How Housing and Food Insecurity Impact the Health of Children and Youth:

What should we do about it?

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Outline

• Housing, Food Insecurity and Health
  – Are housing and food insecurity problems in Canada?
  – What are their Health impacts?
  – What specific strategies can we use to mitigate the impact?

• What broader roles can we play as health care professionals and institutions caring for children and youth?
Housing

12.7% Households in Canada in Housing Need

National Pediatric Housing Survey

- 52.5% in housing need
  - Lone parents
  - Immigrants/Refugees
  - Households with Disabilities
  - First Nations families
Health Impact of Housing

**Physical Quality**
- Air quality significantly influences health
- Indoor allergens associated with development of asthma and concentrations of nitrogen dioxide

**Crowding**
- Overcrowding leads to increased vulnerability to communicable diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis, gastroenteritis, and upper respiratory tract infections.

**Stability**
- Long-term stable housing contributes to positive child development, including a child’s sense of safety and helps to community and social development.

**Place**
- There is an association between neighbourhood safety, location and conditions and health outcomes for children and youth.
- Socio-economic status, housing density, green space and access to fresh food sources all impact child and youth health, development and socialization.

**Dability**
- Families that spend more than 30% of their household income on shelter costs are more likely to fail a grade, stay out of school, or have emotional problems.
- Affordable housing is associated with negative health outcomes, including chronic illness and injuries.

Adapted from: Canadian Child and Youth Health and Housing Network www.housingandchildhealth.ca
Housing and the Health Care System

• Poor housing has significant direct and indirect impacts on the health care system
  – Increased hospital admissions
  – Lack of access to primary health care providers
  – Decreased access to subspecialists

• Direct Health Care Costs of Housing Need
  – Annual UK estimates of £600 million
Food Insecurity

• The “inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways or the uncertainty that you will be able to…”

• 13% Canadian households in 2012
  – 1.15 million children
  – Majority working families
  – 70% of those on social assistance

• Factors:
  – Accessibility, geography, cost, changes in food procurement
Household food insecurity by province & territory

Ontario, Quebec, Alberta & British Columbia accounted for the largest share of food insecure households in Canada: 84% of the food insecure population.

Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2012.
Food Insecurity and Health

- *Ever being hungry and multiple episodes of hunger were associated with poorer general health*
  - 20.7% vs 9.3% if food secure

- *Hunger or severe food insecurity linked*
  - Nutritional inadequacy
    - Malnutrition and obesity
  - Chronic Diseases
    - Asthma
    - Heart disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, anemia, dental decay
  - School success, cognitive development, psychosocial development
  - Poor birth outcomes
What can be done?
Individual patients and families

• Screen for Housing and Food Insecurity
Screen for Housing Need

Screening Questions

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate where you are living now?
2. What would you like to make better about where you are living?

H.O.M.E. Associated Questions

H (Harm)

O (Occupancy)

M (Moves)

E (Enough)
What can be done?

Individual patients and families

- Screen for Housing and Food Insecurity
- Inform patients about how their housing and food situations impact their health
  - Give out fact sheets/resources
  - Work together to develop strategies to mitigate these impacts
- Refer to resources within the community
  - Know the resources
  - Work with community partners to develop referral tool or resource inventory
What can be done?
Community and Population level

• Monitor extent and impact of issue at population level

• Ensure Policy Makers are aware of health impacts
  – *Pool expertise and resources*
  – *Collaborate with other sectors*
    • Health, Education, Social Services, Legal…
  – *Present information in ways that are relevant and understood*
• Canada only G8 country without a National housing strategy
  – Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  – UN Convention on Rights of the Child

• **Housing and Child Health Action Statement**
  – Policy makers should be aware that housing is linked to health

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**Hinks-Dellcrest Centre**
**Paediatric Chairs of Canada**
What can we do?

- Individual Clinicians
  - Understand the health impacts of housing and food insecurity
  - Know the problems in your community
  - Implement routine screening questions
  - Know about and refer to appropriate resources in your community
  - Advocate at community and policy levels
    - Vending machines in schools, community centers etc
    - Access to healthy and affordable food programs
What can we do? Institutions

• Acknowledge the role that housing and food insecurity plays on:
  – All patients that we care for
  – How housing and food insecurity impact people’s ability to access and follow through on our services and care
  – Determine what food and housing insecurity are actually costing us financially
  – Create and implement innovative ways to mitigate them
    • Good food box programs within our walls
    • Pro Bono Law partnerships
    • Triage resources to ensure the most vulnerable are being seen
  – Support research and program evaluation that will help program and policy development
Take Home Messages

– *Housing and Food Insecurity Issues are prevalent amongst children and youth that access our care*

– *There are short and long-term physical, psychological and social health consequences*

– *Time for us to join the conversation, create solutions within our walls and advocate for changes in policy*
  
  • Lots of room for leadership in collaboration across sectors
  • Work to be done locally, regionally and nationally
Questions/Comments?