Housing Solutions Lab
Building and sharing knowledge to
advance equitable local housing policy.

NYU
Furman
Center

Integrating Health into Local Housing Strategies

June 2023

Introduction

Housing policy decisions have the potential to influence the health of individuals and communities. A wealth of research demonstrates that affordable, quality, stable housing provides an important foundation for supporting physical and mental health across the life course. Conversely, high housing costs, housing instability, substandard housing, and poor neighborhood conditions can undermine health and well-being.

Despite these connections, local housing policy is not often developed with much attention to its implications for the health of residents. Local government housing and health agencies often work in silos and miss opportunities to advance healthier communities through cross-agency efforts. This brief identifies opportunities for local housing officials to collaborate with peers in local government health agencies and integrate health considerations into housing strategies and planning. We highlight the development of a local housing strategy as a key collaboration opportunity and make recommendations for local governments and philanthropy to support housing and health collaborations.

Housing and Health Connections

Housing and neighborhoods are widely regarded as key determinants of health that can influence health behaviors and health outcomes at all stages of life. Housing and neighborhoods can provide safe and stable environments for people to live healthy lives or pose economic, social, and physical stressors that compromise health and well-being. Multiple pathways connect housing with health.[1] Unaffordable housing can force households to make financial tradeoffs that leave fewer finances available for health-related resources such as healthcare, prescriptions, and food.[2] Housing instability can also contribute to adverse health outcomes. Multiple moves, evictions, and homelessness are all associated with reduced physical and mental health, particularly for children.[3,4] Decades of research have also shown a strong association between housing quality and health. Substandard housing and housing with hazards such as lead, mold, and pests place residents at risk for injuries, chronic health problems, and mental distress.[5] Children, older adults, and persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the health and safety risks of substandard housing. Public housing residents are often impacted by substandard conditions and research has shown subsidized housing renovations to be a promising intervention for improving health and well-being.[6]

The neighborhoods where housing is located are also critical. Well-resourced neighborhoods can promote health by providing access to assets such as affordable healthy foods, safe outdoor recreation spaces, and healthcare facilities. However, households with low incomes have less access to well-resourced neighborhoods and may be confined to communities with high levels of poverty, crime, segregation, and limited economic and social mobility.[7] These conditions have been shown to foster adverse health outcomes and contribute to health disparities.

Housing and Health-Related Interventions

In recent years, the connection between housing and health has gained greater attention, particularly among public health and healthcare stakeholders concerned with the growing need for affordable housing in the communities they serve. A range of related interventions have emerged, including:

- Healthcare system and hospital investments to develop affordable housing for targeted populations[8]

- Use of state Medicaid waivers to support housing-related services and tenancy supports[9]

- Screening for housing-related needs in clinical health settings and referral to housing services[10]

- Supportive housing programs to provide affordable housing and coordinated services for targeted persons with high health needs, chronic illnesses, and disabilities[11]

- Municipal healthy housing initiatives to improve housing conditions through more proactive inspections, code enforcement, and repair programs[12]

While these interventions are promising, they are often limited in scope and scale. They typically serve a narrow range of individuals and have minimal impact on the overall affordability of housing and the conditions of neighborhoods. In order to make systems- level changes that help advance healthier communities, housing and health agencies also need to work together towards a shared agenda of policies, programs, and strategies. Cross-sector agency collaboration can help cities take a more systematic and coordinated approach to policy issues that span both sectors and that impact the communities they serve. Working together, housing and health agencies can leverage collective expertise, maximize scarce resources, and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Collaboration Opportunity: Integrating Health Into Local Housing Strategy Development

A key systems-level opportunity for local housing officials to collaborate with the health sector is through the development of a **local housing strategy**. Developing a local housing strategy allows city housing leaders to identify priorities, policies, and approaches to achieve local housing objectives. **Local Housing Solutions** identifies six key steps for this comprehensive process. Each step offers an opportunity for housing agencies to involve health stakeholders and consider the potential for housing policy options that can benefit community health. The following chart suggests ways that local housing officials can engage with the health sector at each step in the process. While there are many organizations and institutions that make up the health sector, for this purpose, we define health sector partners as staff working in government agencies such as local, state, and/or regional public health departments.

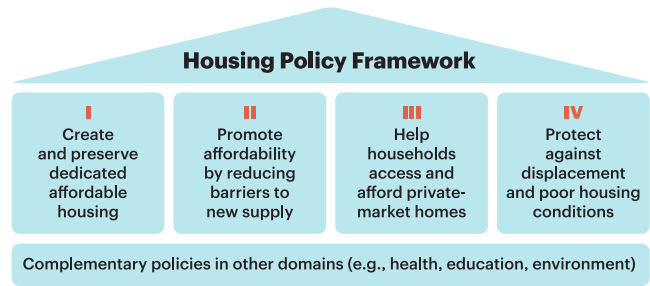| Steps for Developing a Local Housing Strategy	Opportunities to Engage with the Health Sector
Step 1: Plan Identify key players and partners to participate in developing a local housing strategy.	Invite colleagues within local health departments to contribute health-related goals and strategies to the development of a local housing strategy. (e.g., goals to increase housing stability for populations with high health needs, improve housing quality in targeted communities, or reform zoning to promote greater access to health amenities such as grocery stores and green space.)
Step 2: Analyze Use local data to shape local housing strategy.	Examine public health surveillance data to identify communities with housing-related health concerns that may benefit from housing interventions. (e.g., housing quality improvements in areas with elevated rates of lead poisoning or asthma).
Step 3: Act Identify policies to meet local needs.	Work with health partners to analyze the potential health impacts of housing policy options. Consider conducting a Health Impact Assessment, a structured process for evaluating the health implications of policy decisions in other (non-health) sectors.
Step 4: Fund Identify resources for the creation and preservation of affordable housing.	Examine the potential for local healthcare entities (e.g., hospitals, healthcare systems, and payers) to make housing-related investments.
Step 5: Refine Strategize on how to allocate limited housing resources.	Work with health partners to analyze local housing and health disparities to help guide the prioritization of populations and communities for interventions.
Step 6: Bridge Build connections between housing and policies in other sectors.	Enlist health partners in advocacy efforts to make the case for affordable housing as a critical component of community health and well-being.

Steps for developing a local housing strategy are adapted from Local Housing Solutions.

In addition to engaging health partners in the development of an overall local housing strategy, housing officials can collaborate with health partners to consider how specific housing policy options may promote health and well-being. The Local Housing Solutions **housing policy framework** provides four categories of policy options for localities to consider when developing a balanced and comprehensive local housing strategy.

Housing Policy Framework

I Create and preserve dedicated affordable housing	II Promote affordability by reducing barriers to new supply	III Help households access and afford private-market homes	IV Protect against displacement and poor housing conditions

Complementary policies in other domains (e.g., health, education, environment)

Several policies within this framework have the potential to advance community health, including:

- Inclusionary zoning and other zoning reforms that increase access to affordable housing in high-resource neighborhoods

- Eviction prevention and legal assistance policies that promote housing stability

- Proactive code enforcement to address substandard housing conditions

- Enforcement of fair housing laws to reduce housing discrimination and combat segregation

While every city's specific needs and priorities will differ, all cities should consider housing policies that have the potential to promote health by improving housing affordability, stability, quality, and neighborhood conditions.

Tools for Local Governments to Launch and Sustain Collaborations

Mayors, city hall officials, and other elected leaders can leverage their authority and convening power to bring housing and health agencies together. They can foster such collaboration through formal and informal mechanisms, including ordinances, executive orders, and task forces that authorize or require interagency collaboration. A number of cities and states have done this by enacting Health in All Policies ordinances that require cross-sector work across government agencies.[13] Richmond, CA, became one of the first localities to pass a Health in All Policies ordinance in 2014. The process convened multiple housing and health agencies and established housing goals that the city linked to improving health equity. Areas of focus included increasing the number of affordable housing units, limiting rent increases, and improving physical and safety features of the built environment.[14]

Several cities have also used Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) to consider the health implications of housing and planning policies. HIAs provide a voluntary process for agencies to evaluate the potential positive and negative health effects of a plan, project, or policy before it is built or implemented. For example, in Galveston, TX, officials conducted a HIA as they considered where to locate replacement housing for public housing units destroyed by Hurricane Ike. Based on the 23 health indicators, the city used the HIA's recommendations to select the new housing sites.[15] Through the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, a systematic review identified how 40 cities have used HIAs to examine the health impacts of policies related to affordable housing, zoning and land use, housing quality, and the broader built environment.[16]

Elements of Successful Collaborations

Collaboration is not easy and requires time, intention, patience, and vision. Commonly cited challenges to cross-sector collaboration include differing priorities, unclear goals, lack of leadership, poor communication, lack of capacity, and limited funding support. To help cities address these challenges to sustaining successful collaborations, several organizations have identified the following elements.[17, 18]

Leadership: Cross-sector partnerships must have the support and commitment of leadership in both sectors. Identifying supportive leaders who are willing to commit time and resources to collaborative activities is essential.

Coordination: Identifying a coordinating entity that can lead and manage collaborative activities is critical. Depending upon the focus and scale of the partnership, this role can be played by agency staff, trusted intermediaries, or community nonprofit organizations.

Shared goals and priorities: Housing and health partnerships must establish realistic goals and clear priorities for their work together. Identifying a shared agenda and setting joint expectations for the partnership can help foster productive collaboration. Newly formed partnerships may benefit from setting smaller, short-term goals before seeking to advance larger structural and systemic solutions.

Time and capacity: Housing and health leaders have complex challenges to address in their individual sectors. Effective partnership requires each sector to dedicate time for staff to engage in collaborative efforts such as task forces and workgroups.

Communication and transparency: Clear and consistent communication is critical for building relationships, breaking down silos, and developing buy-in. From the start, it is critical to establish clear communication mechanisms and messengers.

Recommendations

Collaboration between housing and health agencies is critical for developing systemic interventions that can potentially improve community health. Local and state governments can play a leadership role. Additional support is also needed from local and state government leaders and philanthropy. The following recommendations provide suggestions for facilitating effective housing and health partnerships and interventions.

Local and State Governments

- Convene housing and health agencies to develop a shared agenda for improving community health through housing and planning. Consider establishing a formal structure, such as an interagency task force, to organize and institutionalize efforts.

- Adopt well-recognized processes and approaches such as Health in All Policies and Health Impact Assessments that help policymakers incorporate health considerations into policies and programs outside the health sector.

- Examine housing and health agency budgets for opportunities to better align and support funding for health-related housing initiatives.

- Support intergovernmental data sharing to facilitate shared processes, policymaking, and evaluation.

- Identify funding opportunities and regulations that provide an opportunity for housing and health agencies to collaborate, such as Medicaid waivers.

- Engage university researchers and research organizations to evaluate the impact of cross-sector policy and program interventions.

Philanthropy

- Provide backbone funding to help cities develop and sustain long-term housing and health collaborations through robust planning processes, pilot projects, and coordination activities.

- Convene governmental housing and health leaders across the country to support shared learning about effective practices and strategies to address persistent challenges.

Research

- Develop research and evaluation projects that bridge the fields of housing and health. Prioritize projects that build the evidence base about the impact of housing interventions on various aspects of individual and community health.

References

1. Taylor, L. A. (2018). Housing and Health: An Overview Of The Literature. *Health Affairs*, Health Policy Brief.
https://doi.org/10.1377/hpb20180313.396577

2. Pollack, C. E., Griffin, B. A., & Lynch, J. (2010). Housing Affordability and Health Among Homeowners and Renters.
American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 39(6), 515–521.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2010.08.002

3. Cutts, D. B., Meyers, A. F., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Chilton, M., Cook, J. T., Geppert, J., Ettinger de Cuba, S., Heeren, T., Coleman, S., Rose-Jacobs, R., & Frank, D. A. (2011). US housing insecurity and the health of very young children. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), 1508–1514.
https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2011.300139

4. Sandel, M., Sheward, R., Ettinger de Cuba, S., Coleman, S. M., Frank, D. A., Chilton, M., Black, M., Heeren, T., Pasquariello, J., Casey, P., Ochoa, E., & Cutts, D. (2018). Unstable housing and caregiver and child health in renter families. *Pediatrics*, 141(2).
https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-2199

5. Office of Disease Prevention and Promotion. *Quality of Housing*. Healthy People 2030.
https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/quality-housing#cit10

6. Ellen, I. G., Dragan, K. L., & Glied, S. (2020). Renovating subsidized housing: The impact on tenants' health. *Health Affairs*, 39(2), 224–232.
https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00767

7. Braveman, P., Egerter, S., & Williams, D. R. (2011). The Social Determinants of Health: Coming of age.
Annual Review of Public Health, 32(1), 381–398.
https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031210-101218

8. American Hospital Association. (2019). Making the Case for Hospitals to Invest in Housing.
https://www.aha.org/system/files/media/file/2019/05/AIHC_issue_brief_final.pdf

9. Atkeson, A. (2021). *How States Use Federal Medicaid Authorities to Finance Housing-Related Services*. National Academy for State Health Policy.
https://www.nashp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/housing-medicaid-waiver-report-3-4-2021.pdf

10. Byrne, T., Fargo, J. D., Montgomery, A. E., Roberts, C. B., Culhane, D. P., & Kane, V. (2015). Screening for homelessness in the Veterans Health Administration: Monitoring Housing Stability through repeat screening. *Public Health Reports*, 130(6), 684–692.
https://doi.org/10.1177/003335491513000618

11. Dohler, E., Bailey, P., Rice, D., & Katch, H. (2016). Supportive Housing Helps Vulnerable People Live and Thrive in the Community. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*.
https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/supportive-housing-helps-vulnerable-people-live-and-thrive-in-the-community.

12. National League of Cities. (2021). *Housing Hazards and Health Stakeholder Series*.
https://www.nlc.org/resource/housing-hazards-and-health/

13. Rudolph, L., Caplan, J., Ben-Moshe, K., & Dillon, L. (2013). H*ealth in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Governments*. American Public Health Association and Public Health Institute.
https://www.apha.org/-/media/Files/PDF/factsheets/Health_inAll_Policies_Guide_169pages.ashx.

14. Corburn, J., Curl, S., & Arredondo, G. (2014). A health-in-all-policies approach addresses many of Richmond, California's place-based hazards, stressors. *Health Affairs*, 33(11), 1905–1913.
https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2014.0652

15. Nolen, L., Prochaska, J., Rushing, M., Fuller, E., Dills, J. E., Buschmann, R., Miller, C., Tarlekar, S., Avey, H., Ruel, E., & Oakley, D. (2014). Improving Health through Housing and Neighborhood Development in Galveston, Texas: Use of Health Impact Assessment to Develop Planning Tools and Coordinated Community Action. Center to Eliminate Health Disparities at the University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas.
https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/external-sites/health-impact-project/utmb-2014-improving-health-through-housing-and-neighborhood-development-in-galveston_report.pdf.

16. National Center for Healthy Housing, & National Housing Conference. (2016). A Systematic Review of Health Impact Assessments on Housing Decisions and Guidance for Future Practice.
https://nchh.org/resource-library/report_a-systematic-review-of-health-impact-assessments-on-housing-decisions-and-guidance-for-future-practice.pdf.

17. ChangeLab Solutions. (2018). The Health & Housing Starter Kit.
https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/health-housing-starter-kit

18. Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. (2018). *Cross-Sector Partnerships to Improve Health and Housing Outcomes: Resource Guide*.
https://www.astho.org/globalassets/report/cross-sector-partnerships-improve-health-housing-outcomes.pdf

Resources

Developing Housing and Health Partnerships

From Idea to Action: Building the Team for Housing and Health Collaborations | The Urban Institute
https://www.urban.org/research/publication/idea-action-building-team-housing-and-health-collaborations

The Health & Housing Starter Kit | ChangeLab Solutions
https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/health-housing-starter-kit

Identifying Health-Related Housing Policy Options

Affordable Housing & Health: City Roles and Strategies for Progress. | National League of Cities
https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/AffordableHousingHealth_WEB.pdf

Toolkit to Integrate Health and Equity into Comprehensive Plans | American Planning Association
https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9201866/

Chartbook: Housing and Health Problems are Intertwined. So Are Their Solutions.
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/housing-and-health-problems-are-intertwined-so-are-their-solutions

Leveraging the Built Environment for Health Equity | The Urban Institute
https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102557/leveraging-the-built-environment-for-health-equity.pdf

Examining Potential Health-Related Policy Impacts

Health in All Policies Toolkit: Collaborating Across Sectors to Improve Health | ChangeLab Solutions
https://www.changelabsolutions.org/health-all-policies

Health Impact Assessment Toolkit for Planners | American Planning Association
https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9148443/

Health Impact Assessment and Housing: Opportunities for the Housing Sector | Pew Charitable Trusts
https://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/assets/2016/03/opportunities_for_the_housing_sector.pdf

Examining Community Health Data

City Health Dashboard
https://www.cityhealthdashboard.com/

County Health Rankings
https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/