



Housing and Health:
Unlocking Opportunity

October 2016

Housing and Health: Unlocking Opportunity

Dr. Barbara Yaffe
**Acting Medical Officer of
Health**

October 31, 2016

The link between housing and health is not new

“It is homes we must give our people,
not merely shelter.”

Dr. Charles Hastings
Toronto Medical Officer of Health, 1918

The current Toronto housing situation is a significant public health issue



- Rising housing prices/rents
- Declining incomes
- Inadequate social assistance
- Low vacancy rates
- Affordable/supportive housing – low supply/high demand
- Aging housing stock

Affordable, good quality, and stable housing is key to health



- Better physical/mental health
- Reduced food insecurity
- Reduced health service use and health care system costs
- Improvement to determinants of health:
 - Reduced homelessness
 - Reduced overcrowding
 - Improved safety
 - Reduced likelihood of living in high poverty areas

Affordable housing is a health equity issue



- Indigenous people
- Newcomers and immigrants
- Children and families
- Youth
- Seniors
- LGBTQ2S people
- People affected by violence
- People with mental health issues
- People with substance use issues
- People with chronic illnesses/physical disabilities

Spending too much on housing limits people's investments in health



High shelter cost burdens:

- Poor physical/mental health
- Increased stress
- Food insecurity
- Health care non-adherence
- Health conditions (e.g., hypertension, arthritis)

Energy insecurity:

- Infants – e.g., increased ER visits
- Children – e.g., increased respiratory problems
- Adolescents/adults – e.g., poor mental health

John's Story

“ We could not afford both gas and electricity, we had to choose one or the other. ”



*Pseudonyms are used to protect participant identity.

Housing unaffordability constrains housing and neighbourhood choices



Poor quality dwellings:

- Brain, nervous system, and kidney damage
- Cancers
- Injuries
- Respiratory conditions (e.g., asthma)
- Child emotional/behavioural problems

Poor quality neighbourhoods:

- Poor reported health
- Disability
- Stress
- Chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes)
- Bodily harm/injuries
- Physical inactivity

Ashley's Story

“ There’s been shootings in the area, and just like ... great place for a kid to grow up. ”



*Pseudonyms are used to protect participant identity.

Homelessness and housing instability have negative health impacts



Overcrowding:

- Poor physical health
- Increased risk of infectious diseases
- Poor child mental health

Residential mobility/Evictions:

- Emotional/behavioural problems (children/adolescents)
- Maternal depression
- Poor adult/child health

Homelessness*:

- Poor physical health
- Increased risk of death
- Mental health/substance use issues
- Barriers to health care access

**No safe level of homelessness for children!*

Bindu's Story

“ The last time when they asked me to evict ... I was fed up and I tried to kill myself. ”



*Pseudonyms are used to protect participant identity.

New investments are needed to promote health and reduce inequities



- Increase supply and support repair and maintenance
- Provide adequate income and financial assistance
- Tackle discrimination in housing system
- Prevent homelessness in the early years – mental health promotion/supports, violence prevention

***Thank you to the people who
shared their stories with us.***