



For more details, please read the full [case study](#) of Blackstone Apartments conducted in May 2015.



The LeadingAge Center for Affordable Housing Plus Services serves as a national catalyst for the development, adoption, and support of innovative affordable housing solutions that enable low- and modest-income seniors to age safely and successfully in their homes and communities.

To learn more about the center, see [www.LeadingAge.org/Center\\_for\\_Housing\\_Plus\\_Services](http://www.LeadingAge.org/Center_for_Housing_Plus_Services).

## Blackstone Apartments: Adapting to a Changing Resident Population

*Boston, MA*

Blackstone Apartments is an 11-story, 145-unit housing property located in Boston's West End neighborhood, adjacent to Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). The property houses a diverse population of low-income older adults and individuals with disabilities, most of whom receive Section 8 rental assistance.

Blackstone faces a variety of challenges associated with its changing resident population, which represents a range of ages, functional levels, health statuses, and ethnicities:

- Older residents are aging in place. An increasing number of these residents face challenges with declining cognition.
- A growing number of residents are younger people with disabilities. Many of these younger residents are dealing with mental health issues and challenges related to substance use.
- Approximately one-third of the property's residents speak Mandarin or Cantonese, making it challenging for them to engage in services and activities at the property.

Blackstone is collaborating with MGH and Boston Senior Home Care (BSHC) to provide onsite services and supports designed to help all of these residents address their health, long-term care, and social services needs, and continue to live in their apartments for as long as possible.

### *Massachusetts General Hospital: Senior HealthWISE*

MGH launched the Senior HealthWISE program in 2002 with a goal of improving the health and well-being of vulnerable low-income older adults in three nearby housing properties, including Blackstone Apartments, and the community.

Blackstone Apartments provides the Senior HealthWISE program with a rent-free space in the building. All Senior HealthWISE services are provided for free and are available to all residents.

## Senior HealthWISE Program Staff

A full-time social worker, nurse, community resource specialist, and program manager staff the Senior HealthWISE program. Team members often collaborate with each other to address the needs of residents.

The Senior HealthWISE nurse:

- Conducts vital sign monitoring.
- Provides education and counseling on self-management of health conditions.
- Answers health-related questions.
- Conducts medication reconciliation and education.
- Helps residents communicate with their medical providers.
- Assists with transitions from hospital to home.
- Triage potential urgent health needs and helps determine appropriate action.
- Advocates for health-related resources and referrals for residents.

The geriatric social worker:

- Provides individual residents with support, information, and referral to needed services and supports.
- Offers general counseling around issues like depression, bereavement, adaptation to functional limitations, and hoarding, and refers residents to ongoing care, if needed.
- Leads discussion groups around topics like grief, advance directives, and living with anxiety.
- Serves as a resource to housing property staff on dealing with challenging issues like paranoia and bullying.

The community resource specialist:

- Works with individual residents to access resources and benefits like Medicare Part D plans, Medicaid, and food stamps.

Senior HealthWISE also hosts group activities at Blackstone, including education sessions, monthly

discussion groups, and exercise classes. In addition, staff from Senior HealthWISE frequently confers with property management about residents who are experiencing issues that could jeopardize their housing. Senior HealthWISE staff can help property management staff understand these issues and can provide strategies or resources to help resolve problems before they lead to eviction.

### Accessing Services

Each Senior HealthWISE staff member has scheduled hours each week when they are available at the housing property. Residents can visit staff members during those hours and can also make an appointment outside of scheduled hours. In urgent situations, the Blackstone service coordinator may request that a Senior HealthWISE staff member come to the property.

Maintaining residents' privacy is a primary goal of Senior HealthWISE. Residents meeting with a Senior HealthWISE staff member complete a brief intake form that asks only for the resident's name, address, emergency contact information, and primary care physician (PCP), if the resident has one. The form does not ask residents to provide a social security number or insurance information. Residents are asked to sign a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) agreement form, which allows the Senior HealthWISE staff to communicate with a resident's PCP, when necessary. Finally, Senior HealthWISE staff members make it clear that they only share information with the property staff for the sake of resident safety and with the resident's permission.

### Boston Senior Home Care: Supportive Housing Program

BSHC, a private, nonprofit corporation, provides case management and arranges services to help support low-income older adults and persons with disabilities so they can remain in their own homes or other supportive settings.

BSHC's partnership with Blackstone Apartments and Senior HealthWISE started in 2008. At the time, BSHC was operating its Supportive Housing Program, which placed a case manager at a housing property to work with residents receiving BSHC services, in one other building. BSHC agreed to expand the program and dedicate a case manager to the Blackstone two-and-one-half days per week. BSHC believed placing a case manager onsite can increase its operating efficiencies, enhance its interaction

with residents, and improve collaboration with the Blackstone service coordinator and Senior HealthWISE team.

The Supportive Housing Program, which is now available in nine housing communities, typically offers onsite service coordination, nursing, health and wellness programming, and structured activities like fitness, social, and recreation programs. However, the program functions differently at Blackstone Apartments, where service coordination, health and wellness programs, and social activities are already available. BSHC's program at Blackstone complements these existing resources and meets additional resident needs.

Originally, the Supportive Housing Program was supporting approximately 60 Blackstone residents who were already receiving assistance through BSHC programs. As the case manager became aware of more needs in the building, BSHC began working with Blackstone's service coordinator and Senior HealthWISE to conduct more programming, including a variety of social and recreational programs, and the evidence-based Chronic Disease Self-Management, Matter of Balance, and Healthy Eating programs.

BSHC's presence at Blackstone began to change in late 2013, due to some staffing cutbacks, evolution in the supportive programs in which BSHC clients participated, and funding constraints. Currently, BSHC dedicates a Mandarin-speaking Supportive Housing Program case manager to the property for five hours per week. The case manager focuses this more limited time on:

- Working with the Chinese resident population in an attempt to help create a more cohesive community in the building.
- Providing information about BSHC's services to the broader resident population.
- Serving as a liaison to a resident's ongoing BSHC case manager if that resident is already utilizing BSHC services.
- Coordinating training sessions that educate property staff and residents about eligibility for other BSHC programs.

BSHC currently serves a diverse population of 93 Blackstone residents. Most of these residents are receiving some form of homemaker, personal care or companion service, and home-delivered meals. Some

also receive assistance with laundry, personal emergency response systems, incontinence products, grocery shopping, and skilled nursing.

### *Partner Communication*

The Senior HealthWISE nurse and social worker and Blackstone service coordinator meet formally once a month to review at-risk residents. The staff brainstorm options for assisting the individual and then decide which team member will offer the assistance. When a Supportive Housing Program case manager was initially dedicated to the property two-and-one-half days per week, the case manager also participated in this monthly meeting. The three partners confer informally on a regular basis by phone, email, and in person.

### *Perceived Program and Partnership Benefits*

Numerous features have contributed to the overall success of and resident satisfaction with all of the service programs at Blackstone Apartments. These features include:

- **Flexibility:** Senior HealthWISE is not constrained by Medicare, Medicaid, or other regulations that tend to limit the amount of time medical professionals are able to interact with patients, where those interactions take place, and what interventions are conducted. This allows the program to tailor interventions to meet the needs of residents.
- **Open access:** The Senior HealthWISE program is open to all residents of a housing property. Services do not replace a resident's primary or direct care. Instead, onsite services are designed to reinforce the connection between a resident and his/her health care team, and to provide education, support, and advocacy.
- **Trusting relationships with residents:** BSHC and Senior HealthWISE staff members are able to interact with residents both in clinical and social settings. This interaction fosters a level of trust that allows staff to raise topics with residents that can be difficult to discuss, and helps increase the willingness of residents to discuss or apply for supportive services they might need.
- **Staff collaboration:** The collaboration among staff of Blackstone, Senior HealthWISE, and BSHC ensures that gaps in critical care, or

breakdowns within the hospital system around discharge planning, can be addressed in a timely manner. All partners are willing to take a team approach to care coordination and resident programming.

- **Responsiveness:** With so many regular “eyes” on residents, the partners can respond early and quickly to a resident’s changing needs before those needs reach a crisis point.

### *Perceived Program Challenges*

Several challenges are associated with the need to adapt service and activity offerings to Blackstone’s diverse and changing resident population. Specifically, Blackstone and its partners see the need to adapt their services to meet the needs of the building’s younger residents. In addition, BSHC must optimize staffing, within its operational constraints, to meet the needs of residents and partners.

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