the various elements of our program and applying that knowledge when making suggestions for the direction of the project. Finally, having an intern “forces” our program to be more introspective and deliberate about our approach and methodology. This is beneficial for an intern whom we want to teach and mentor, but also allows our busy program to take a step back and consider the “big picture” and the finer details of our research.

## Internship Description

*Describe in detail the work or project will do; please be as specific as possible. Please also explain the benefit that a student will obtain by interning with your organization.*

### BHCHP's Research Department

The BHCHP Research Department was created with the goal of fostering research, evaluation, and quality improvement within the Program. By drawing on the wealth of experience and information within BHCHP, the department seeks to be a resource for various teams to evaluate their practices. We also work to engender research ideas and projects that will shed light on local and national issues surrounding the health care of homeless individuals and families. As such, the department supports and encourages research efforts, both by conducting research and by providing technical support to other teams within BHCHP in the design and implementation of an array of research projects.

The department has four principal objectives:

1. to measure and evaluate the accessibility, quality, and delivery of health care services;
2. to monitor health care outcomes;
3. to serve as a catalyst for change and a mechanism for advocacy in the realm of policy and practice;
4. to ensure the recruitment, retention, and professional development of clinical staff.

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### Internship Opportunity

In recent years, federal, state, and local governments have targeted people the chronically homeless, particularly those who have been living on the streets—many for several years—and moved them into housing without preconditions of sobriety. This intervention model is termed “Housing First.” Evaluations of Housing First programs have found encouraging housing retention rates as well as more efficient utilization of health care services that have translated to government cost savings. However, it is quickly becoming apparent that the medical and social needs of this unique population are complex and require extensive supportive services. BHCHP’s Street Team provides such supportive services and addresses the medical, mental health and social needs of our patients both while they are homeless and once they are housed. This multidisciplinary team of medical and mental health professionals does not wait for their homeless patients to come to them. Instead the team takes to the streets checking in on their patients where ever they may be. In addition, the team’s physician assistant and psychiatrist make house calls, visiting these newly housed – former street dwellers to be sure their transition to housing is going smoothly as well as to continue to monitor the complexity of their medical and mental health needs. This continuity of care model provides an excellent opportunity for an evaluation of the medical, mental health and social needs and health status of patients who have been housed after living on the streets.

In 2007, BHCHP’s research department began a study to evaluate the health status, services utilization, and quality of life of patients who have been housed after living on the streets. Princeton students have been instrumental in carrying out this study. Using data collected by Princeton students from the medical chart reviews, we have improved our understanding of the lives of our patients and have thus improved their care. Moreover, Princeton interns have contributed significantly to the development of the study’s design, methods, and process.

A Princeton intern could assist with several different components of the housing first evaluation study by the continuation of the study, including additional chart reviews and extended data analysis.

He or she will have the opportunity to learn first hand about the impact of homelessness on the health and well being of our patients. The intern will have the opportunity to work closely with the physician assistant who coordinates support to housed street patients. He or she will accompany the physician assistant during house calls and will work with Street Team staff in the support and care of patients.

In the past, interns have also served in clinics providing foot care, conducted activities for patients staying in our respite facility, and shadowed providers in other areas of our program. We hope that through this personal interaction with our patients and clinicians, the intern will begin to understand the complex lives, medical and social needs, and rich histories of people experiencing homelessness. Through participation in research and work in a variety of settings, we are confident that the intern will gain an increased and nuanced understanding of the public health and medical issues surrounding homelessness and health care. Perhaps the intern will even catch our passion for caring for some of our society’s most vulnerable citizens.

### **Intern Qualifications**

*Describe any particular skills, background, or qualities you are seeking in an intern.*

- Strong interpersonal skills, including being comfortable in a variety of settings and with people of many different backgrounds (physicians, patients, staff, funders, etc.)
- Flexibility and adaptability, as intern may be needed to assist with other research tasks, program operations, or patients
- A demonstrated interest in medicine, public policy, and/or public health
- Desire to explore and understand the intersection of medical, cultural, and social histories of people who have experienced homelessness
- A mature, compassionate student, *preferably* in junior or senior year
- Highly motivated and self-directed; comfortable taking initiative with little supervision
- Database development, statistical skills, and working knowledge of medical and/or public health field preferable but not required
- Strong writing skills
- Attention to detail and thorough review of work

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