

# Humans of CDI

## Dr. Alister Martin, MD, MPP

### Emergency Medicine

Assistant Professor, Harvard Medical School

Founder, [Get Waivered](#)

Founder, [VotER](#)



**Dr. Alister Martin, MD, MPP** is a faculty member at the Center for Social Justice and Health Equity at Harvard Medical School and a transformative figure in healthcare policy and emergency medicine. As the founder of Get Waivered, he leads a national campaign redefining Emergency Departments (EDs) into primary hubs for opioid addiction recovery. Recognized as a [national model at the NIH](#), his initiatives extend across states, including partnerships with Get Waivered Texas and Get Waivered Nebraska. Alister's impactful contributions, highlighting his commitment to reshaping healthcare paradigms, have received acclaim in publications like the [Boston Globe](#), [NPR](#), and [JAMA](#). This recognition of his work was further underscored by his appointment as a White House fellow for 2021-2022.

With an MPP from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Alister, previously a Health Policy Aide to Governor Peter Shumlin of Vermont, brings extensive experience in state health policy. As Chief Resident at MGH/Brigham and Women's Hospital, leveraging his background in politics, healthcare policy, and behavioral economics, Alister pioneers ED programs addressing the unique needs of vulnerable patients. From facilitating the transition of homeless patients into supportive housing to aiding those struggling with addiction, he continues to make a profound impact on patient care and societal well-being.

**To learn more about the incredible story of Dr. Martin, MD, MPP, recognized as one of the [Association of American Medical Colleges' 8 Prominent Black Leaders in Medicine](#), keep reading.**

---

**Your recent feature as one of [AAMC's 8 Prominent Black Leaders in Medicine](#) is a testament to your outstanding contributions. Can you share a key moment or accomplishment in your career that has been particularly motivating, and how does it resonate with your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?**

I've experienced firsthand the thin margins for error in communities of color and the often inadequate response of civic institutions to the needs of the poor. My personal and professional experiences have deeply influenced my work, particularly in founding VotER. This initiative, born out of a collaboration with Massachusetts General Hospital, TurboVote, and ideas42, was designed to empower patients, especially those from underserved backgrounds, to engage in civic life through voting. By offering voter registration in healthcare settings, we bridged a crucial gap, acknowledging that health and civic engagement are intertwined. This work is not just about healthcare; it's about leveraging every opportunity to advocate for those who have been marginalized, reflecting my commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

**Having been involved with CDI since residency, serving as a board member on the Resident and Fellow Committee (RFC), how has being a part of CDI impacted your overall experience at MGH? How has it shaped your career?**

Being involved with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) since residency, particularly through my service as a Community Service Outreach Officer on the Resident and Fellow Committee (RFC), profoundly impacted my experience at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and shaped my career trajectory. This role not only allowed me to contribute to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment within the hospital but also reinforced my commitment to health equity and social justice in medicine. It provided a unique platform to advocate for systemic changes within the healthcare system, ensuring that it serves all communities equitably. This experience has been instrumental in honing my leadership skills, particularly in the context of addressing the social determinants of health, and has motivated me to pursue initiatives like

VotER and Get Waivered, which aim to bridge the gap between medical care and social needs. Serving on the RFC within CDI highlighted the importance of diversity in medicine, not just in patient care but also in creating a more inclusive and equitable healthcare ecosystem, a principle that continues to guide my career and advocacy work.

**As an accomplished Black physician at MGH, your initiatives, like Get Waivered and Vot-ER, address critical social determinants of health. How does your personal journey inspire your work, and what message do you have for aspiring individuals, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds in medicine?**

My personal journey deeply inspires my work in addressing critical social determinants of health through initiatives like Get Waivered and Vot-ER. Growing up in a low-income community taught me the slim margins for error that Black and Brown kids face, and how easy it is to slip through the cracks. This understanding fuels my commitment to leveraging emergency departments as the front line in addressing social emergencies and systemic healthcare failures. My efforts in creating Get Waivered and Vot-ER stem from a profound belief that we have a responsibility to address these issues head-on, partnering with local community-based organizations and utilizing the federal government's scale for broader impact. To aspiring individuals, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds in medicine, my message is clear: At Harvard it can often feel like your background is a handicap but it's not. It is your superpower. Use your unique perspectives and experiences to drive change, address inequities, and never underestimate the power of community.

**What are the most exciting things happening in your world right now?**

The most exciting developments in my world right now revolve around impactful initiatives aimed at addressing the social determinants of health through innovative collaborations. Link Health ([link-health.org](http://link-health.org)), a key initiative I help lead which helps channel over \$80B in unspent federal benefit funding into the pockets of low-income patients, has partnered with 10 health centers nationwide, including in Boston, leveraging the healthcare sector to connect patients, especially those from underserved communities to vital resources. This effort has enabled nearly \$500,000 in federal benefits to be distributed to low-income patients, marking a significant stride in our mission to bridge the digital divide in healthcare and promote health equity. This partnership embodies our commitment to using healthcare settings as a platform for comprehensive support, not only addressing immediate health concerns but also the underlying social factors that significantly impact health outcomes. It's a testament to our belief in the power of healthcare to serve as a catalyst for broader social change, ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to the resources they need to live healthier, more connected lives.

**What are you or your team doing that no one else is?**

What sets our team apart in the healthcare landscape is our pioneering use of artificial intelligence (AI) to connect patients directly to federal benefits, a capability that significantly enhances our ability to scale our impact. This approach harnesses the power of large language models to streamline the process of identifying and enrolling eligible patients in programs that can improve their health and wellbeing. By integrating AI into our workflow, we not only expand our capacity to serve more patients efficiently but also innovate a solution that bridges the gap between healthcare and social services. This integration allows us to address the social determinants of health proactively, offering a scalable model that could transform how healthcare providers support their patients' broader needs.

**What is the main message you'd give to would be social change agents?**

My message would be to find your people. Look, I would be nothing without my mentors. I am lucky to have a deep bench of people smarter than me who help look over my shoulder. These folks help me with the blocking and tackling work that allow me to be successful and I am forever grateful for the people who have built me up from day one here at MGH. I quite honestly think none of this would have been possible were it not for the special place that MGH is. The longer I've been here the more I appreciate it and the folks that helped me get to where I am. To them (and you all know who you are) I will say. 'We are just getting started. Buckle up!'

*To explore more stories like Alister's, [click here](#) or visit our website at [massgeneral.org/cdi/resource-library/humans-of-cdi](http://massgeneral.org/cdi/resource-library/humans-of-cdi).*