

Housing is a Public Health Crisis in California

"Housing insecurity and homelessness are social factors that have dire and profound impacts on population health. The Office of Health Equity Health in All Policies has shed important light on housing and homelessness as central health equity issues and as issues extremely salient during the COVID-19 pandemic."

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Public Health Problem (Issue)

Housing is a social determinant of health and the lack of affordable, safe, and stable housing has both direct and indirect negative health impact on the individual and the community. Further, findings illustrate that California's unhoused communities are among the most susceptible populations to severe COVID-19 infection (1) and that overcrowded housing has also been a significant contributor of COVID-19 transmission, and has adverse effects on children's health (2). This is specifically detrimental to California as the state is experiencing a housing affordability crisis. The state currently ranks 49th in the nation for housing units per capita, with only 358 homes per 1,000 people. More than a quarter of California's renters are paying more than 50% of their household income on housing needs, a reality that categorizes many renter households as 'housing insecure' (3). Housing affordability also impacts the unhoused population and exacerbates homelessness. One Bay Area county, Alameda, found that the top causes of homelessness among local residents are eviction, foreclosure, rent increase, and/or job loss (4). As of January 2019, California had an estimated 151,278 people experiencing homelessness on any given day throughout the state (5). Unhoused people generally have higher rates of chronic health conditions, including most listed by the CDC, and increased medical vulnerability compared to the general housed population (6). A study found that homelessness itself is an independent risk factor for mortality for some conditions, including circulatory and respiratory disorders related to COVID-19 risk, and thus requires more intensive targeted health and social interventions (7).

Taking Action (Intervention)

With the support of the Preventive Health and Health Services Block grant, the Office of Health Equity, Health in All Policies program, funded a literature review focusing on housing and homelessness as a social determinant of health as well as potential policy and programs interventions. The findings and potential policy and program interventions were presented to Department leadership at CDPH, partners at the Strategic Growth Council, and other health and non-health departments. Staff currently using this research and recommendations to inform program planning and COVID-19 interventions.

Impact

Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach to improving the health and well-being of all people by incorporating health and equity considerations into policies, practices, and processes in non-health sectors. The desired impact is that these literature reviews will contribute to a growing body of research to drive program interventions among housing and homelessness policies and decision makers. The literature reviews also include a suite of available policy and program interventions for consideration during the COVID-19 pandemic

Footnotes

- (1) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>.
- (2) Ortiz, Selena E., & Johannes, Bobbie L. (2018). Building the case for housing policy: Understanding public beliefs about housing affordability as a key social determinant of health. *SSM-Population Health*, 6, 63-71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2018.08.008>.
- (3) State of California. (2018). California's Housing Future: Challenges and Opportunities, Final Statewide Housing Assessment 2025. Retrieved from https://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-research/plans-reports/docs/sha_final_combined.pdf.
- (4) East Bay Housing Organizations. (2020, July 23). EBHO Letter, Eviction Moratorium Extension 07-23-2020.
- (5) United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2019). California Homelessness Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ca/>
- (6) Rountree, Janey, Hess, Nathan and Lyke, Austin. (2019). Health Conditions Among Unsheltered Adults in the U.S. California Policy Lab. Retrieved from <https://www.capolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Health-Conditions-Among-Unsheltered-Adults-in-the-U.S.pdf>
- (7) Morrison, David S. (2009, March 21). Homelessness as an independent risk factor for mortality: results from a retrospective cohort study. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 38(3), 877-883. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyp160>

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Healthy People Objective

Built Environment Policies

PHHS Block Grant Funding

100% - Total source of funding

