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MANITOBA HOUSING RESIDENTS HAVE HIGHER LEVELS OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Report finds residents of Manitoba housing face challenges beyond socio-economic factors

A study on social housing by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) at the University of Manitoba has found that Manitobans living in social housing face increased levels of mental health issues, illness and teen pregnancy compared with those not living in subsidized social housing. In addition, women in social housing are less likely to engage in preventative health practices such as breast cancer screening.

On a more positive note, individuals in social housing are doing better on cervical cancer screening and childhood immunization rates compared to other low income Manitobans.

“For most of the health status measures, poverty—not social housing—was found to be the most important factor in explaining the level of mental and physical health challenges facing those living in social housing,” explains Mark Smith, lead author of the study.

“Still, a few outcomes were worse in social housing even after taking into account poverty,” cautions Smith.

The two-part study, Social Housing in Manitoba, looked at data on 31,000 Manitobans living in social housing complexes that are owned and managed by the Department of Housing and Community Development. Nearly half of the residents are under the age of 20 and about 65 per cent of residents over the age of 20 are women. About 30 per cent of all units are occupied by single parent families.
The premature mortality rate (death before the age of 75 years) was twice as high in social housing as compared to all other Manitobans. The rate of suicide was four times higher, and in some regions, Schizophrenia was as much as eight to 10 times higher in the Social Housing cohort. The latter finding is likely due to an increased need for social housing in this vulnerable population.

In terms of education, children in social housing had lower rates of being deemed ready for school (in kindergarten testing) and had lower rates of high school completion compared with residents living elsewhere.

The researchers make several recommendations based on the results of the study. These include: improve levels of breast cancer screening in women living in social housing; address high-school completion rates in lower socio-economic neighborhoods, identify factors contributing to higher rates of respiratory illness; and develop a more integrated approach to providing and delivering programs to Manitoba housing clients.

The full report, *Social Housing in Manitoba*, can be downloaded from the MCHP website at: umanitoba.ca/medicine/units/mchp

For more information, contact MCHP at: 204-789-3819 or email: reports@cpe.umanitoba.ca