



Creating Healthy Homes & Communities Throughout Minnesota

HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Good Health is Rooted in the Homes and Communities of All Minnesotans

Health care providers understand that even the best medical intervention will not be as effective if patients' homes are making them sick. On the other hand, when people have safe housing options they can afford, when communities make it easy to get exercise and buy healthy foods, and when the water and air are clean, people can make choices that will support their health.

Healthy Homes Lead to Healthy Bodies and Minds

When homes are unhealthy due to mold, rodents, or other dangers, health care providers can intervene. Like referrals to smoking cessation programs and exercise routines, referrals for housing-based health interventions can result in immediate and long-term improvements for patients.

Problem	HC Provider & Home Visitor Response	Refer for Housing Intervention
Asthma and other respiratory conditions are associated with exposure to molds, dust mites, and other allergens such as cockroach and rodent droppings in the home. ^{1,2}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask patients about exposure to rodents, insects, dust, and mold in the home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based environmental assessments and interventions.
Developmental problems, learning disabilities, and crime rates are linked to lead exposure during childhood. ^{3,4}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask about age of home and chipping paint. • Test for blood lead levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead hazard control and lead safety education.
Developmental problems, respiratory illness, and cancer can be caused by chemical exposures and unhealthy indoor air from tobacco smoke, carbon monoxide, pesticides, volatile organic compounds, and radon. ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask about exposure to pesticides, secondhand smoke, chemicals, paints, and carpets. • Ask about carbon monoxide alarms and radon testing. • Educate about smoke-free housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated pest management, smoking bans, radon mitigation. • Carbon monoxide and radon detectors. • Safer paint, reducing carpet usage, smoke-free policies.
Injuries in the home account for 46% of all injuries that receive medical attention, including falls, fires and burns, drownings, and poisonings. ⁶ In Minnesota, the fall death rate among adults ages 65 and older is 84 per 100,000, which is 73% higher than the U.S. rate for this group. ⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer for fall-prevention education or services. • Educate about burn prevention. • Educate about secondhand smoke and smoke-free housing. • Ask about smoke alarms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke alarms; smoke-free policies. • Hot water heaters at safe temperatures. • Stair gates, window guards, handrails, grab bars, and other measures.



Healthy neighborhoods help us thrive and prevent us from getting sick in the first place.

Unaffordable housing is prevalent and tough on health.

In Minnesota, one in four homeowners and one in two renters pay more than 30% of their income for their housing, which is considered unaffordable by HUD.²⁰



A Healthy Home Is Only the First Step

Treating the physical condition of homes, like good clinical care, is essential. But conditions of neighborhoods also matter when it comes to health outcomes, even outside of personal traits, income and education.^{8,9} Health care providers have a role to play in ensuring that communities can support patients in caring for themselves. With thoughtful interventions, entire communities can benefit.

- **Exercise as a part of daily life** is easier when communities have places to shop nearby, transit, parks, and bicycle paths. In one study of ten U.S. cities, having four or more different types of businesses in a neighborhood significantly increased walking trips by area residents.¹⁰
- **Neighborhoods that feel safe to residents support health.** Feeling unsafe in a neighborhood has been associated with a higher body mass index.¹¹
- **Fresh, healthy foods in local supermarkets** make it far easier to eat a nutritious diet and maintain a healthy weight.^{12,13} Yet 21 percent of Minnesota's census tracts are low-income with low access to supermarkets.¹⁴
- **Clean, fresh air to breathe outside and safe water to drink** are the foundation for health, but air and water quality are often threatened in both urban and rural areas.
- **There are important disparities in health.** Good health and a long life are linked in part to higher incomes and higher-income neighborhoods. Many illnesses are also not distributed equally by race and ethnicity.¹⁵

Safe, affordable housing choices are a gateway to health.

Lacking housing that's affordable has a broad negative impact on the health of adults and children. When people live in housing they can afford, they are far more likely to find there's enough left over each month for other health needs—such as healthy food, medical care, and medicines.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

In a major study of families with children under three years of age, frequent moves or housing crowding were associated with skipping or reducing size of meals or poor diet quality. With frequent moves, the children had poorer health, more developmental delays, and lower weight.¹⁹ Older children are also at risk for developmental delays and behavior problems in school when housing is unaffordable.



Health care providers promote wellness for individuals and communities.

How Health Care Leaders Can Promote Healthy Housing and Communities

In addition to the clinical and housing interventions in the table, there are many ways health care professionals support health in homes and communities.

- Provide referrals to housing, food, heating, weatherization, and other assistance programs for families that will benefit from them.
- Cross-train home-visiting staff to assist families living in unstable or unsafe home situations or who are at risk of losing their homes.
- Cross-train home-visiting staff to assist with fall-prevention measures and installing and maintaining smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and other safety devices.
- Integrate community health workers into patient care teams.
- Invite healthy housing professionals to speak at parenting and/or birthing classes.
- Invite housing organizations to present information to clinic and hospital staff during staff trainings.
- Advocate for additional affordable housing options, energy, and weatherization assistance.
- Support Safe Routes to School programs, Complete Streets policies, and walkable neighborhoods

“A safe, decent, affordable home is like a vaccine – it literally keeps children healthy.”

–Children’s HealthWatch

Minnesota is poised to be a national leader as health, housing, and other organizations find new ways to work together to promote healthy homes and communities. With their expertise and experience, health care providers have a key role to play. Together we can ensure that Minnesota’s children, our elders, and everyone in between can achieve the best possible health.



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