

The Housing Vaccine: Why a Stable, Decent Affordable Home Keeps Kids and Families Healthy

**Brief from Dr. Megan Sandel's Visit to Columbus
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With quality, affordable housing in short supply, low-wage earners and their children are forced to live in inadequate housing where they can experience health problems, struggle academically, and become mired in economic distress. On any given night in America, 610,000 people are sleeping on the streets and 11 million households are paying half of their income on rent. A worker in Columbus would have to earn **\$32,440 annually– or double their income at minimum wage – to afford Columbus' market rate of \$811 for a two-bedroom apartment.**



Housing should be the first in a series of vaccines

“Affordable housing serves as the first vaccine in a series to ensuring healthy people and communities. You need good education, public safety, and decent jobs as well, but if you don’t start with housing first, none of those interventions will work well.”

Personal Anecdote of Dr. Sandel's Patient, David

“I had a two-year-old little boy, David, who I was taking care of, and though he was two he was actually the size of an average one-year old, and I was tearing my hair out to get him to grow. We tried medicines to stimulate his appetite, nutritional supplements like Pediasure, ran all these blood tests to see if there was a metabolic problem, and he just wouldn't grow. And then something changed - he and his mom got their own affordable apartment after sleeping in various family member's living rooms for the past year. And it all changed - he not only started walking, he was running, he was talking in little sentences. His body and brain finally grew and he went from flat-lining to finally catching up to where he was supposed to be.”

Being behind on rent strongly associated with:

- High risk of child food insecurity
- Children and mothers in fair or poor health
- Children at risk for developmental delay
- Mothers experiencing depressive symptoms

“Affordable housing serves as the foundation for success in building healthy communities. It keeps kids in school and parents working, and helps neighbors know each other to protect neighborhoods.”

A study conducted in Minnesota found that first grade through sixth grade students who had moved three or more times scored on average 20 points lower on reading assessments than students who had not moved.

Stocking the housing vaccine in the pharmacy

“Columbus has not only started to recognize housing as a vaccine, but it is starting to stock the vaccine such as through partnerships like Nationwide Children's Hospital has with community development agencies and City government.”

Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families focuses on the revitalization of three zip codes around the anchor institution, Nationwide Children's Hospital. Community Development for All People, Homeport, and Habitat for Humanity Mid-Ohio have been important housing development partners.

Why must we tackle the housing insecurity crisis now?

There is no time to waste. Rents are increasing. Wages are stagnating. The Community Shelter Board reports that in the last three years, the number of homeless families has skyrocketed by 79 percent. Without affordable housing, the health of children and families diminish, health care costs increase, and our workforce suffers.

Improve Child Health and Decrease Infant Mortality

- Children who experience pre-natal and post-natal homelessness have a 99% increased risk of poor health outcomes
- Children who move more than two times in a year have as great of social and health problems as those who experience homelessness

Decrease Health Care Costs

- Chronically homelessness individuals housed in coordination with health care have only a 2% rate of return to homelessness
- Providing housing, in coordination with healthcare, for a chronically homeless and/or ill individual is far cheaper than continuous, costly interventions through emergency room visits

Create a Stronger Workforce

- Businesses benefit from having stable, healthy employees. More affordable housing provides companies with a competitive recruitment advantage over cities with higher cost and/or poor quality housing

How to cut the affordable housing gap in half by 2025:

1. Awareness and Advocacy – No community – urban, suburban, or rural – is immune. In Columbus, 63% of extremely low-income families are housing insecure, spending more than half of their income on housing. Their struggles are personal and often hidden from view. The Affordable Housing Alliance wants to give those suffering with housing insecurity a voice.

2. Partnerships – We can all help to end this crisis. Together the Affordable Housing Alliance, Central Ohio businesses, nonprofits, advocates, and policymakers can invest in quality affordable homes and support families in need. These partnerships can work towards ensuring the most economically vulnerable and housing insecure families benefit from affordable housing investment, investing in workforce housing for people with low-wage jobs, and addressing the housing needs of the growing population of seniors.

3. Policy – Central Ohio has a shortfall of 54,000 decent, affordable and accessible apartments. But the deficit can be cut in half within a decade by adding 2,700 units a year. By increasing local investment in affordable, quality and accessible homes, individuals and families have the opportunity and foundation to build healthy lifestyles, better jobs, vibrant neighborhoods, and economic prosperity.

All families need decent homes they can afford. We can and must expand the supply of affordable housing in Central Ohio and promote economic opportunity for all people.

