

*Full Citations***HEALTH & HOUSING**

As Americans, we spend more than two-thirds of our time at home – a fact that renders the relationship between health and safe, stable housing inextricable from one another (De Leon & Schilling, 2017).

Where we choose to live – which, by extension, is ultimately dictated by where we can afford to live – impacts our access to key factors of health like quality of schools and employment opportunities to safe communities and nutritious food. (Affordable housing alone is such a huge and timely topic, we will address that in our next installment.)

As outlined below, the myriad specifics of housing and neighborhood conditions invariably affect our individual and family's well-being (De Leon & Schilling, 2017). In other words, housing and health go hand-in-hand; read on to learn more.

**WHY IT MATTERS***Neighborhoods*

It is widely understood that the availability of and access to resources in our neighborhoods are directly correlated with improved health outcomes (Taylor, 2018).

Perhaps the most compelling data to date, on the impact of neighborhoods on health, comes via the Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration Program – a landmark federally funded experiment aimed at analyzing the effects of moving individuals and families to lower-poverty areas. Adults who moved reported long-term improvements in mental health and some aspects of physical health like reduced rates of obesity and diabetes; two decades after the experiment concluded, children who moved to lower-poverty neighborhoods prior to age 13 were shown to experience a significant improvement in both their likelihood of attending college and projected lifetime earnings (Taylor, 2018).

*Quality*

Various environmental factors in our homes can be linked to poor health. Exposure to lead is particularly harmful to young children, often resulting in irreversible nervous system damage. Substandard housing conditions – from mold and poor ventilation to dirty carpets and pest infestation – have been associated with negative health outcomes.

Studies have proven the potential for improving our collective health through improved housing quality and safety (Taylor, 2018). Removing asthma triggers, for instance, repeatedly yields health improvements, increases quality of life, and reduces the cost associated with treating both children and adults (Taylor, 2018).

*Stability*

Being without a stable home is ultimately detrimental to our health. Chronically unhoused individuals are at increased risk of both mental and physical morbidity and mortality. Trauma, incurred on the streets and in shelters, has been shown to have long-term effects on mental health.

Those facing housing instability (due to moving frequently or couch surfing) are at increased risk of poor health outcomes; for youth this equates to increased risk of teen pregnancy; early drug use; and depression. For families facing foreclosure, worsened outcomes from depression and anxiety to substance use and suicide are on the rise (Taylor, 2018).

Housing instability makes it difficult for us to invest in our homes, our relationships, and our neighborhoods; and in those instances where connections that support our health have been established, eviction – with which Black and Hispanic renters generally, and women in particular, are disproportionately threatened nationwide – disrupts the very fabric of entire communities (Network for Public Health Law, 2021).

## **WHAT WORKS**

It indeed takes a village to promote health and equity in our communities, as evidenced by efforts to ensure adequate housing for all:

### *Land Use and Community Planning Strategies*

Comprehensive zoning code reform encourages healthy development patterns and limits those with negative impacts. When compared with exclusionary zoning rules, which result in residential segregation (limiting how some low-income communities and communities of color access necessary resources), mandatory inclusionary zoning requires developers to make a certain percentage of newly developed units affordable (Linberg & Majumdar Narayan, 2021).

### *Rental Assistance*

Most people who struggle to afford housing have a place to live, but the gap between their income and housing costs is too great. For those community members who can't always meet their basic needs or who teeter on the brink of eviction, help affording the housing in which they currently live is a viable, real-time solution – one that calls for additional rental assistance resources.

### *Investment from Hospitals*

Nationwide, a growing number of hospitals – in order to maintain their tax-exempt status and improve the communities they serve– are investing in housing capital costs. These efforts, coupled with healthcare services, are intended to meet the needs of a target population: individuals who are currently, or at risk of becoming, unhoused and those who are currently or potentially high-cost users of healthcare. As a result, these investments often generate direct, small, financial return in either the short or long term for the hospital system (Bailey, 2020).

## **COMING UP**

Next up, we will look more closely at the relationship between health and housing with a deep dive on affordability. Please check back here in the coming weeks.



## References

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