Housing & Health in Des Moines

The relationship between health and home is well-studied and widely-recognized: the health of our bodies depends on the health of our homes.

Healthy housing is affordable, safe, and supportive

A healthy home is one where the physical, mental, and socioeconomic environment supports the well-being of household members. It is free from hazards like pests or structural deficiencies. It does not impose a cost burden, ensuring household income can be spent on other needs such as food and healthcare.

It should be possible for every Des Moines resident to live in a healthy home.

- Affordable
  - Less than 30% of household income is spent on housing, ensuring there is enough for healthy food, health care, and other needs

- Safe
  - Home is free from hazards such as toxins, pests, and structural problems

- Supportive
  - Household members are supported in making healthy choices, achieving educational and economic success, and engaging with their community

Hallmarks of Healthy Housing
- Dry
- Pest-Free
- Contaminant-Free
- Ventilated
- Maintained
- Adequate plumbing & kitchen
- Not crowded
- Affordable

Healthy housing is critical to well-being

Research shows that affordable, healthy homes are positively correlated to physical and psychological well being.

- Poor housing quality is the most consistent and strongest predictor of emotional and behavioral problems in children and youth

- Households who spend less on housing are less likely to experience residential instability, which is associated with reduced mental and physical health outcomes

- Residential exposures are major contributing factors to serious illnesses
Impacts of healthy housing barriers in Des Moines

HUD’s defined housing problems include overcrowding, inadequate plumbing, inadequate kitchen facilities, and cost-burden. The National Healthy Housing Standard (NHH) builds on these to include structural integrity, safety & security, heating & energy, moisture, waste, pest management and chemical agents.

- Injuries at home account for 4 million emergency department visits and 70,000 hospital admissions nationwide.
- Leaky, saggy roofs & broken windows cause mold, increasing the risk for asthma and other serious health problems.
- 40% of childhood asthma cases are attributable to residential exposures.
- $2,584 Annual expenses for asthma related treatments per household.
- 4.3 million Days of lost productivity due to asthma in Washington adults (71% of adult population).

Barriers to Healthy Housing

- Nearly 4 in 10 households in Des Moines are cost burdened.
- Families who spend less of their income on housing spend more on food and healthcare.
- The presence of pests can increase the risk of hospitalization by up to 3x.
- 547 Des Moines households are overcrowded.
- Over-crowding is linked to higher rates of infectious disease transmission.
- Malfunctioning or poorly maintained HVAC systems pose safety and health risks including fire and exposure to carbon monoxide.

- 253 Des Moines households have inadequate kitchen or plumbing facilities.
- 62% of Des Moines households have a risk of lead exposure. Lead at any level has toxic effects on the nervous system and cognitive development, especially in children.

Updated March 2017.

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