



Creating Healthy Homes & Communities Throughout Minnesota

OVERVIEW

Health is Rooted in Our Homes and Communities

When we are really home, we know it. At home we have a safe refuge, and we are nurtured. When home is as it is meant to be, kids play freely in the neighborhood, and neighbors care for one another. Grocery stores and schools are nearby, and our businesses prosper. We relax with family and friends, eat well and sleep soundly, and nurture dreams for a bright future. Home is where we are truly free to be ourselves. But for far too many people, home is not for what we hope. In fact, our homes and communities can be making us sick.

Beyond being our refuge, for most Minnesotans, housing is also our biggest expense each month, and we want to choose a home and a community that's really right for us. We want options that will support good health, so our children, our elders, and everyone in between can thrive.

“The connection between health and the dwelling of the population is one of the most important that exists.”

—Florence Nightingale

What are Healthy Homes and Communities?

A Healthy Home is built/renovated, designed, and operated in ways that support the health of people living there.

A Healthy Home is:

- Dry
- Clean
- Pest-free
- Contaminant-free
- Well-maintained
- Well-ventilated
- Safe
- Energy-efficient
- Affordable to the occupant

A Healthy Community provides the economic, social, and physical environment that allows all people the opportunity to achieve and maintain physical health, well-being, and a high quality of life.

A Healthy Community has:

- Transportation Choices
- Clean Air and Water
- Safety
- Social Connectedness
- Healthy Housing Choices
- Opportunity for Physical Activity
- Healthy Food and Health Services
- Economic and Educational Opportunity
- Affordability



Healthy homes nurture healthy bodies and minds.

Health Begins in a Healthy Home

Our homes should support health and make healthy choices possible. The physical state of the home is an important place to begin with to be sure our conditions are safe.

Many illnesses and injuries can be avoided or improved by making changes to the home itself.

| Problems | Effective Solutions |
|--|--|
| <p>Exposure to molds, dust mites, and other triggers such as cockroach and mouse droppings in the home is strongly associated with asthma and other respiratory conditions.^{1,2}</p> | <p>When triggers are removed, improvement can be dramatic for people and even save money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based assessments and modifications for children with asthma have been shown to reduce asthma symptoms, emergency department visits, and hospitalizations. For every dollar invested in one Twin Cities program, \$2.19 was saved in overall health care costs and \$1.76 was saved on asthma treatments.³ |
| <p>Exposure to lead during childhood is linked to lower intelligence, learning disabilities, and violent crime rates. In 2010, about 3,800 Minnesota children under the age of six were found to have blood lead levels that needed intervention, based on CDC standards.⁴</p> | <p>Lead hazard control in and around the home and lead safe practices limit exposure for children at risk.</p> |
| <p>Chemical exposures and unhealthy indoor air due to tobacco smoke, carbon monoxide, pesticides, volatile organic compounds, and radon contribute to developmental problems, cancer, asthma and other respiratory illnesses.⁵</p> | <p>Reduce exposure to irritants, allergens, and cancer-causing gases through use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated pest management, smoke-free practices, and radon mitigation. • Carbon monoxide detectors and radon tests. • Safer paint, reducing carpet usage. |
| <p>Injuries in the home account for nearly half of all injuries needing medical attention, including falls, fires and burns, drownings, poisonings, and others.⁶ Smoking is the leading cause of residential fire deaths. Eighty-seven percent of fire fatalities in Minnesota occurred in residences in 2010; in most cases smoke alarms were absent, inoperable, or the status could not be determined.⁷ For older Minnesotans, the death rate from falls far exceeds the U.S. average for older adults by 73%.⁸</p> | <p>Many falls, fires, burns, and drownings are preventable by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installing and monitoring smoke alarms. • Setting hot water heaters at safe, not scalding, temperatures. • Installing stair gates, window guards, handrails, and grab bars. • Smoke-free policies and practices. |

Both homeowners and renters can benefit from healthy improvements to the home.

Improving the health of our homes is good for us, and leads to cost savings and more comfortable living. Lower utility bills, lower maintenance and repair costs, and fewer draft, mold, and pest issues are some of the benefits of healthy home improvements.



Healthy neighborhoods help us thrive and prevent us from getting sick in the first place.

Healthy Communities Allow Us to Thrive

Our health is related not just to our personal habits, medical care, and income and education, but also to the communities we live in. Conditions of neighborhoods matter—and can be changed for the better, through smart policy choices and community involvement.

Vibrant, local communities make it easy to choose walking and biking for daily errands, shopping, and work. Parks, transit, and healthy air, water, and food nearby contribute to healthy neighborhoods.

- **Community design** including bicycle paths, parks and green space, walkways, local shopping, and a variety of businesses mixed in with housing, all can increase people's physical activity.⁹⁻¹² Safe and attractive routes for pedestrians and bicyclists with well-lit streets make it easier for people to choose alternatives to driving.
- **The presence of transit** provides opportunity to increase exercise.¹³ In fact, transit users are more likely than others to get the exercise they need simply by walking to and from transit.¹⁴
- **Access to local supermarkets** where fresh, healthy foods are available makes it easier to eat a nutritious diet and maintain a healthy weight.^{15,16} Yet 21 percent of Minnesota's census tracts are low income tracts with low access to supermarkets. Over half of these "food deserts" are in rural areas.¹⁷
- **Many people prefer walkable neighborhoods** with a mix of features and would prefer not to have to drive to stores and businesses if they had the choice.¹⁸
- **Clean, fresh air to breath outside and safe water to drink** are essential for good health, but are not a given. About 13 days during 2010 did not meet air quality standards for particulate matter in Minnesota.¹⁹ People in low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to be exposed to toxic chemicals and dirty air.
- **Safe neighborhoods** have a positive effect on health. Individuals who believe their neighborhoods are safe have been found to have a lower body mass index than those who do not, even after adjusting for individual and neighborhood characteristics.²⁰

There are important disparities in health. Rather than being equally likely for all, good health and a long life are linked in part to higher incomes and higher-income neighborhoods. In addition, many illnesses are not equally distributed by race and ethnicity.²¹

Better Policies— Healthier Communities

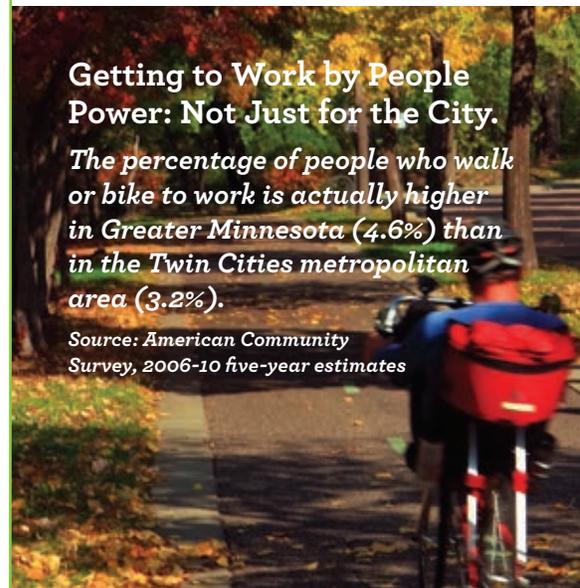
Smart policy can lead to safer, walkable streets, to development linked with many transportation choices, and to other desirable community features.

- Zoning for mixed-use development promotes a mix of businesses near homes.
- Local "Complete Streets" ordinances ensure that when roads are re-done, they welcome all types of transportation, from pedestrians to bicycles to wheelchairs to cars.
- Creating incentives to support supermarkets in low-access areas and supporting farmers markets or community gardens all help address food deserts.

Getting to Work by People Power: Not Just for the City.

The percentage of people who walk or bike to work is actually higher in Greater Minnesota (4.6%) than in the Twin Cities metropolitan area (3.2%).

Source: American Community Survey, 2006-10 five-year estimates





Housing Options that are affordable, healthy, and safe lead to better well-being.

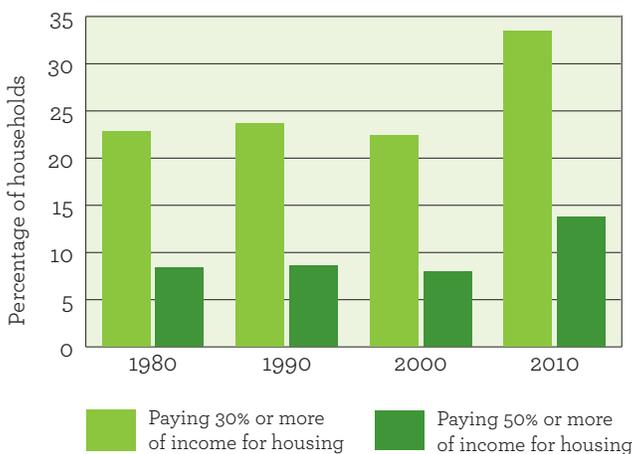
We Fare Better When Housing Is Affordable

Decent housing that fits within a budget allows families to make responsible health choices. Yet housing in Minnesota has become increasingly unaffordable. One in four homeowners and half of renters in the state live in housing that's unaffordable at their income levels, according to HUD standards. The problem is particularly severe for households with incomes under \$50,000. Fifty-nine percent of these households spend more for their housing than they can afford.²² Unaffordable housing takes a heavy toll on the health of adults and children alike.

- **Unaffordable housing makes it more difficult for people to seek medical care and to prevent illness in the first place.** Working families paying half or more of their income for housing are more likely to have difficulty paying for food and to lack health insurance than those paying less. Inability to afford housing or food often leads to delaying medical care or not taking needed medications due to cost.²³⁻²⁵
- **Children are especially vulnerable when housing is unaffordable.** The impacts of unstable, unaffordable housing, inadequate home heating and cooling, and lack of nutritious food can add up. They can prevent normal growth and development in children, and negatively affect school performance.²⁶⁻³⁰

Yet interventions can help. Research finds that access to affordable housing and energy assistance can lead to better physical, social, and emotional health.³¹⁻³⁵

Proportion of Minnesota Households Burdened by Housing Costs



Source: 1980 and 1990: National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS); 2000: Decennial Census; 2010 American Community Survey

Business Matters: Healthy Housing and Communities Are Good for the Bottom Line.

A number of health conditions are closely linked to housing and neighborhood conditions—with a severe impact on business. Asthma, often triggered by dust, pests, and mold in the home, results in 14 million missed work days each year.³⁶ Similarly, obesity costs employers \$73 billion each year in medical expenses, sick days, and lost productivity.³⁷ Yet the design of communities can make it difficult for workers to walk, bike, or use transit, even if they want to.



Minnesota: Reaching Across Sectors

Healthy homes programs that coordinate across sectors can increase the availability of affordable, healthy housing, raise housing values, and improve health outcomes—and cost less than addressing issues piece by piece. Minnesota is poised to be a national leader as health, housing, safety, and planning organizations find better ways to work together. Private, nonprofit, and governmental sectors all have a role to play in making our shared vision for healthy homes and communities a reality.



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The Alliance for Healthy Homes and Communities is a partnership of Sustainable Resources Center, Minnesota Housing Partnership, Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, and the Minnesota Green Communities initiative of the Family Housing Fund and Greater Minnesota Housing Fund with the goal of creating a statewide alliance to promote healthy homes and communities in Minnesota. The Alliance was formed through a planning grant from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation. www.alliancehhc.org