



Housing and Health: Unlocking Opportunity

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The link between housing and health is not new

A faded, historical black and white photograph of a group of men, likely immigrants, in a room with patterned wallpaper. The men are dressed in early 20th-century clothing. The room appears to be a tenement or a shared living space.

**“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. ”



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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.”



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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.***