



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé

HOUSING AS A FOCUS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION ON EQUITY: A CURATED LIST

The concept of housing describes the environment in which people spend most of their time, and has an impact on our physical, mental and social health and well-being.¹ Approximately one-third of households in Canada live in substandard conditions or in housing need, where unstable or inadequate housing can have significant health impacts resulting in added demands on the healthcare system.² For this reason, housing is widely recognized as a social determinant of health (SDH), and public health professionals have a role to play to take action on housing as a determinant of health equity.

In this document, the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) has assembled a list of tools and resources that public health practitioners can use to understand the impact of housing on health equity. **The resources are grouped into three main themes: housing as a health issue in Canada, the impact of housing on health equity and housing as a focus of public health action.** The collection includes Canadian and international sources in a variety of formats, with several items available in French as well as English. Resources were selected in an effort to represent the diversity of those who are affected by unstable or inadequate housing and those doing the work to address housing as a health equity issue.

HOUSING AS A HEALTH ISSUE IN CANADA

These resources present strategies and calls to action that can position housing as a priority area for public health action.



[National housing strategy:](#)

[A place to call home](#)

Government of Canada. [2018].

Canada's first national housing

strategy draws attention to affordable housing as a key component of healthy social environments. The strategy is a 10-year, \$40-billion plan based on three key principles: people, communities and partnerships. Targets are set to address housing need, create new housing units, improve conditions of current housing, reduce homelessness and offer affordability supports. Issues covered include

housing as a human right, federal investment funds, the community housing sector, housing benefits, enhanced support to provinces and territories, housing research, gender-based analysis and community engagement. A focus on the housing-related needs of Indigenous and northern communities is threaded throughout.

This resource can support public health efforts to help prioritize housing at the national, provincial, regional and local levels.



[Health status of Canadians 2016: Report of the chief public health officer](#)

Government of Canada.
[2016].

The Health status of Canadians 2016 report is a publication that primarily addresses chronic disease

and factors that influence population health in Canada. It also contains an informative section that focuses on core housing need, presenting data by income, sub-population and Indigenous identity. While this section of the report is short, it provides an example of how to position housing as a health issue related to reporting on other socioeconomic factors that influence the health of populations. Such work relates to the subsequent *Chief public health officer's report on the state of public health in Canada 2017 – designing healthy living*, which describes housing quality, affordability and accessibility as critical components of a healthy built environment.



[Housing need in Canada: Healthy lives start at home](#)

Canadian Paediatric Society.
[2015].

The *Canadian Paediatric Society* developed this position statement as a call

to action to address housing need as a factor that affects the health of children and youth in Canada. The statement provides an overview of housing need in Canada, the impact of housing on the health of children and families, the influence of social and physical environments and the impact of housing on the healthcare system. The statement also outlines the role of healthcare providers in assessing and addressing housing need among their patients. In doing this, it provides an opportunity for public health practitioners to consider relationships with the primary care sector to address housing as a factor influencing health equity.

[OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES](#)

- Reading J, Halseth R. Pathways to improving well-being for Indigenous peoples: how living conditions decide health [Internet]. Prince George (BC): National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health; 2013 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 55 p. Available from: www.ccnsa-nccah.ca/495/Pathways_to_Improving_Well-being_for_Indigenous_Peoples_How_living_conditions_decide_health_nccah?id=102.
- Upstream. Housing is healthcare [Audio on the internet]. Saskatoon (SK): Upstream; 2018 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 54 minutes. Available from: www.thinkupstream.net/radio12.
- Plan h. Healthy housing [Internet]. Victoria (BC): BC Healthy Communities Society; [date unknown] [cited 2018 Jun 8]. About 11 screens. Available from: <https://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-environments/built-environments/page/healthy-housing>.
- Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. Consultation submission: a progressive human-rights based approach to housing. Ottawa (ON): Canadian Housing and Renewal Association; [2018] [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 6 p. Available from: <https://chra-achru.ca/en/news/submission-to-the-consultation-on-a-progressive-human-rights-based-approach-to-housing>.

IMPACT OF HOUSING ON HEALTH EQUITY

The sources below describe the impact of housing on health — especially for marginalized groups — in a way that supports a shift in practice to take action on housing as a public health equity issue.



RentSafe

Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment (CPCHE). [2018].

RentSafe is an initiative of the [Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment \(CPCHE\)](#)

to address unhealthy housing conditions affecting low-income tenants in rural and urban communities in Ontario. Through an equity-focused knowledge translation approach and community engagement process, RentSafe explores the health impacts of unhealthy housing and intersectoral approaches that include public health as a key partner in solutions. Several resources released as part of the project provide actionable recommendations and useable tools to support public health action on housing as a SDH.

- [*Toward healthy homes for all: RentSafe summary and recommendations*](#) is the final report of the RentSafe project, summarizing key research findings and a set of recommendations for capacity-building approaches to move toward healthy housing for all.
- The [*Public health unit survey report*](#) summarizes the results of a 2015 online survey of the experiences of all 36 health units in Ontario in addressing health concerns related to housing.
- [*RentSafe connector, step-by-step guide*](#) is an online tool for building an intersectoral network of housing-related partners for collaborative approaches to health equity.
- [*Frontline connections: Supporting tenants' rights to healthy housing*](#) and the [RentSafe whiteboard video *Home*](#) can be used by practitioners and community members for education and advocacy related to improving housing affordability and accessibility.



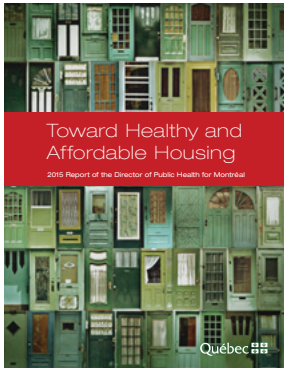
[Housing as a social determinant of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis health](#)

National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. [2017].

The [National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health](#)

(NCCA) created this document to provide an overview of housing and living conditions among Indigenous populations in Canada. The report includes population growth data and housing statistics for First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations, which offer a portrait of the housing inequities and consequent health impacts for Indigenous populations across the country. On- and off-reserve housing issues are explored alongside homelessness among Indigenous populations, as well as strategies to improve housing and health outcomes for Indigenous populations.

This document will support public health practitioners to prioritize Indigenous housing issues as a component of population health equity strategies.

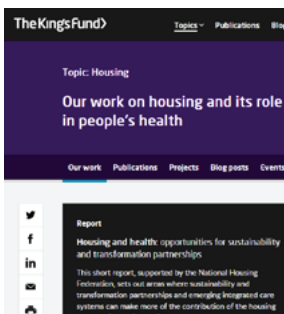


[Toward healthy and affordable housing](#)

Public Health Montreal. [2015].

This 2015 report from the director of [Public Health Montreal](#) describes the history and current state of housing in the city,

positioning it as a critical area of focus for public health. The document describes the intersection of housing sanitation and affordability, including accessibility, as well as the issue's health impacts on children, youth, families and older adults. Marginalized populations most at risk of unhealthy and unaffordable housing are positioned as a priority for public health equity strategies, along with a discussion of social housing in Canada. The report concludes with recommendations for public health practice in Canada, including possible solutions in the areas of policies, interventions and partnerships. A [synthesis](#) of the full report is also available.



[The King's Fund: Our work on housing and its role in people's health](#)

The King's Fund. [2018].

The [King's Fund](#) is a charity focused on the improvement of health and healthcare in

England. Its consulting and advisory work highlight research to influence policy and practice, including resources that explore the impact of housing on health. These include several reports on housing partnerships, sustainability and the role of housing associations in the economics of health and housing, as well as a series of infographics that highlight various aspects of inadequate housing. The organization has also profiled a learning network related to care homes in addition to a number of blogs, articles and past events with archived resources that relate to housing. This collection of resources supports intersectoral approaches for housing and health sectors to work together to improve population health.

[OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES](#)

- Wellesley Institute. Housing [Internet]. Toronto (ON): Wellesley Institute; 2018 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. Available from: www.wellesleyinstitute.com/topics/housing.
- Toronto Public Health. Housing and health: unlocking opportunity [Internet]. Toronto (ON): Toronto Public Health; 2016 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 58 p. Available from: www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-97428.pdf.
- Addictions and Mental Health Ontario, Wellesley Institute, Canadian Mental Health Association. Promising practices: 12 case studies in supportive housing for people with mental health and addictions issues. Toronto (ON): AMHO, Wellesley Institute, CMHA; 2018 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 57 p. Available from: www.wellesleyinstitute.com/publications/promising-practices-12-case-studies-in-supportive-housing-for-people-with-mental-health-and-addictions-issues.
- Wilkinson P, Close R, Crabbe H. The health problems associated with poor housing and home conditions, inadequate water supplies, flooding, poor sanitation and water pollution. Gerrard's Cross (England): Health Knowledge; 2016 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. About 9 screens. Available from: www.healthknowledge.org.uk/public-health-textbook/disease-causation-diagnostic/2f-environment/health-problems-poor-housing.

HOUSING AS A FOCUS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION ON EQUITY

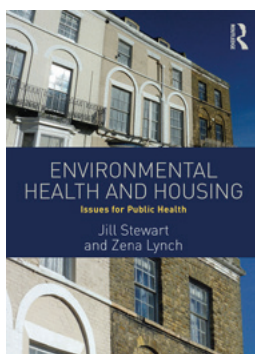
These resources help position housing as being within the scope of public health practice at multiple levels of the public health system.



[Homeless Hub](#)

Homeless Hub. [2017].

The [Homeless Hub](#) is a web-based collection of information and resources on homelessness in Canada. Its extensive [library of resources](#) offers a variety of resource formats and styles for homelessness-related work. For example, the Hub's collection of [policy briefs \(from various authors\)](#) explores topics including housing as a human rights issue, housing concerns of vulnerable youth and federal investment issues. The site also features [research summaries](#) that touch on issues such as street youth with HIV, homelessness among Indigenous populations and the relationship between homelessness and drug use. In addition, a series of papers from the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#) — a steward of the Homeless Hub — helps bring [research and policy findings](#) to the forefront, complementing various reports that highlight [strategies and interventions for addressing homelessness](#). A [collection of blogs](#) provides both context and links to other relevant resources. Information related to specific vulnerable groups such as [LGBTQ youth](#) and [racialized communities](#) will be of particular interest to public health practitioners, as well as a [public health model of homelessness prevention](#) and work on the [potential negative effect of public health policies on marginalized populations](#).



[Environmental health and housing: Issues for public health](#)

Jill Stewart and Zena Lynch. [2018].

This second edition of *Environmental Health and Housing* explores housing as a

focus of action for environmental public health practitioners. Using an intersectoral lens, the publication reinforces the importance of an interagency approach that includes health

protection and other social, municipal and health professions. Case studies are also incorporated, as well as a review of regulations and legislation that impact housing-related issues in the United Kingdom.

This book can be useful to students and both emerging and mature professionals to inform public interventions on housing and health.



[The Health and Housing Starter Kit](#)

ChangeLab Solutions. [2018].

[ChangeLab Solutions](#) is an organization focused on policy and law development to transform public health practice through systems change. ChangeLab's [Health and Housing Starter Kit](#) was developed to explore intersectoral partnerships to address housing, measurement and reporting of indicators to inform health and housing initiatives. It also helps identify what local institutions can do to improve health outcomes through housing-related strategies. The toolkit includes information about the impact of housing on health, including discriminatory housing policies and groups most at risk of unhealthy housing. It also features three case studies of housing and health initiatives: the [Bon Secours Hospital](#) in Baltimore, the [Denver Public Housing Authority](#) in Colorado and the [Alameda County Public Health Department](#) in California. The strategies explored in the resource include core actions required to address housing, such as partnering with communities, engaging organizations, using indicators to inform housing initiatives and framing messages about the impact of housing on health.

This resource will be useful for health and non-health institutions working together to address the health impacts and inequities related to unhealthy housing.



**Strengthening evidence
and public health advocacy
for housing**

Thomas, M. [year unknown].

This report presents the findings of a project initiated by the [Alberta Public Health Association](#) to strengthen the organization's capacity to participate in policy advocacy related to the SDH. The publication highlights key advocacy areas, including housing affordability, property development and homelessness, while also describing policy windows, identifying stakeholders and reviewing legislation that outlines the role of public health practitioners in Alberta related to housing. This document is intended to inform the development of an advocacy plan with identified actions for stakeholders involved, reinforcing that that advocacy for healthy housing is within the role of APHA. The accompanying [Filtering system for taking action on public issues](#) document is populated with housing-related context to help APHA decide when to take action on the issue of housing.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

- National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. Public health surveillance of housing conditions: recent data from Montreal and thoughts on improving impacts on policy [Presentation on the internet]. Vancouver (BC): NCCEH; 2018 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 67 minutes. Available from: www.ncceh.ca/content/public-health-surveillance-housing-conditions-recent-data-montreal-and-thoughts-improving.
- Fenton K. Bringing together housing and public health. England: Public Health England; 2015 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. About 5 screens. Available from: <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/21/bringing-together-housing-and-public-health>.
- Hernandez D, Suglia S. Leveraging the social determinants to build a culture of health: housing as a social determinant of health. New York (NY): Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University; 2016 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. 8 p. Available from: <https://healthequity.globalpolicysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Housing2.pdf>.
- White K, Lisitz G. Using fair housing to achieve health equity. Stanford (CA): Stanford Social Innovation Review; 2016 [cited 2018 Jun 8]. About 8 screens. Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/using_fair_housing_to_achieve_health_equity.

¹ Waterston S, Grueger B, Samson L. Housing need in Canada: healthy living starts at home. Paediatr Child Health [Internet]. 2015;20(7):403-07 [cited 2018 Jul 9]. Available from: www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/housing-need.

² Dunn JR, Hayes MV, Hulchanski JD, Hwang SW, Potvin L. Housing as a socio-economic determinant of health: findings of a national needs, gaps and opportunities assessment. Can J Public Health [Internet]. 2006 Sep-Oct;97 Suppl 3:S11-5, S12-7 [cited 2018 Jul 9]. Available from: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17357542.

CONTACT INFORMATION

National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH)
St. Francis Xavier University
Antigonish, NS B2G 2W5
nccdh@stfx.ca
tel: (902) 867-6133
fax: (902) 867-6130
www.nccdh.ca
Twitter: @NCCDH_CCNDS

This curated list was prepared by Dianne Oickle, Knowledge Translation Specialist, National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH).

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