

Survey Says: Housing is Healthcare

By [Colleen O'Connor Toberman](#), Hindsight Community Fellow, February 26, 2013 at 1:30 pm



Sometimes research just proves what we already believe to be true, for better or for worse. That's the case with a [new study](#) from Children's HealthWatch. CHW surveyed 6,000 low-income parents of young children seeking treatment at Hennepin County Medical Center. 67 percent of these families reported "housing insecurity," defined as moving two or more times in the past year, living in overcrowded conditions for financial reasons, or being behind on rent any time in the past year. Only one-third of families were considered stably housed by these relatively low standards.

The study also found that low-income families with insecure housing also experience other financial difficulties. They were 3-4 times more likely to experience food shortages and have a hard time heating and cooling their home. They were *five* times more likely to forgo needed healthcare.

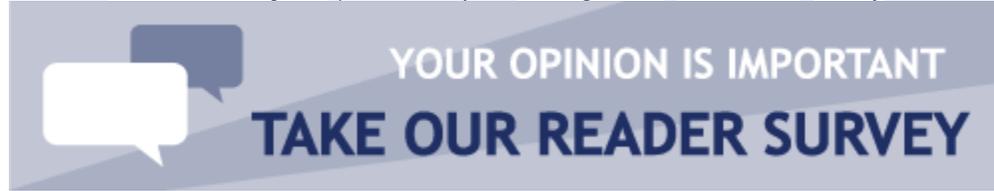
The children in this study were all under the age of four, which makes this finding especially concerning: "Compared to children in securely housed families, we found children in housing insecure families were 1.27 to 2.23 times more likely to be in fair or poor health. Housing insecure families were 1.36 to 1.68 times more likely to have young children at risk of developmental delays than securely housed families." Early childhood is a critical time for brain development and school preparation, which is exactly when these children are being shortchanged.

We already knew it, but now we can prove it: housing is healthcare. It's tough to prevent diabetes when families' cupboards are bare. We can't treat asthma when children live in substandard mold-infested homes. Potential mental illness is difficult to address in a four-year-old who lives in overcrowded and unstable conditions. And their parents, struggling to earn every dollar, can't always miss work to address these medical needs.

One piece of good news: interventions can help. Families living in subsidized housing were more likely to have good health and food security than families on the waiting lists for these

programs. With waiting lists being years long (if even open at all), we can't expect this disparity to fix itself. We need more affordable housing now, before it's too late for these children.

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