STABLE HOUSING AND UTILITIES:
Keeping Baltimore's Babies Healthy

Further Reading

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For more on Children’s HealthWatch, please visit www.childrenshealthwatch.org
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Why study children under three years of age?

- Very young children are uniquely vulnerable to deprivation.
- The health and learning potential of our nation's youngest children are put at risk because of hardships associated with poverty:
  - Unstable housing conditions
  - Inadequate home heating or cooling
- Children's HealthWatch works to bring timely scientific evidence about the links between these conditions and children's health and well-being into the public policy arena.

Unstable housing and utilities negatively impact mother and child health and well-being.

- Nearly half (47%) of Children's HealthWatch families at the Baltimore site are housing insecure.
- A quarter (24%) of Children's HealthWatch families at the Baltimore site are energy insecure.

Housing insecurity increases risk for:
- maternal fair or poor health
- maternal depression
- child fair or poor health

Energy insecurity increases risk for:
- maternal fair or poor health
- maternal depression
- child fair or poor health
- child risk for overweight

Having combined insecurity is associated with the most risk for:
- maternal fair or poor health
- maternal depression
- child fair or poor health
- child hospitalizations
- child risk for under/overweight

Current housing subsidies and energy assistance programs are not sufficient to prevent or alleviate housing and energy insecurity for all families.

Summary and Recommendations

Public policies can positively prevent and reduce housing and energy insecurity, leading to better health and well-being for mothers and young children.

- Increase resources for energy and housing assistance.
- Fund housing subsidization programs (i.e. public housing and Section 8), and Maryland Energy Assistance Program.
- Funding and program development efforts should assit families with weatherization, support home ownership, and manage/reduce home energy costs.
- Services and resources should be centralized to increase accessibility and utilization.
- Enable families to apply for multiple assistance programs in a single location, modeled after Benefit Bank (www.thebenefitbank.com).
- Create a centralized resource for providers to access information on energy and housing services, eligibility, and assistance modeled after www.hungryinbaltimore.org.
- Encourage providers to identify families at risk for housing and energy insecurity and assist families in accessing services.
- Monitor prevalence rates of energy and housing insecurity and assess accessibility and enrollment rates.
- Baltimore City should protect the health and well-being of families by prioritizing housing and energy programs that focus on women and children.
Are children in families who are both housing and energy insecure at greatest risk for poor health & well-being?

Families with both housing and energy insecurity are at greatest risk for:
- maternal fair or poor health
- maternal depression
- child fair or poor health
- child hospitalizations
- child risk for under/overweight

Housing and Energy Insecurity

Housing insecurity defined:
A housing insecure household lacks stable housing.

Housing insecure families have experienced:
- Moving two or more times in the past year
- Crowding (more than two people per bedroom)
- Temporarily living with others for economic reasons
- Inability to pay rent/mortgage on time in the past year

Energy insecurity defined:
An energy insecure household lacks consistent access to the energy needed for a healthy and safe lifestyle.

Energy insecure families have experienced:
- Threatened utility cut-off
- Actual utility cut-off
- Unheated/uncooled days because of non-payment
- Heating the residence with a cooking stove
**Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP)**

- Provides assistance with past due heating and cooling costs for low-income families.
- Targeted to households with the highest energy costs in relation to income and household size.
- Eligibility:
  - income <150% of the poverty level
  - Receiving other services:
    - TANF
    - SSI
    - Food Stamps
    - veteran benefits

**THE FACE OF HOUSING AND ENERGY INSECURITY**

The economic crisis in America is also a health crisis, especially for young children.

Monique, a young mother, brought her infant son to the University of Maryland School of Medicine for medical care.

She received letters from the electric company, threatening to shut off her utilities. After losing power to her home, she struggled to make ends meet.

Monique put food on the table rather than pay the electric bill. She said, “You feel down that you can’t do anything, but you just know you’ll get through it.”

Even when the gas and electricity were turned back on, more letters threatening to disconnect the power appeared in the mailbox.

Monique was surprised to learn that she may qualify for public programs designed to help families with electricity and heat.

These resources may ease some of the stress families feel in a time of economic instability.

**ENERGY ASSISTANCE**

This is a story of two young children who experienced first-hand the restorative effects of stable housing through the Baltimore Section 8 housing program.

Asia and Jacob were being treated at the Growth and Nutrition Clinic at the University of Maryland School of Medicine for severe underweight and poor growth.

Their caregiver, a single, disabled, great-grandmother, was raising the children on her own. The family had too few resources and were forced to move multiple times in one year, only to end up crowded into a friend’s home.

With a move to Section 8 housing, their situation dramatically improved. A safe, secure, stable home enabled the family to build daily routines that led to healthy weight gain and successful growth patterns.

Facilitating secure housing and energy for families is a critical step toward ensuring the health and development of our nation’s children.

Is there any better investment we can make?

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**What percent of Baltimore Site families receive MEAP?**

Overall, 17% of families receive MEAP.

Among energy insecure families, 11% may have been assisted by receiving MEAP. The benefits of MEAP may not be sufficient to prevent energy insecurity.
This report addresses four issues about Children's HealthWatch families at the Baltimore Site:

- Housing/energy insecurity
- Risk for poor health and well-being among housing/energy insecure mothers and children
- Public housing and energy assistance
- Combined risk: housing AND energy insecurity

Mothers in energy insecure households are at risk for fair or poor health and depression.

Children in energy insecure households are at risk for fair or poor health, risk of overweight, and hospitalizations.
**Housing Insecurity at the Baltimore Site**

- **47%** of Baltimore site families are housing insecure — that is, they report at least one housing risk factor.

Mothers in housing insecure households are at risk for fair or poor health and depression.

Children in housing insecure households are at risk for fair or poor health.

**Public Housing**

- **27%** of Baltimore site families live in subsidized/public housing.

The average length of time on the waiting list is more than **2.5 years**.

**Public Housing:**

- Provides affordable housing to low-income families, the elderly and persons with a disability.
- Waiting periods for public housing are often long, and waiting lists close due to excessive demand for resources.
- Individuals and families with the greatest needs are given preference on the waiting list.

Among housing secure families, **30%** may have been assisted by receiving subsidized/public housing.

The benefits of subsidized/public housing may not be sufficient to prevent housing insecurity.

- **Mental Health**
  - Housing secure: 14 & 21
  - Housing insecure: 70 & 30

- **Mental Depression**
  - Housing secure: 8 & 10
  - Housing insecure: 10 & 24
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The Face of Housing and Energy Insecurity

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Energy Assistance

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Is there any better investment we can make?
Are children in families who are both housing and energy insecure at greatest risk for poor health & well-being?

Combined Risk

Families with both housing and energy insecurity are at greatest risk for:

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- child fair or poor health
- child hospitalizations
- child risk for under/overweight

Energy inequality defined:

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14% of families report both housing and energy insecurity

14% of families report housing and energy insecurity

44% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity

10% of families report only housing insecurity

32% of families report only energy insecurity

92% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity

14% of families report both housing and energy insecurity

14% of families report only housing insecurity

32% of families report only energy insecurity

44% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity

10% of families report housing insecurity

10% of families report energy insecurity

4% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity

14% of families report both housing and energy insecurity

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44% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity

10% of families report only housing insecurity

32% of families report only energy insecurity

44% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity

10% of families report housing insecurity

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4% of families report neither housing nor energy insecurity
A FOCUS ON YOUNG CHILDREN

Children's HealthWatch monitors the impact of economic conditions and public policies on the health and well-being of very young children.

This report is based on information from infants and toddlers who received health care services at the University of Maryland School of Medicine's Pediatric Emergency Department and Pediatric Ambulatory Center between January 2004 and December 2008.

Characteristics of the 3,074 families interviewed at the Baltimore site:

- 88% African American
- 84% single parent households
- 100% non-private insurance
- 61% of children were under 1 year old
- 39% of children were 1-3 years old

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- Children’s HealthWatch works to bring timely scientific evidence about the links between these conditions and children’s health and well-being into the public policy arena.

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- Having combined insecurity is associated with the most risk for:
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- Current housing subsidies and energy assistance programs are not sufficient to prevent or alleviate housing and energy insecurity for all families.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public policies can positively prevent and reduce housing and energy insecurity, leading to better health and well-being for mothers and young children.

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