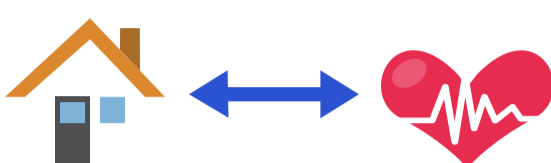


Housing & Mental Health

Affordable, safe housing helps all of us

Prepared by the Health Promotion Team
IWK Health Mental Health and Addictions

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WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN HOUSING AND PROTECTING MENTAL HEALTH?

Housing does more than provide shelter. Housing lays the groundwork for the health and wellness of our communities and the people who live there. Homelessness is not the only housing issue, there are many other broad contributing factors that support positive mental health. Those factors include affordability, quality, autonomy, stability, accessibility, and livable neighbourhoods.

State of Housing in Halifax

Scope of Core Housing Need (CHN)

CHN = # households that spend > 30% of household income to access affordable, suitable, adequate housing .
In Nova Scotia:

- **49,450 households (12.8%) in CHN * Pre COVID-19**
 - 34% homeowners
 - 66% renters
- Halifax vacancy rate 2.1% as of 2020
- **22.2% of children live in low-income households *pre COVID-19**
- NS subsidy for eligible single parent = \$586-\$913 * Pre COVID-19
 - average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in NS = \$1090
 - average rent for a 2BR apartment in HFX = \$1,156
 - average increase in rent per year >2%



About 1 in 8 people have housing need



Almost 1 in 4 children live in low-income households

Why should housing be addressed?

Housing problems have a negative impact on health and mental health, including child mental health

- Living in unsafe, unstable and crowded living conditions = poor mental health outcomes
- Individuals who experience housing insecurity or homelessness at greater risk of:
 - high levels of stress
 - self-harm, isolation, substance abuse and suicide
 - low self-esteem and self-loathing
 - loneliness, feeling of worthlessness and hopelessness
 - lower life expectancy than the general population
- Children who are homeless are 3-4x more likely to have poor mental health outcomes compared to children who have homes.

However, addressing housing problems can have a lasting positive impact on mental health

- Affordable housing promotes housing stability, limits frequency of moves, and reduces financial stress
- High-quality housing improves well-being, psychological stability, personal independence, and social contentedness
- Protective housing policy prevents adverse childhood experiences and which reduces health problems across the lifespan

What are the solutions?

- Start with the position that **housing is a Human Right**
- Focus on building and advocating for policies that are **upstream**, use **best practices** and emphasize known **protective factors**
- Work in **collaboration** with organizations who have shared values and goals for improving housing options
- Focus on housing first because it is **preventative** and **cost-effective**:
 - The cost of adequate social housing is offset by costs in health care, shelters, and other social services
 - Studies show savings to health systems when governments implement supportive housing policies
 - For every \$10 spent on addressing homelessness, \$22 is saved in medical and social service supports

Everyone has a role to address housing!

Talk to your elected officials and decision makers to advocate for local level change.

You can **influence** and **improve** which policies are implemented.

Stay informed and keep the conversations on housing going.



For every \$10 spent on addressing homelessness, \$22 is saved in the system.



Best practices & guidance for future policy

1. **Improve mix of housing stock:** Policy supporting access to a range of housing options, from social/shared housing to housing for sale
2. **Improve neighbourhood quality** by encouraging citizens to participate in community planning
3. **Promote and protect access to nature:** encourage public green space, including green spaces near building startups
4. **Focus on stability and affordability:** target strategies for people most at-risk for insecure housing, fast-track development process for affordable housing stock
5. **Ensure quality housing** by improving existing stock, including public housing
6. **Overcome implementation barriers** by aligning policies across and strengthening working relationships between jurisdictions, in order to build affordable housing, and share costs across groups and organizations



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