

JUNE 2020

THE IMPACT OF THE STEPS AND STRATEGIES OF THE **HEALTH ACTION PLAN**

This report will broadly detail the evidence behind core steps of the Health Action Plan, resources and strategies to draw upon when developing a Health Action Plan, and a summary of the impact affordable housing developers can expect when implementing a Health Action Plan.

This work was supported by the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Health Impact Project, The Pew Charitable Trusts or the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

ABOUT ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Enterprise is a proven and powerful nonprofit that improves communities and people's lives by making well-designed homes affordable. As a social enterprise, we bring together the nationwide know-how, policy leadership, partners, donors and investors to multiply the impact of local affordable housing development. Over more than 35 years, Enterprise has created 662,000 homes, invested nearly \$53 billion and touched millions of lives.

ENTERPRISE PROJECT TEAM

Mary Ayala, Krista Egger, Nikki Miller, Stephany De Scisciolo

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Mary Ayala, mayala@enterprisecommunity.org

Designed by Aaron Geis.

Join us at www.EnterpriseCommunity.org/HealthActionPlan

© 2020, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. Permission is granted to copy and distribute this document under the CC BY-ND license with EXCEPTIONS listed in the Terms of Use on our website, www.EnterpriseCommunity.org.





THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HOUSING AND HEALTH

Prominent public health institutions, including the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), include the physical environment as one of many factors that impact human health (World Health Organization, n.d.; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Of the physical environments humans inhabit, housing is one of the most important, with the average person spending close to 70% of their day in their residence (Klepeis, et al., 2001). The features of a home influence many aspects of health through four main pathways, including:

1. **Housing affordability** - the cost of housing compared to the population's ability to afford that cost and balance other necessary expenses;
2. **Housing stability** – the ability to have a consistent place to live with choice over when to move.
3. **Housing quality** – the physical condition and environment of the home.
4. **Location of the home** – the connectedness of the home to community resources including food, services, jobs, transportation, education and other resources (Maqbool, et al., 2015; Taylor, 2018).

When housing is unaffordable, families and individuals are often forced to make decisions that are detrimental to their health such as delaying healthcare and medications or not purchasing essential items such as food (Maqbool, et al., 2015; Enterprise Community Partners, 2019). In a **national survey** released by Enterprise Community Partners (Enterprise) of 1,000 renters, over 80% of respondents indicated they would prioritize rent before all other expenses (Enterprise Community Partners, 2019). This illustrates the value renters place on maintaining a steady and stable living situation. Often, when housing at an affordable rent is not available in a city or town, individuals are forced into living in poor or overcrowded living situations or in low-opportunity neighborhoods (Maqbool, et al., 2015).

There is a significant gap between the need and supply of affordable housing in the United States. According to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, there is a shortage of 7.2 million affordable housing units leading to over 500,000 people living in homelessness every night and 75% of extremely low-income families paying over half of their income to rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019). The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is the nation's largest tool for financing the production and preservation of affordable housing. Affordable housing developers typically finance their new developments through the use of these funds.

By providing affordable and stable homes to low- and moderate-income individuals and families, affordable housing developers address two of the four pathways that housing impacts health described above. Beyond affordability and stability, a home should be dry, clean, pest-free, contaminant-free, ventilated, well-maintained, thermally controlled, and connected to opportunity. Building certification programs are one way to set requirements around these and other elements of a home. Enterprise provides a pathway for affordable housing developers to improve health through housing quality and location through its sustainable building certification program, [Enterprise Green Communities](#).

Enterprise Green Communities is a certification program for the design, construction, and operations of affordable housing developments. It spans 8 categories detailing mandatory and optional criteria involving 1) integrative design, 2) location & neighborhood fabric, 3) site improvement, 4) water, 5) operating energy, 6) materials, 7) healthy living environment, and 8) operations, maintenance, and resident engagement. In addition to the priority of sustainable building practices, all eight sections include criteria targeting health and wellness. This strong focus on health and affordability has made the 2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria the first national green and healthy building

standard; developments certified to Enterprise’s 2020 Criteria will also receive certification as a WELL Building by the International WELL Institute. Certification programs, including Enterprise Green Communities, are widely used in affordable housing development because states often require or incentivize certification as part of their process for awarding LIHTC to developers. These requirements or incentives are outlined in a state’s Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) and detail the state’s eligibility criteria for awarding their federal tax credits. Currently, 27 states incentivize or require Enterprise Green Communities in their QAP.

While Enterprise Green Communities infuses health throughout its criteria, a key feature that distinguishes it from other healthy building standards is the Health Action Plan (HAP). This innovative process pairs affordable housing developers with public health professionals to prioritize the health needs of their residents in the design, construction, and operations of their development through data analysis and community engagement. Affordable housing developers can use this flexible process as part of Enterprise Green Communities certification or as a stand-alone practice. Since 2015, this process has been adapted for affordable housing developments of all types, including rehabs, new construction, and even smaller scopes such as operations and resident services.

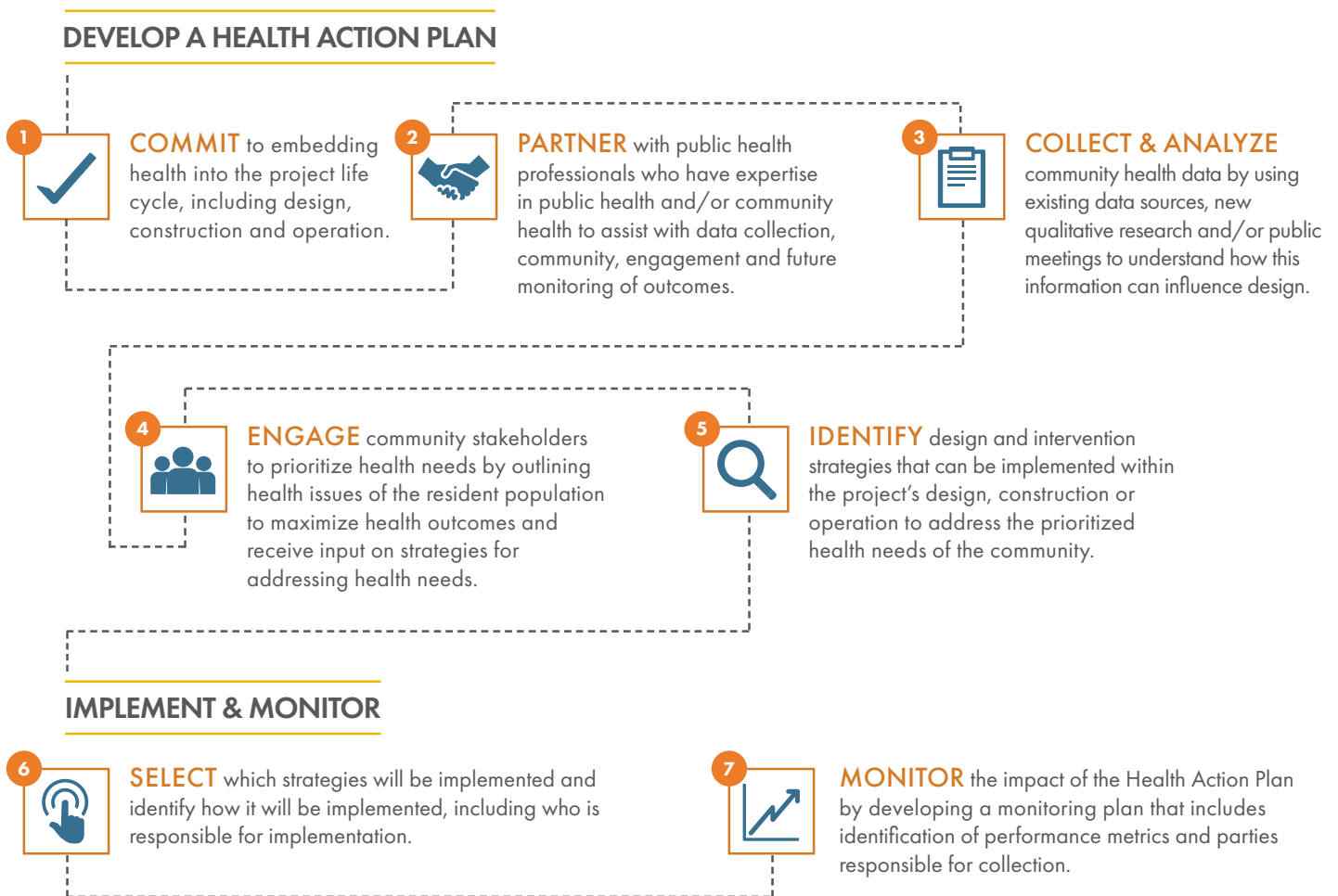


The Health Action Plan Framework

Enterprise developed the Health Action Plan in 2015 in partnership with the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, and the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). It was updated in 2019 for the [2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria](#) with the support of practitioners who had experience performing a HAP. The HAP provides affordable housing developers a means for integrating health into the development process, ideally during pre-development phase of housing development, prior to finalizing the site design. The HAP consists of seven steps outlined in Figure 1.

The HAP offers affordable housing developers a structured, yet flexible, evidence-based process for embedding health-promoting features into the design of their construction projects. Based on the data analysis and community engagement steps included in the HAP process, these features can be tailored to resident health needs, thus increasing the likelihood that these features will positively contribute to resident health outcomes. The next several sections summarize the evidence-base embedded in the steps of the HAP and learnings and challenges from practitioners who performed the HAP or similar processes.

Figure 1: Seven Step Process for the Health Action Plan





Prioritizing Health in the Project Lifecycle

Many affordable housing developers are interested in improving resident health and provide health-promoting programs onsite, such as cooking or exercise classes. Others incorporate health-promoting features within the design of their buildings, such as a community garden, but may not have a defined health goal in doing so. The Health Action Plan is not a prescriptive solution or set of strategies, but rather a process that brings together health-related data and priorities from community engagement activities to guide project scopes of work and inform developer decisions about how to address resident and community health.

In 2016, Enterprise, with the support of the Health Impact Project, conducted a pilot project and evaluation of five community development corporations to observe and support the ways in which these organizations implemented the HAP framework. By the end of the pilot all five participating organizations reported an increase in their organization's appreciation for how the built environment impacts resident health (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017). This illustrated that through the HAP, affordable housing developers better understand the direct connection between the built environment and resident health (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017). Illuminating this connection can bring about change not only in a single project, but across the practice of affordable housing development. Three of the pilot participants shared their plans to incorporate portions of the HAP and their learnings into future developments (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017). In continued partnership with several of the pilot organizations, health has clearly remained a component of their approach to affordable housing development after completing the HAP. One partner chose to take part in a second HAP; another prioritized partnership with health

organization with plans to pursue healthy building certifications on future developments; and a third is part of a local health and housing collaborative exploring how to expand their partnerships with health organizations. The promotion of public health in housing through the HAP is consistent with evidence from other similar process like the Health Impact Assessment, which also show how the increased awareness of health needs influences the decisions made in a way to positively influence community health (Bourcier E, 2015).

As part of disseminating the HAP, Enterprise regularly speaks with developers about the HAP and presents the framework and findings to larger audiences at conferences and through webinars. Questions that arise in these conversations reveal how novel the concept of committing to a community-driven process is to determine health promoting strategies for a building, rather than circumventing community input and selecting strategies with which the design team is familiar. A prescriptive set of "healthy housing" solutions is much more comfortable to many developers. As will be discussed in the next few sections, the HAP when executed with a strong public health partner and with clarity and transparency to the impacted community is able to solve for health needs that the residents lift up in ways that both honor their needs and that are feasible in property development. In some cases, site design is adjusted, in other cases, space planning is the focus, in other cases, property amenities, building materials, and/or resident programming will be the focus of the solution set. All in all, the HAP is a flexible process that responds to the impacted community and is feasible within development.



Leveraging Expertise Through Cross-sector Partnerships

Issues as complex as improving the health of residents living in affordable housing rarely have a single answer. There is power in multi-sector solutions which bring together professionals that do not typically work together. Successful cross-sector partnerships begin by understanding the unique expertise and contributions that representatives of each sector offer. Professionals from the affordable housing sector and the public health sector serve the needs of low- and moderate-income individuals and families in distinct, yet complementary, ways.

Through Enterprise's evaluation of the HAP, selecting a public health partner was one of the most challenging steps for the participating affordable housing developers. This was in part due to the lack of connections between the affordable housing sector and public health community, along with not knowing the skill set to look for in a public health partner. Luckily, the gap between the affordable housing and public health sectors is starting to close and resources such as Enterprise's TA Provider Registry exist to provide insight into local and national public health partners that are well versed in working with affordable housing development teams.

Of equal importance to identifying public health organizations is knowing what skill sets the public health partner should bring, including expertise in accessing, analyzing, and disaggregating local health data; facilitating resident and community engagement; and identifying evidence-based strategies that promote health and are applicable to the design, construction, and operations of a residential building (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017). In a HAP, affordable housing developers work closely with these partners while bringing their direct knowledge and experience with residents, appropriate means of outreach to the impacted community, and feasibility and cost of the proposed strategies. Relying on the expertise and distinctive skill set of both practitioners allows for the greatest impact (Enterprise Community Partners, 2020; Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017).

Similarly, the evidence around comparable processes in housing, such as with Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) illustrate that these are most effective when they are being co-led by housing officials and public health practitioners. This impact is attributed to each set of professionals lending their own strengths which are complementary and distinct to the project's impact on health (The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2016). As a public health practitioner or affordable housing developer it is important to assess what you uniquely bring to the project in terms of expertise and capacity prior to entering into a formal partnership.



The Value of Community Engagement in Prioritizing Needs and Formulating Strategies

Whether through formal evaluations conducted by Enterprise or side-bar conversations with partners, community engagement is lauded as the most impactful and enlightening step in the Health Action Plan process. This was confirmed by the Enterprise pilot project. As one participating developer explained, “The residents are the experts on what they’re experiencing” (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017). On its surface, community engagement is critical in uncovering resident health needs that cannot be garnered from the data; however, studies illustrate that community engagement also improves the uptake of the selected strategies by residents, builds trust with residents and relationships with community stakeholders, and lends credibility to the findings of the process (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017; The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2019; Anon., 2016; Payton Scally, et al., 2017).

Communication and transparency with community stakeholders is key to achieving these positive outcomes. Engaging community members, stakeholders, and residents of properties around their health needs, and most importantly the types of strategies to address those needs, can build relationships, contribute to power and agency for those involved, and promote health and healing (The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2019; Payton Scally, et al., 2017; Szczepanski, 2017). To effectively do this, those involved in the HAP need to be open and transparent about how the information collected from those engaged will be utilized, how decisions will be made, and a pathway for accountability (The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2019). When those steps are taken, authentic community engagement uncovers critical

community health concerns that were not apparent in the data analysis and allows existing evidence-based health-promoting strategies to be tailored to the cultural needs of the population (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017; The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2019).

Many affordable housing developers are experienced in community engagement and the addition of a public health professional allows this engagement to focus on resident health needs with more clarity. It is important for developers and public health practitioners to go into community engagement sessions with a united vision and clear messaging about how the stakeholders’ feedback will be used in the HAP. These engagement sessions are opportunities for residents and community members to share what they value most, in regards to their health. Access to affordable healthy food, safe areas for recreation, air quality, ease of connecting with neighbors, and more, may come up in these sessions. Focusing on illuminating these core health values is key. As previously discussed, some developers expressed concern prior to entering a HAP for fear of giving the impression that involving the community in the development process would mean committing to following-through with any number of shared design ideas. For example, one developer shared their concern that community members would expect a swimming pool if that came up as a solution during the engagement. This comment illustrates the need to clearly frame engagement with residents around core health needs, and potential types of solutions, rather than around specific solutions (e.g. physical activity opportunities vs. a swimming pool).



Selecting Evidence-based Strategies

The HAP tailors design, construction, and operation strategies to align with the health needs that residents identify as their highest priority. After the community engagement phase, the public health professional will synthesize the feedback and identify the aspects of health that residents identified as their greatest need. Then, the public health professional in partnership with the affordable housing design and development team will identify design, construction, or operations strategies that could be incorporated into the housing development in question and that respond to those health needs. The information gathered and collected prior to identifying strategies guides the focus of the set of strategies both identified and selected. In selecting strategies, both the public health professional and affordable housing developer are critical. The public health professional can provide their knowledge of health impact and supporting evidence for the strategies while the affordable housing developer understands the feasibility and costs associated with implementation.

Although not a comprehensive list, the following five health needs arise as common needs in Health Action Plans and have strong evidence behind built environment strategies, many of which are incorporated in Enterprise Green Communities, that can be adopted for health promotion. They include 1) injury and accessibility, 2) asthma and respiratory health, 3) chronic diseases (obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases), 4) cancer and toxin exposure, and 5) mental health, trauma, and healing (Enterprise Community Partners, 2020; Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017). Table 1 identifies each of these common health needs, associated built environment strategies, and links to additional resources.

Table 1: Potential Health Strategies and Resources

Health Campaign	Injury and accessibility	Asthma and respiratory health	Chronic diseases (obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases)	Cancer and toxin exposure	Mental health, trauma, and healing
Potential types of strategies	Physical accessibility of the site and building	Indoor air quality, humidity, and temperature (central air, AC, ventilation)	Proximity to essential goods and services	Material selection	Views of nature
	Safety and access points for mobility (walking, biking, trans-it)	Controlling for mold	Proximity and access to public transportation	Exposure to toxins through site selection and products used	Noise levels
	Access to health and community services and supports	Use of toxic / carcinogenic products	Indoor air quality, humidity, and temperature (central air, AC, ventilation)	Indoor and outdoor water quality testing and control	Opportunity for social connection
	Fall prevention features (stair gates, window guards, handrails, grab bars, flooring, and improved lighting)	Smoke-free policies	Access to safe, affordable places to be active	Indoor air quality, humidity, and temperature (central air, AC, ventilation)	Natural light
	Access to affordable transportation services	Pests mitigation	Smoke-free policies	Access to safe, affordable places to be active	Promotion real and perceived safety
	Appropriate lighting for household tasks and movement	Site selection	Proximity and access to affordable, healthy food	Proximity and access to affordable, healthy food	Flexible spaces
	Methods of wayfinding	Material selection	Walkability, pathways, stairs	Smoke-free policies	Integration of art, culture, and history
Additional resources for strategy selection	<u>Aging in Place Design Guidelines</u> , Enterprise Community Partners	<u>Community Guide Asthma</u> , Center for Disease Control and Prevention	<u>Community Guide Obesity, Diabetes, Physical Activity</u> , Center for Disease Control and Prevention	<u>Making Healthy Choices</u> , Building Clean	<u>Community Guide: Mental Health</u> , Center for Disease Control and Prevention
	<u>Active Design: Affordable Designs for Affordable Housing</u> , Center for Active Design	<u>Smoke-free policies in multi-unit housing</u> , American Lung Association	<u>Active Design Guidelines</u> , Center for Active Design	<u>Radon</u> , Environmental Protection Agency	<u>Trauma Informed Community Building</u> , The Bridge
	<u>Principles of Universal Design</u> , NC State University	<u>Integrated Pest Management: A Guide for Affordable Housing</u> , Stop Pests	<u>Community Activities to Promote Physical Activity</u> , Center for Disease Control and Prevention	<u>Chemical exposures in recently renovated low-income homes</u> , Environmental International	<u>Trauma Informed Community Building and Engagement</u> , Urban Institute



Benefits for Affordable Housing Developers from the HAP Process

Since the creation of the HAP, Enterprise has worked with eleven developers on the creation of their HAP. Through these conversations, Enterprise's HAP Evaluation, and evaluations of similar processes, the benefits of the HAP process do not accrue only to residents. In performing a HAP, developers:

1. Further align with their mission – many affordable housing developers are non-profit organizations and include resident health and wellbeing within their mission. The design, construction, and operations of their development will impact the health and wellbeing of residents, whether positively or negatively. The HAP process is designed to intentionally optimize the health benefits of affordable housing in a way that directly responds to the specific resident health needs.
2. Build reputation and relationships – The HAP through community engagement, transparency, and reporting out about the HAP process, allows developers the opportunity to strengthen their reputation and relationship with residents, community stakeholders, and funders. Each one of these groups is critically important in affordable housing with the relationship and trust between the developer and resident being critical to resident wellbeing and important in communicating when there is a problem in the unit or with rent. Second, community stakeholders are more likely to turn to partners they know when there is a need or opportunity – the HAP process can help to establish new relationships between the developer and potential partner organizations serving the same community, possibly even partnerships to address the health needs uncovered. Lastly, there is evidence to illustrate that the results and findings from the HAP process can be used to leverage additional funding, grants, and community resource allocation (Egger & De Scisciolo, 2017; The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2016).
3. Experience reduced turnover and less maintenance costs – Reduced turnover and less maintenance costs can come through the result of a healthier and engaged resident population (The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2016). This is particularly true in senior buildings where healthier seniors are more able to take care of their homes and age-in-place.

Performing a HAP takes time and commitment. The benefits listed result from working with, listening too, and building trust with cross-sector partners and community members – a component as important as the strategies selected.



Conclusion

Prioritizing health through the design, construction, and operations of affordable housing development remains an emerging method for addressing health needs of low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Despite its novelty, the evidence points to positive outcomes both through the process of the Health Action Plan and the resultant strategies selected for implementation. Residents living in an affordable housing development after a HAP is performed will experience a building that is designed,

operated and maintained with their health as a focus. The HAP can lead to strengthened relationships and partnerships and new organizational opportunities for the affordable housing developer. The Health Action Plan truly goes beyond adopting a few generic healthy building strategies by providing space for residents to share their health concerns, and collaboratively designing and programming the property in response.

Works Cited

- Anon., 2016. Community Participation in Health Impact Assessment: A National Evaluation. [Online] Available at: https://humanimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Executive-summary_Community-Participation-in-HIA.pdf
- Bourcier E, C. D. C. D. A., 2015. An Evaluation of Health Impact Assessments in the United States, 2011 - 2014. Preventing Chronic Disease Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy, Volume 12.
- Bourcier, E., Charbonneau, D., Cahill, C. & Dannenberg, A., 2015. An Evaluation of Health Impact Assessments in the United States, 2011 - 2014. Preventing Chronic Disease, Volume 12.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018. Social Determinants of Health: Know What Affects Health. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/index.htm> [Accessed April 2020].
- De Scisciolo, S., Egger, K. & Ayala, M., 2018. Embedding Health in Affordable Housing Development: Results of the Health Action Plan Pilot Project. Cityscape, 20(2).
- Egger, K. & De Scisciolo, S., 2017. Health Action Plan Pilot Program Process Evaluation, s.l.: Enterprise Community Partners.
- Enterprise Community Partners, 2019. Survey: When Housing Costs Undermine Health and Peace of Mind. [Online] Available at: <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/blog/health-survey-renters>
- Enterprise Community Partners, 2020. Enterprise Green Communities Criteria, s.l.: s.n.
- Health Impact Project, 2016. Health Impact Assessment and Housing: Opportunities for the public health sector. [Online] Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2016/03/guidance_for_the_public_health_sector.pdf
- Klepeis, N. et al., 2001. The National human Activity Pattern Survey (NHAPS): a resource for assessing exposure to environmental pollutants. Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology, Volume 11, pp. 231-252.
- Maqbool, N., Viveiros, J. & Auit, M., 2015. The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Health: A Research Summary. Insights for Housing Policy Research.
- National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019. The Problem. [Online] Available at: <https://nlihc.org/explore-issues/why-we-care/problem> [Accessed 16 April 2020].
- Payton Scally, C., Waxman, E., Gourevitch, R. & Adeeyo, S., 2017. Emerging Strategies for Integrating Health and Housing: Innovations to Sustain, Expand, and Replicate, s.l.: Urban Institute.
- Szczepanski, C., 2017. Nine Critical Steps to Authentic Community Engagement, s.l.: Housing Matters.
- Taylor, L., 2018. Housing and Health: An Overview of the Literature. Health Affairs.
- The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2016. Guidance for Housing Professionals: Health impact assessment in housing. [Online] Available at: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/03/guidance-for-housing-professionals>
- The PEW Charitable Trusts, 2019. Do Health Impact Assessments Promote Healthier Decision-Making? Findings from a national study of the perspective of HIA stakeholders, s.l.: s.n.
- World Health Organization, n.d. The determinants of health. [Online] Available at: https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/ [Accessed April 2020].





[enterprisecommunity.org](https://www.enterprisecommunity.org)

© 2020 Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.