



Intersection of Policy, Housing and Public Health

Health in All Policies is a framework for government entities to utilize as they explore policy options. It is rooted in the fact that environments where people live, work, and play can influence health outcomes. Health is not based on just personal choices. The American Public Health Association (APHA) notes that Health in All Policies is “collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas.”¹

The American Public Health Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have pages regarding Health in All Policies. They can provide you with more information about Health in All Policies as well as ideas on how you can incorporate them into your community. You can visit them by clicking [here for APHA](#) and [here for the CDC](#). This document will explore healthy housing opportunities, particularly as they relate to tobacco.

Housing and Health²

There is strong evidence acknowledging the relationship between housing and health. Current evidence suggests the connections exists in these pathways:

- **Stability** – not having a stable home
- **Safety and Quality** – conditions inside the home
- **Affordability** – financial burden’s resulting from high-cost housing
- **Neighborhood** – environmental and social characteristics of where people live

Stability Pathway

People facing chronic homelessness experience higher morbidity in both mental and physical and increased mortality. Many people experience traumas in the streets and shelters, which can negatively impact psychological health. Children who experienced homelessness only while in utero are more likely to be hospitalized or suffer worse health.

People who face housing stability, like moving frequently, falling behind on rent or couch surfing are more likely to experience poor health compared to their stably housed peers. Housing instability is also associated with:

- Increased risk of teen pregnancy
- Early drug use
- Depression among youth
- Decreased effectiveness of healthcare (proper storage of medications become difficult or impossible)

Foreclosure is associated with:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Increased alcohol use
- Psychological distress
- Suicide

Providing access to stable housing and housing the homeless are both associated with improving health and reducing healthcare costs.

Safety and Quality Pathway

Environmental factors within homes are correlated with poor health. They include:

- Lead exposure irreversibly damages the brain and nervous system of children
- Substandard housing conditions, like water leaks, pests, poor ventilation, and dirty carpets are associated with poor outcomes like asthma
- Exposure to high or low temperatures are correlated with cardiovascular events and other adverse health events, particularly among the elderly
- Residential crowding is linked to physical illness and psychological distress

Addressing these factors have been shown to be effective in improving outcomes. Notably:

- Removing asthma triggers is linked to health improvements and cost reductions among children and adults
- Smoking bans in public and affordable housing is linked to reductions in
 - The number of smokers
 - The number of cigarettes smoked per smoker
 - Secondhand smoke exposure among nonsmokers

Affordability Pathway

In 2019, no state had an adequate supply of affordable renter homes for the lowest income population. Alaska had 37 affordable homes per 100 renter households with extremely low-income, 54 for very low-income households, and 98 for low-income households.³

As a result, 58% of renters with extremely low incomes, 33% of very low, and 4% of low income spend more than 50% of their income on housing and utilities. Those spending more than 30% of their income on housing and utilities include: 76% of extremely low-income, 76% of very low-income, and 34% of low-income Alaskan households.³

Cost burden can create challenges for individuals when it comes to being able to afford other health promoting choices. For example, healthy foods, healthcare, and gyms or the ability to travel to parks may be more difficult. It's been reported that New York City families with affordable rent payments saw an increase of their discretionary income by 77%, making more money available for other health promoting activities.

Neighborhood Pathway

Neighborhood resources connected to improved health outcomes include:

- Public transportation to one's job
- Grocery stores with nutritious foods
- Safe spaces to exercise
- Sidewalks, bike lanes, and safe road crossings
- Blight, abandoned building, and lot remediation (reduction of firearm violence; "greened lots" linked to decreased heart rate)

Neighborhood characteristics linked with negative outcomes:

- Close proximity to high-volume roads (respiratory diseases, like asthma and bronchitis)
- Segregation – one caveat is some research reported health-protective effects among Blacks living in "clustered Black neighborhoods."
- Crime
- Low social capital



Healthy People 2030⁴

In 1980, the U.S. Health and Human Services released Healthy People 1990. This was the first iteration of national objectives to improve the health of the nation. It's been updated every decade since. Healthy People 2030 have objectives related to housing. They are:

- Reduce the proportion of families that spend more than 30% of income on housing
- Reduce the proportion of people living in poverty
- Increase the number of states, territories, and DC that prohibit smoking in multiunit housing
- Increase the number of smokefree homes
- Increase the proportion of homes that have an entrance without steps
- Reduce blood levels in children aged 1 to 5 years

Housing in Alaska

Cost Burden⁵

- Among extremely low-income (0-39% AMI) Alaskans, 58% spend over half of their incomes and 76% spend over 30% of their income on housing
- Among very low-income Alaskans, those percentages are 33% and 76%, respectively
- Among low-income Alaskans, 4% spend over half of their incomes and 34% spend over 30% of their incomes on housing
- Among middle income Alaskans, 15% spend over 30% of their income on housing. None spend over 50%

Secondhand Smoke

Homes are a source of secondhand smoke (SHS) exposure. No ventilation system on market can eliminate smoke that come from different rooms or units in multiunit housing dwellings. Smokefree housing can:

- Reduce turnover costs
- Reduce risk of fire
- Address demand for being in smokefree environments
- Protect the health of residents and staff
- Encourage individuals to quit smoking

Alaska was highlighted in Healthy People in Action for its work around smokefree multiunit policies and other tobacco work.

[Check it out here.](#)



Alaskan attitudes around smoking in home and secondhand smoke exposure can be seen in the chart below. Data can be found at [Publications and Resources | Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program](#).

Region	Secondhand smoke is harmful to health	Prefer to spend time where people are not smoking	Smoking ban at home	Among those who rent, landlord has rules about smoking on the property
Alaska	92%	87%	90%	50%
Anchorage	93%	88%	91%	52%
Gulf Coast	91%	88%	91%	48%
Interior	92%	85%	91%	50%
Mat-su	89%	83%	87%	45%
Northern	93%	87%	87%	35%
Southeast	93%	87%	91%	56%
Southwest	94%	90%	91%	37%

Most Alaskans believe secondhand smoke exposure is harmful, prefer to spend time in places when people are not smoking and have smoking bans at home. The same is reported when broken down by region. For residents of multiunit housing reporting landlord having a rule about smoking on the property, only three regions saw a percentage at or above 50%. The highest being 56% in the Southeast region of the state. The lowest percentage in the Northern region, at 35%

Disability

Just over 1 in 4 Alaskan adults have a disability. Among those individuals, 10% have challenges with their mobility, making it difficult to walk or climb stairs.⁶ Single story homes without stairs would be beneficial for these individuals. Flatter services would allow for easier movement at home.



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Lead

- 7.7% of Alaska's housing stock in 2019 potentially contained elevated lead risk due to the age of housing. This was the third lowest percentage in the nation.⁷
- Old housing or home renovation was the third leading potential exposure source in Alaska.⁸
- About 1% of children in Alaska had elevated blood level concentrations in 2015. The percentage is 3.3% nationally. About 2.6% of children in Alaska and 10% nationally were tested.⁸



References

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