

# Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Communities:

A Summary of the Symposium for Public Health, Health Care and  
Community Development Professionals



Alexa Walker, Vickie Miene, and Tracy Hightshoe



Institute of  
Public Health  
Research and Policy



CITY OF IOWA CITY  
UNESCO CITY OF LITERATURE

**INVEST HEALTH**  
*Strategies for Healthier Cities*

This symposium was sponsored by the Iowa Institute of Public Health Research and Policy and the City of Iowa City through a grant from the INVEST Health Initiative. The event was hosted by the Levitt Center for University Advancement.

# Introduction

Health outcomes are declining, and health costs are rising in the United States which is forcing health providers, patients and advocates to find opportunities to influence health outside of the clinic or hospital walls. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease. Nutrition, activity and managing chronic conditions are largely part of a healthy lifestyle. In addition, environment including where we live, work and play influences healthy behaviors. *Healthy housing* is a home where the physical, mental and socioeconomic environment supports household members in making healthy choices, achieving education and economic success and engaging in robust social and cultural networks.<sup>1</sup>

In order to effectively improve the health of individuals we must move toward treating the social determinants of health. By providing broad, upstream changes we have the opportunity to improve the health of the population. This symposium introduces a variety of approaches to address social determinants by attending to the built environment. The intersection of health and housing has been the focus of a new initiative in Iowa City to improve the health of underserved neighborhoods. INVEST Health forms collaborative partnerships to address health challenges in our community. Through these partnerships, we provide leadership for the intersection of health and other sectors including housing, education, employment, transportation, economics, and cultural differences. We inspire and drive conversations between the variety of stakeholders by breaking down the language barrier between disparate sectors through education and face to face learning. This event was a catalyst for cross-sector collaboration for housing and health programs in Iowa City, furthering the work of the INVEST Health initiative.

The Iowa City INVEST Health initiative, in partnership with the Iowa Institute of Public Health Research and Policy, at the University of Iowa, College of Public Health and the City of Iowa City sponsored the *Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Communities Symposium* on June 22, 2018. The event, designed to bring disparate groups together, was attended by 98 individuals ranging in profession from neighborhood residents to journalists, physicians, housing inspectors, teachers, program managers, architects, researchers, government employees, insurers, bankers, public health workers and policy advisors. Distinguished keynote speakers Megan Sandel, Associate Director of the GROW clinic at Boston Medical Center, and Angela Mingo, Director of Community Relations at Children's Nationwide Hospital in Columbus Ohio provided their perspective and experience's regarding the intersection of housing and health. A panel of local experts including architect Bruce Hamous, CEO of Sunshine Sustainable Design, policy advisor Mary Nelle Trefz, Health Policy Associate at the Child and Family Policy Center, and social worker Erin Sullivan, Mental Health Recovery Manager at Shelter House provided their thoughts and experience regarding health in Iowa City. They specifically discussed the importance of collaboration and how valuable working with others is to achieving goals that impact healthier communities. In addition, opening remarks for the daylong event were provided by well-known guests Geoff Fruin, the City of Iowa City, City Manager and Dr. Raphael Hirsch,

Chair of the Department of Pediatrics and Physician-in-Chief, University of Iowa, Stead Family Children's Hospital.

Our intention for this event was to provide inspiration and education about the intersection of health and housing and to advance concepts to further shape our local pipeline of projects. Another equally important goal of the event was to continue to build collaborations through networking and introducing like-minded attendees to others in their city that they had not met before. Participants provided concrete ideas for addition to the pipeline of health improvement projects in our city.

Additional information, including speaker biographies, presentations, and participant E-book is available on the symposium website at <https://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/healthy-neighborhoods-healthy-communities>

*Vickie Miene*

Vickie Miene, Interim Director  
Iowa Institute of Public Health Research and Policy  
University of Iowa, College of Public Health

*Tracy Hightshoe*

Tracy Hightshoe  
Neighborhood Development Services Director  
City of Iowa City

# Opening Remarks

**Vickie Miene**, Welcome, and Opening Remarks

*Interim Director of the Iowa Institute of Public Health and Research and Policy*

Ms. Miene provided an overview of the INVEST Health initiative describing that it is a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Reinvestment Fund. Small grants were awarded to 50 mid-sized cities from over 180 applicants across the nation. The program had several goals, but one very important goal was to provide cities with strategies and ideas to help sectors that are generally siloed work together in collaborative ways. The conditions of the funding were that Health, Housing and Government affiliated leaders were required to be represented and that after 18 months of planful collaboration, a pipeline of projects would be developed.

The vision of the Iowa City INVEST Health initiative is that “*All Iowa City residents deserve healthy, safe and vibrant neighborhoods that positively contribute to their physical and mental health*”. Using a collective impact model where collaboration is led by a backbone convening agency and all partners bring their collective strengths and agree on metrics, a pipeline of various projects was developed. These projects included the Free Wheels program, 7-Steps to a Healthy Home Campaign, Neighborhood Connections program, the Healthy Homes Initiative for Asthma, Arthur Street Healthy Life Center, Healthy Homes Training for City Housing Inspectors, and the Birth to age 5 Child Care Incubator program

Ms. Miene discussed that now is the time to expand the network and to consider additional health improvement opportunities in all of our neighborhoods, paying attention to the results of the survey collected from three underserved neighborhoods by the INVEST Health team and keeping the focus on improving health for the entire population.

## **Geoff Fruin, Welcome and Opening Remarks**

*City of Iowa City, City Manger*

Mr. Fruin shared evidence of the poverty rate increase, median rent increase, and prevalence of asthma and mental health conditions in Iowa City. He emphasized the importance of this symposium and the need to collaborate on housing and health to improve these numbers. He stressed “we all use the same words when discussing community health, but in each sector, there are different definitions.” He summarizes that it is important to start by understanding the definition that each sector attaches to key words and it is important to take the time to understand each partner’s goals. He stresses that there is overlap, and each of us has a part to play, we just have to figure out how to best use resources and work together through collaboration to make it work.

## **Raphael Hirsh, Welcome and Opening Remarks**

*MD, Physician-in-Chief, University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital*

Dr. Hirsh explained that health is more than physicians, nurses and clinic spaces. He described that medicine is becoming more aware that the air we breathe, the water we drink, the housing that we live in and whether we are employed, safe and have friends all influence our health. The field of medicine plays a crucial part, but not all can be remedied in a doctor's office. Dr. Hirsch described that Physicians in the future will transform how medicine is delivered. Dr. Hirsh shared new research on gene therapy technologies that may be transformative in the future, but will only provide improved health for a small portion of the population. He asks, what are we doing today to improve the health of the population? Dr. Hirsh shared that a practice change to prescribe behavior change for his patients to improve health is an important step for physicians in the future. He points out that it is important as a clinician to understand the interaction of our genes and our environment.

## **First Keynote**

### **Megan Sandel, MD, MPH**

*Associate Director of the GROW clinic at Boston Medical Center, Principal Investigator with Children's HealthWatch, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Boston University Schools of Medicine and Public Health*

#### **Population Health**

Sandel begins by addressing the definition of population health, acknowledging the different definitions held by the multiple sectors involved. As a physician, she defines population health as the patients being seen in her clinic, versus public health which consists of everyone in the community.

#### **Dimensions of Homes That Affect Health**

In her keynote, Sandel presented evidence on the multiple dimensions of homes that affect health. These include quality, stability, affordability and location. She argues that a stable, decent, affordable home in a good neighborhood can act as a vaccine. Access to this level of housing can act as prevention to various health outcomes.

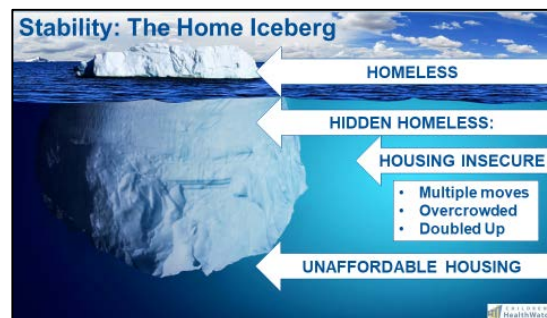
According to research done by the MacArthur Foundation with Children's HealthWatch, poor housing quality is found to be the strongest predictor of emotional and behavioral problems in low-income children. The association between poor housing quality and children's wellbeing operated through parental stress, parenting

## **Mission and Margin Related: Investing in Housing for Health**



behaviors and parental mental health leading to a multigenerational effect for poorer health and wellbeing outcomes.

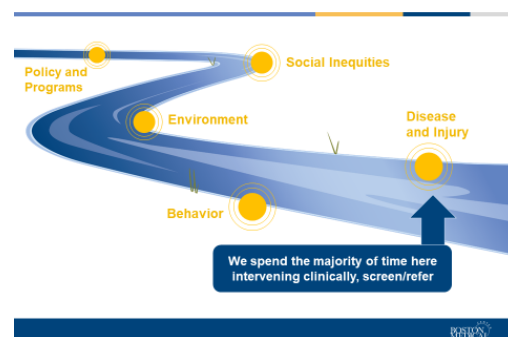
Sandel presents “The Home Iceberg” as a visual for housing stability. The visual component of housing instability is homelessness, but like an iceberg there is much hidden underneath the water’s surface. The hidden homeless, those who are “couch surfing,” those in cramped housing conditions and those who are severely house cost-burdened, are harder to see, but they are just as important to address. Evidence has shown that all three unstable housing conditions lead to increased rates of poor health outcomes when compared to those in stable housing.



Sandel presented evidence on the link between poverty and zip codes. In New Orleans for example, life expectancy can vary by 19 years based on the neighborhood you live in. Neighborhoods with access to health care, fresh food, green space to be outside and a variety of cultural experiences have the longest life expectancy. When viewing the health of a population, the zip code may be more important than the genetic code. This is an important idea to consider when providing healthcare because the environment where one lives can cause biological differences.

### BMC Health System Housing Initiative

The Boston Medical Center is moving forward as a result of the evidence compiled in their research on the dimensions of homes that affect health. Sandel presents a roadmap, that begins with topics of policy, social inequities and environment, but at the end of the road is disease and injury where most resources are expended. The beginning of the map, according to Sandel, presents opportunities to intervene before clinical interventions, and provides the opportunity to impact the entire population through creating equity and creating policies that address the root causes of health outcomes by intervening in the environment.



The hospital has identified five zip codes that have the highest percentage of costs for the hospital. They have committed eight investments using a multiple approach housing strategy to improve the health of the community and patients. The goal is to invest in a range of targeted housing opportunities in Boston’s most underserved neighborhoods in addition to maximizing collaboration among housing stakeholders. Funds have been devoted to evaluation and oversight of the program to determine the best approach in this multiple approach housing strategy. Through this continuing

*“I thought the event was awesome. The speakers were very inspirational – the projects they’ve undertaken and found success with suggest an awesome future for collaboration between cities and health systems in improving housing and thereby improving health”.*

- Audience Participant

process, Sandel has learned the importance of cross-sector collaboration in order to effectively benefit the health of the community.

In response to the presentation by Sandel and her experience with investors, the audience posed the question of how we bring the banking industry into the conversation surrounding affordable housing? Sandel discusses that banks do have community engagement and re-investment obligations. Often, Sandel finds that banks are working with local hospitals and she hopes that there will be more innovation in the house-building industry. Currently, there are often many small, one bedroom units that are good for both the young and aging populations, however, Sandel argues that there is a shortage of 3-4 bedroom units that can house families.

The audience further inquired about cost, “which is most effective: having housing designated ‘low-rent’ or providing housing subsidies”? Sandel argues that one needs to consider factors specific to each neighborhood but it is advisable to allow choices, both to leave a neighborhood or to expand a neighborhood – including economic expansion as well as housing expansion.

### **Homes as a Route to Health Equity**

Sandel closed with the comparison of equality and equity. Equality is providing the same resources to all, whereas equity is providing what is needed to be healthy for each individual. When it comes to health and housing, “we have to begin to treat unequally, to address the inequity in these populations”.

## **Second Keynote**

### **Angela Mingo, MA**

*Director of Community Relations at Columbus Children’s Nationwide Hospital*

### **Population Health**

Mingo begins by discussing the journey to best outcomes, which includes going outside of the walls of the hospital. She continues by stating how population health is more than just health care. Population health includes high quality clinical services, connecting clinical care with social supports, and addressing social determinants of health.

## **Healthcare as a Community Development Strategy**

## Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families

Mingo shares the Nationwide Children’s program to improve population health through communities. Nationwide Children’s Hospital acknowledges that safe, quality and affordable housing is a critical contributor to growing up healthy. Their program starts with affordable housing but encompasses education, safe and accessible neighborhoods, workforce development, and health and wellness.

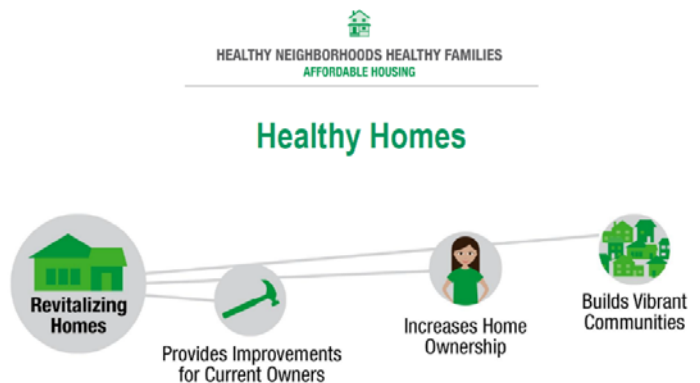


### Affordable Housing

To provide affordable healthy homes, Nationwide Children’s in partnership with Community Development for All People is taking two approaches. They are providing a home-repair grant program as well as purchasing vacant properties to rehabilitate older outdated homes into healthy homes. The goal is to create a sustainable, mixed-income community where everyone across the income spectrum can benefit.

The home repair grant program provides home improvements for current homeowners to support a healthier home. The Healthy Homes rebuilding program revitalizes the neighborhood and provides increased home ownership. This program has decreased the vacancy rate in the target community. With the great progress made in

this neighborhood, Children’s Nationwide has begun a new Healthy Homes Rental program to provide healthy, affordable rental options in the community. This new rental program provides affordable rental options for families needing three to four-bedroom units – a housing option that was very much lacking in the neighborhood.



In response to Mingo’s presentation of affordable housing, the audience asked if there are residency requirements to rent or own the homes within the housing project? Mingo responded, as a homeowner, the home must be your principal residence, you can’t rent it out. There is also the requirement that the owner must live in the home for five years before it can be sold, and that a percentage of any profit made from the home sale must be given back to the program. The same concept applies for rental units, if you rent a space you must actually live in the space as a tenant.

The audience wondered what plans are in place to assist low-income homeowners in keeping up the property including home repairs and maintenance? Mingo indicated that when buying a home, the owners must go through homebuyer training. However, following this the maintenance is in the hands of the homeowner. Before selling, the



program works with the banks to assure the buyers have some understanding of the financial impact to keep up a home and to assure they have a plan outlined to meet those goals. For those who are unable to afford the home ownership program, the low-rent properties are an option.

### ***Workforce Development***

Nationwide Children’s in partnership with the City of Columbus, Community Development for All People, and other community partners have built an affordable housing unit with on-site workforce development training called the *Residences at Career Gateway*. This program provides leadership training, job seeking assistance and programming to help residents obtain and sustain employment. Throughout all of the Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families programs, over 800 residents are employed by Children’s Nationwide. This program has helped children’s nationwide fill needed positions and saves money on staff turnover.

### ***Education***

The Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families program offers a neighborhood engagement program that provides education on civic engagement and leadership skills. After training is completed, the individuals develop a community engagement program to implement in their neighborhood. In addition, the program participates in Care Connection School-Based Health Care. This program provides health education and clinical services in a school based site.

## **Panel Discussion**

The panel selected for this symposium consisted of four carefully selected individuals each from a different field, providing unique perspectives on the interaction of housing and health. The panel included Bruce Hamous, CEO of Sunshine Sustainable Design, Mary Nelle Trefz, Health Policy Associate at the Child and Family Policy Center and Erin Sullivan Mental Health Recovery Manager at Shelter House. Kelley Pennington, Director, Health Care Management, Amerigroup Iowa, Inc was unfortunately unable to join us due to inclement weather conditions.

The topic of the panel was collaboration and we asked members of the panel to share their thoughts and experiences with collaboration. The panelists talked about how important collaboration has been to each of them in reaching program goals and they shared lessons learned from various collaborations. The panelist spoke about how collaboration takes time and organization but the end result, is a richer, more dynamic outcome that has the perspectives of many. “The benefit of collaboration is the rich partnership that forms and the education between collaborators because you start



## **Iowa City Specific Strategies to Improve Health**

to see how each of the individual parts work toward a common goal... it becomes clear how each member of the collaboration can contribute”.

## Small Group Discussion

Participants were assigned to groups to facilitate table discussions and to debrief on ideas that were raised during the symposium. Each group was provided a worksheet to help guide their discussion. The conversations centered on ideas pertaining to community health and the next steps for further development of community health in Iowa City. Discussion groups were assigned purposefully to promote cross sector introductions and collaborations.

*“I thought this symposium was great and very educational! Would love to have another symposium soon”*

- Audience participant

## Community Health

In small group discussions, participants shared how where they live, impacts their health. Each person shared a different perspective and gave real life examples of how location can change the health of the community. From here, participants were asked to define community health and there were very similar trends through all group discussions. Community health was defined to include social, physical, and mental wellbeing of residents; social support; walkability; accessibility to green space, transportation, and healthy food sources; accessibility to schools and faith-based organizations; opportunities for everyone; and the feeling of safety.



*“The speakers were great – Conversations between sectors were also beneficial”*

- Audience participant

## Future Pipeline Projects

Each group was asked to come up with an intervention that could be implemented in Iowa City to promote community health. The following are the proposed ideas:

- Increased green space in neighborhoods with increased parks and recreation activities
- Fostering neighborhood connection and self-sufficiency through physical and virtual community connection space
- Walking and bicycle friendly neighborhoods to reduce the “car-culture” mentality of Iowa City
- Integration of University of Iowa with the City of Iowa City to promote resource sharing and collaboration on housing and health projects



- Neighborhood block party to increase community social support networks and improve health
- Planting more fruit trees throughout the city to provide healthy food and community interaction
- Radon inspection and education in homes combined with housing rehab to provide healthier homes



- Start community networking groups for low level chores and maintenance in the neighborhood that can be accessed by homeowners.
- Provide leadership training at a neighborhood level resulting in more projects on walkability, community communication, and providing education

## Next Steps for INVEST Health - Iowa City

Following this symposium we are tasked with determining the next steps for Iowa City’s housing and health needs. This symposium provided a wealth of knowledge and ideas through our distinguished speakers, small group discussions, and cross-sector networking. The theme from all involved

included that health can no longer be thought of within clinic walls. Each speaker noted that the health system as we know it - hospitals, clinics and providers, are only a small part of what contributes to individual and population health. Health systems that work with other sectors such as housing, education, and transportation will



have a return on investment that can include lower health costs per capita and a healthier population. The other theme that resounded during the symposium was collaboration. This work cannot be done in a silo and those that collaborate find creative paths to accomplish goals. Collaboration, although it takes time to learn each other’s goals and language, reaps rewards.

The ideas captured during this symposium will be re-visited in future INVEST Health meetings. Funding opportunities will be researched to support the

highest priority ideas and updates will be made available on the INVEST Health website. The City will launch a comprehensive review of all its housing programs to address where the City can best provide resources to improve housing and health outcomes and contribute to a healthier, more sustainable environment for all our residents. To continue this conversation, another symposium will be explored to continue our goals to be a healthy and vibrant community for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Healthy Communities of Opportunity: An Equity Blueprint to address America's Housing challenges. Policy Link and the Kresge Foundation, 2016

## **Acknowledgements**

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