DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDICAL RESPITE CARE

The Respite Care Providers’ Network (RCPN) defines medical respite care as acute and post acute medical care for homeless persons who are too ill or frail to recover from a physical illness or injury on the streets, but who are not ill enough to be in a hospital.

The following Defining Characteristics of Medical Respite Care** were affirmed by the RCPN in Boston, MA, December 2001 and updated in Nashville, TN in October 2008:

- A short term specialized program focused on homeless persons who have a medical injury/illness and may also have mental illness or substance abuse issues
- Comprehensive residential care providing participants the opportunity to rest while being able to access hospitality, medical and supportive services that assist in their recuperation
- Length of stay is determined by medical need and progress on an individual treatment level
- Whole person care through collaboration with other local providers who offer a variety of services to participants during their stay in respite care and also provide continuity of care when the participant moves into the community
- Respect for human dignity of all residents and staff
- Active involvement by participants in the process of their recuperation and discharge planning
- A bridge that closes the gap between acute medical services currently provided in hospitals/emergency rooms, homeless shelters that do not have the capacity to provide the needed recuperative care and more permanent housing options
- Low cost, high quality and innovative care which result in emergency room diversion, additional hospital discharge options and cost avoidance for hospitals and communities
- Diverse service delivery models reflecting unique community needs, priorities, and resources
- An integral component of the continuum of care for homeless services in any community

**Note: Though the RCPN has adopted the term “medical respite,” it acknowledges and accepts programs with these characteristics that use other descriptors (e.g. interim, infirmary, or recuperative care).