



OPPORTUNITY STARTS AT HOME COLORADO

Health, Housing, and Homelessness

Housing is a social determinant of health. Affordable, quality housing options are crucial to individual health and building healthy communities. The lack of a safe, accessible, and affordable home can severely impact physical and mental health.

- Homelessness is associated with a 17.5-year reduction in life expectancy.
- People experiencing homelessness have higher rates of diabetes, heart attacks, HIV, depression, substance use disorder, hypertension, and undiagnosed mental disorders.
- One study suggested that 60% of people experiencing homelessness experience severe tooth pain, and 15% reported having pulled out their own permanent teeth.
- Poverty and housing insecurity means individuals cannot afford regular, preventative care leading to poor health and a reliance on emergency rooms for care. Five percent of hospital users account for half of the health care costs nationally, most of whom are patients living below the poverty line and are housing insecure.
- Lack of access to affordable housing options forces low-income households to rent substandard housing that exposes them to risks like pests, mold, water leaks, and inadequate heating or cooling systems, and overcrowding.
- Poor quality housing is associated with a wide range of health conditions, including respiratory infections, asthma, lead poisoning, injuries, and mental health challenges.

Affordable homes are necessary for individual and public health, particularly for children.

¹ <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29267330/>

³ <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/homelessness-and-health.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41415-019-0572-4>

⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27669168/>

⁶ <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/housing-instability>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447157/#:~:text=Poor%20housing%20conditions%20are%20associated,important%20social%20determinant%20of%20health>

Children, Health, and Homelessness

The affordability, stability, quality, accessibility, and safety of housing are key determinants of children's well-being and outcomes later in life. Healthy homes make for healthier children. Housing insecurity generates many stressors for families with children.

- The material and emotional hardships of not having a stable home leaves children and their caregivers at the risk of poor health. Children who experienced homelessness whose mothers suffered mental illness are at higher risk of mental health challenges themselves. Many suffer adverse childhood events such as trauma, victimization, neglect, and toxic stress from their economically stressed caregivers.⁸
- Poor quality housing is associated with increased risks of physical and mental illness and even developmental delays in children.⁹
- Children who experienced prenatal homelessness are 20% more likely to have been hospitalized since birth.¹⁰
- Children who experienced homelessness for longer than six months are more likely to have developmental delays, fair or poor health, be overweight, and be hospitalized than children who never experienced homelessness.¹¹
- Children's Health Watch estimates that the U.S. will spend \$111 billion over the next ten years in avoidable healthcare costs because of housing instability.¹²
- When housing is unaffordable, a person or family's ability to live a healthy life is severely jeopardized.



The connection between housing and health is nuanced. Families with children who live close to Interstate 70 in Denver not only pay for housing costs, but those children often have asthma and costly medical bills that compound costs for the family.¹³

Ashlie Brown, Colorado Health Institute Director

⁸ Health Risks and Outcomes of Homelessness in School-Age Children and Youth: A Scoping Review of the Literature - Laura E. Gultekin, Barbara L. Brush, Emily Ginier, Alexandra Cordon, Elizabeth B. Dowdell, 2020 (sagepub.com)

⁹ <http://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Unstable-Housing-and-Caregiver-and-Child-Health-in-Renter-Families.pdf>

¹⁰ Housing-as-a-Health-Care-Investment.pdf (opportunityhome.org)

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² <https://nlihc.org/resource/childrens-healthwatch-unstable-housing-will-cost-us-111-billion-avoidable-healthcare-costs>

¹³ Housing And Health Go Hand In Hand, According To Colorado Health Institute | Colorado Public Radio (cpr.org)

Moving Forward

The positive impacts of housing on health cannot be overstated. Denver's Social Impact Bond program demonstrated that when people have access to quality affordable housing, emergency department visits decreased by 40 percent and preventative health care visits increased by 155 percent.

Access to housing must be considered when crafting health policy.

Policy solutions may include:

- Investing in integration of housing and health, including providing supportive services that include behavioral and primary healthcare;
- Developing housing affordable to individuals and families with limited income and assets;
- Funding universal housing vouchers so all eligible households can access subsidies;
- Pairing housing vouchers with direct funding for supportive services;
- Investing in universal design, which focuses on making homes safe and accessible for everyone, regardless of age, physical ability, or stature; and
- Tracking and reporting emergency room use and mortality data for PEH.

Investing in high-quality, affordable housing is an essential strategy for preventing long-term health problems, particularly for low-income households.



Opportunity Starts at Home: Colorado

From better health to food security to good education, housing is foundational to every aspect of well-being, building stronger communities, promoting economic growth, and providing opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Our Colorado-based, multi-sector coalition is working in coordination with the National Low-Income Housing Coalition to generate widespread support for local, state, and federal policies that correct long-standing racial inequities and economic injustices that have prevented access to affordable, quality housing for people with low incomes.

Learn more and see coalition partners at www.ColoradoCoalition.org/OSAH