New partnership assessing the connection of housing and better health

There’s one remedy a physician is not able to prescribe that many have long thought could relieve or resolve many health situations for those who are homeless – housing.

Stable housing and stable health are interconnected, and together assist someone toward greater self-sufficiency. But to what degree? And what is the real-life experience of one on the other?

Thanks to a grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Health Innovation Fund, we are collaborating with community partner Oakland Integrated Health Network (OIHN) to gather that kind of data and tracking outcomes.

OIHN is a nonprofit Federally Qualified Health Center providing primary, behavioral health and dental care. “We see all patients regardless of insurance status or ability to pay,” said Danielle Redilla, OIHN’s Homeless Outreach coordinator. She adds that there is a sliding rate scale, based on family size and income.

Vivian Jones and Megan Pieczynski, who had previously been interns in our Housing Resource Center, are now our part-time Health and Housing coaches working out of five of OIHN’s care centers scattered across Oakland County. Vivian is studying for her master’s degree in social work at Wayne State University and Megan just graduated from Oakland University with a degree in social work.

Part of the routine screening services at the OIHN sites include questions regarding housing. Those who respond that they are homeless or at risk of homelessness are referred to Vivian and Megan. “It helps to have someone trained in housing assistance,” said Danielle. “Last year we saw more than 1,000 patients who self-reported homelessness” with many individuals on the streets and literally homeless, as well as those in various stages of a housing crisis.

As health and housing coaches, Vivian and Megan can immediately start the screening process to determine if someone qualifies for available housing programs and assist with the securing of housing. Likewise, Vivian and Megan can refer those in housing programs who need medical services to OIHN.

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The expected outcome is that when people move into stable housing, their need for emergency health services decreases as they are able to be more proactive about their health.

Being available at the OIHN sites makes it possible for potential clients to work through medical and housing issues at the same place on the same day. “Stable housing is huge for a lot of them,” Danielle says. “If they have an open wound, they may not have a safe and clean place to keep it clean” if they are not in housing. Those who have the flu or an illness also have a difficult time getting well living on the streets.

Once clients are housed, Vivian and Megan begin periodic assessments measuring levels of anxiety, depression, and positive social interactions while Danielle handles health follow-up assessments.

The expected outcome is that when people move into stable housing, their need for emergency health services decreases as they are able to be more proactive about their health. For instance, having access to a refrigerator and stove means they can eat healthier, fresh food rather than fast food, shelter meals or whatever packaged food they can find. Unhealthy eating is a known contributor to a number of poor health conditions. Ultimately, a longer-term goal is to allow people to stabilize variables in their lives that affect their health care. The desired result would be not only a decrease in health care costs, but better health for the people we serve.

2016 CHN Annual Report

The 2016 Annual Report is now available. Marc Craig, our president, has a letter looking at the progress we have made, and challenges we have faced, as we celebrated our first 15 years of strengthening communities. Notable achievements, our financial information, our Community Impact statement, a list of Supporters and Funders, our office locations, as well as photos, are included.

The annual report is available on our website, www.communityhousingnetwork.org, under the ABOUT US dropdown. If you would like a printed copy, please contact Marylynn G. Hewitt at mghewitt@chninc.net and include your name and full mailing address.
Pop-up produce market brings fruits and vegetables close to home

As soon as Rachel Willis saw the collard greens, she smiled and reached for a bunch, knowing she’d be able to serve her family of six a vegetable at dinner. Plus, she knew it would be one they all liked.

She picked up the greens, along with a few apples, bananas and grapes for snacks for her children, a bunch of celery, an onion and some green beans at the Sprout Fresh Food Store pop-up produce market at our Unity Park Rentals community building.

The Tuesday market is part of a pilot program providing residents in the supportive services homes in our Unity Park Rentals with a $10 weekly Sprout voucher. Residents can use the voucher to shop for their family near their homes at the pop-up market, which offers below-market pricing, or they can use their weekly voucher at the newly opened Sprout Fresh Food Store a few miles away.

The pilot program was created through a collaboration of community partners including PNC Bank, Oakland University, Micah 6 (a community development nonprofit in Pontiac) and Healthy Pontiac, We Can!

Many in the homes offering supportive services have experienced homelessness and have not had the ability to make healthy eating choices. Now in housing, the program provides families and individuals with healthy, and fresh, food options in an area without many similar opportunities.

“This program means a lot,” Rachel said. “We have been able to eat much better and it was just one of our baby steps” to healthy lifestyles. Her children, ages 9, 5, 2 and 1, have all gotten involved with age-appropriate kitchen tasks and now they talk about healthy living.

Rachel says she looks forward to being a long-time customer of the pop-up produce market and credits it with more just providing fresh food. She says that as a result, her family has become more involved in physical activity and have participated in family events at the nearby YMCA.

“For us, this has been the beginning of something that has been truly lifesaving.”

Jarrett Sanders, our community revitalization and development coordinator, came up with the idea for the pop-up market after a different organization tried something similar. While it was well received in Unity Park, it was underutilized elsewhere and was then discontinued.

The produce will be supplied year-round through the Sprout Fresh Food Store, one of the initiatives of Micah 6. Cole Yoakum, Micah 6 director, says their community gardens and greenhouse will supply fruits, vegetables and herbs in warmer months. The nonprofit has also provides community activities, formed a church and purchased the former Webster Elementary in Pontiac where long-term renovations are planned for spaces for offices and start-up endeavors. One of the large community gardens, the greenhouse and a small orchard are planted on the school’s large former playground.
Multiple studies have shown the decisive influence and interdependence hospital and medical costs. More because of lost productivity at work and school and increased for those living on the streets and in shelters. In addition to diminishing asthma, hypertension and other ailments, which are especially common who were able to find housing. The influence housing has had on the continued wellness of their clients the positive impact housing has on someone’s life, as well as their health. At the same time, health institutions have noted the positive influence housing has had on the continued wellness of their clients who were able to find housing.

People who have stable housing have fewer incidents of diabetes, asthma, hypertension and other ailments, which are especially common for those living on the streets and in shelters. In addition to diminishing a person’s quality of life, health issues end up costing communities more because of lost productivity at work and school and increased hospital and medical costs.

Multiple studies have shown the decisive influence and interdependence of successful housing and health and wellness. The Seattle Housing First program for homeless individuals with substance use problems resulted in an annual health cost savings of $42,964, and cost $13,440 per person per year for housing and services. Health services use continued to decline with additional time in the program. In Los Angeles, an analysis of supportive housing for the general homeless population found a net savings of $14,280 per resident annually.

In this past year we were able to receive a Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Health Innovation Fund grant to create the Health and Housing program. This grant funds our two part-time Health and Housing coaches in cooperation with our community partner Oakland Integrated Health Network. (See story, Page 1.)

Our strategic partnership is certain to provide benefits to those seeking medical services who are also homeless or at risk of homelessness. In one visit, people will be able to get needed medical attention and start the process to become housed or target solutions to remain housed.

Each issue will highlight a message from a member of our executive team.

Housing is good medicine. Through our 15 years providing safe, affordable and quality housing and housing resources for people in southeastern Michigan, we have seen

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU WANT!
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