Introduction to Health in All Policies and Housing

In 2009, then U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Steven Galson, described a healthy home as one that is, "sited, designed, built, renovated, and maintained in ways that support the health of residents." The policies and programs that create and nurture healthy homes require partnerships between myriad state and local agencies. The cross-sector collaboration necessary to advance healthy policies is at the core of a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach.

Health in All Policies

Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach that integrates health considerations into policymaking and programming, across sectors and at all levels, to improve the health of all communities and people. HiAP requires public health practitioners to collaborate with other sectors to define and achieve mutually-beneficial goals.

HiAP and Housing

HiAP efforts bring together diverse stakeholders to improve health while advancing other goals. There are many ways to integrate HiAP approaches into the housing arena, including through:

- Aging in place programs.
- Crime prevention through environmental design.
- Healthy housing financing incentives.
- Best practices for laws and policies that deal with lead, mold, and radon.
- Model programs and policies for smoke-free, multi-unit housing.
- Energy efficiency programs that adapt to climate change.
- Housing that is accessible to public and active transportation options.
- Community-supported agriculture and access to healthy food choices.
- Housing-based programs that promote social cohesion and mental wellness.

Stable, Quality, Affordable Housing as a Public Health Issue

Housing affects health through its quality level, affordability, physical neighborhood attributes (e.g., access to amenities), and social neighborhood characteristics (residents' socioeconomic status):[1,2]

- **Housing quality** can impact *physiological health* (exposure to lead, radon, mold, and extreme temperatures can cause respiratory illnesses and cancer), *psychological health* (noise and inadequate light can contribute to poor mental health), and *safety* (poorly-structured or -maintained buildings can contribute to falls, burns, and fires).
- **Unaffordable housing** can reduce income that a household can spend on nutritious food and healthcare expenses, causing stress, residential instability, and crowding. In extreme cases, residential instability can affect health through the physical and mental deprivations of homelessness. Crowding also has a negative impact on mental health and may increase susceptibility to disease.
- **Physical neighborhood attributes** affect health by facilitating or impairing walkability/bikeability, proximity to traffic, and access to public transportation, parks, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

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- **Social and community attributes** such as segregation and poverty concentration can also negatively impact health (literature shows that residents of low income, segregated neighborhoods suffer disparate health consequences through a variety of pathways).

The National Prevention Strategy (NPS) provides a framework that outlines the most effective and achievable ways to improve individual health and well-being.[3] It lists recommendations and actions applicable to multiple settings that focus on both increasing longevity and ensuring that individuals' lives are healthy and productive.

One of NPS' four strategic directions is healthy and safe community environments, which includes specific recommendations on designing and promoting affordable, accessible, safe, and healthy housing.[3]

State and Territorial Health Agencies

State and territorial health agencies play a major role in HiAP efforts. They are the primary protectors and promoters of basic environmental health services to communities, including protecting food and water, preparing for climate change, and promoting safe and healthy physical environments. These agencies are also well-suited to integrate health protection and health equity activities across their agencies. They regularly inform state-level policy, create new programs and initiatives, serve as liaisons to federal agencies, and provide support to local health departments, all of which are crucial to a comprehensive HiAP approach. At the state level, HiAP depends on interagency or cross-sectoral collaboration. ASTHO's associated policy guides explore programs, initiatives, and polices at the federal, state, and local levels that have successfully embodied a HiAP approach and aimed to improve overall population health through healthy housing.

[1] National Center for Healthy Housing. Housing and Health: New Opportunities for Dialogue and Action. Available at http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/Health%20%20Housing%20New%20Opportunities_final.pdf. Accessed 10/10/2014.

[2] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Exploring the Social Determinants of Health. *Housing and Health.* Issue Brief #7. 2011. Available at http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2011/rwjf70451. Accessed 10-10-2014.

[3] Surgeon General. National Prevention Strategy. Available at http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/initiatives/prevention/strategy/index.html. Accessed 9-20-2014.