



Housing- Interim Report

Healthy Housing: Promoting Good Health

There is a basic understanding of the links between *adequate housing*, impacts of living in a *secure home*, and *health* outcomes. The ‘Population Health’ perspective is an approach that asks the question: “What makes some people healthy and others not?” It suggests that the strongest determinants of health are socio-economic factors in every day life⁽¹⁾.

This perspective, supported by strong Canadian research, suggests that large differences in health have to do with the cumulative lifelong impact of multiple, overlapping stressors of everyday life, stretched over a life course. Housing, as a central focus of everyday life activities, is likely to be a crucial component in the ways in how our health is shaped.

When we talk about stressors in our life, the most damaging stressor is lack of control, something that is experienced by us all; however, the impact of lack of control over our everyday lives is felt the strongest in the lives of people who are at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum.

Housing and Healthy Living:

There are three aspects of housing to be considered when looking at housing through the lens of “Healthy Living”:

- 1) **The quality and cost of one’s home.**
The physical integrity includes the need for upkeep, and the physical, biological (i.e. mold), and chemical hazards. Housing costs are also crucial because they represent one of

the largest monthly expenditures faced. When housing costs are high relative to income, people will incur costs that directly affect their health. When you spend money on housing then that money cannot be spent on other things necessary for health such as food, clothing, transportation to work, education, etc.

- 2) **One’s “home” - a place of safety, a place to be proud of, a place that one has control over.**

Home ownership has important emotional, psychological, and health advantages. One’s home is a critical setting for social interaction and it is usually the centre of a person’s social network. Having a place to meet and live with people prevents or lowers the risk of social isolation. Social isolation is an important risk factor for chronic illness and premature death.

- 3) **A place of continuity, stability, and permanence in every day life.**

One’s home acts as a centre for everyday activity. One’s home and its immediate environment are likely to be the setting for exposure to a mix of positive and negative influences on one’s health, no matter what age or stage of human development you are at.

Fort Erie’s Housing Situation

In November 2002, the Town of Fort Erie’s Planning Department completed the Municipal Housing Statement (<http://www.forterrie.on.ca/townhall/planning/HousingStatement.pdf>). The information provided by this statement



Definition of Homeless:

- persons living in shelters
- persons living in sub-standard housing which has been condemned by the municipality
- persons living with family/friends on a temporary basis for a period < 6 months
- households whose children cannot be returned by child protection- lack of housing is the only custody issue

Economic Aspects of Housing and Health

“Poverty comes before homelessness.”
At the household level, financial aspects of housing are important. Because income only accounts for household revenues and not household expenditures, income gradients in health underestimate the steepness of the social gradient in health.

Mobility

A measurement of stable housing conditions in a community is the rate at which people move from house to house. Thirteen percent (13%) of the people in Fort Erie moved in the last year. Further information indicates that the working poor and people who need social assistance often experience this upsetting condition. We need to gather more information in order to isolate factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

Team Recommendations

1) A Picture of Assisted Housing & Social Supports

We need an accurate, up-to-date picture of what assisted housing and social supports exist in the community, beyond

housing industry data provided by the Municipal Housing Plan, 2002. We need a description of the social scope and prevalence of inadequate rental housing conditions in Fort Erie in order to plan for a healthier housing situation at the community level, specifically:

- baseline inventory of housing stock (how much is there? How affordable?)
- housing condition: there is a lack of good measures of housing quality in current data sets

We need to compile categories of needs including:

- information on tenants
- extent of homelessness, hidden homeless, unstable housing situations, and families living in poverty (incipient homeless); how do you find them in our community?

We need to strengthen and support the communication link between the Niagara Homeless Plan and the Niagara Regional Affordable Housing group. Specifically we need to support the direct connection with the information collection system (Homeless Individuals Families Information System, or HIFIS) so that our community can make informed decisions.

2) Develop Partnerships

It is highly recommended that we investigate opportunities for collaborative partnerships between Niagara Regional Housing Authority, Canada Mortgage and Housing, the Municipality of Fort Erie, and landlords and builders of Fort Erie for funding, development and service provision opportunities. By meeting with landlords and builders in Fort Erie, we will



