We, as the Massachusetts health sector, recognize that the challenge of unaffordable and unstable housing has reached epidemic proportions. We are health care providers, hospitals, health centers, public health leaders, consumer advocates, and social service providers. We believe that quality, affordable housing for all is a foundation for healthy, equitable, and vibrant communities. We are committed to using our institutional resources to be part of the solution. Because we know the health sector alone cannot solve this problem, we ask others to join us. In particular, we call on Massachusetts policymakers to take concerted action to ensure that all residents can access quality, affordable housing as an essential resource for health.

Good health requires that all of us live in quality homes that we can afford. Overwhelming evidence shows that housing instability directly contributes to poor health outcomes. Conversely, a stable place to live supports the health of people across the life course, promotes health equity, and helps to create thriving communities.

The Massachusetts epidemic of housing instability demands action. In a recent report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Massachusetts was ranked the 3rd least affordable state in the nation. An estimated 20,000 people are experiencing homelessness on any given day in Massachusetts – individuals and families, young adults and seniors, people with a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. Our housing challenges touch all regions of the state; low-income households and people of color are hurt the most.

Many of our institutions are anchors within our communities. As such, we are at the forefront of a growing movement that recognizes the critical role health care plays in tackling the social determinants of health, including housing. We care about housing for the benefit of our patients, but also as major employers: not being able to afford a home impacts our ability to attract and sustain a talented workforce. Many of us are already screening and providing referrals for patients facing housing insecurity, connecting them with community services to help them find or maintain stable homes. Some of us are investing in housing directly. We are proud that our actions are making a difference in the lives of our patients and our communities, and we will strive for even greater impact in the years ahead. Working together across sectors, we can solve this problem.

Policy action from our elected and appointed leaders is crucial to meet this challenge. In particular, we believe that state action is urgently needed to advance these goals:

- **Increase resources** to produce and preserve more housing that is affordable to low and extremely low income families and individuals
- **Improve the quality of housing** to ensure all residents live in safe and healthy homes
- **Ensure protections for tenants** and low-income households facing eviction and displacement
- **Expand rental supports** for low-income households, and
- **Increase low-barrier supportive housing** with the services needed to help individuals and families with complex physical and behavioral health challenges.
Access to quality affordable housing has a profound impact on health outcomes. According to a recent review of the literature on housing and health published in the journal Health Affairs:

People who have experienced chronic homelessness face worse physical and mental health outcomes, increased mortality, and higher health care costs.

People who face housing instability (for example, moving frequently, falling behind on rent, or couch surfing) are more likely to experience poor health.

Low-income families with difficulty paying their rent, mortgage, or utility bills are less likely to have a usual source of medical care and more likely to postpone needed treatment. Renters that spend more than 50% of their income on rent and utilities are more likely to face difficulty purchasing food.

Poor quality housing with conditions such as water leaks, poor ventilation, dirty carpets, and pest infestation have been associated with poor health outcomes. Exposure to lead in the home irreversibly damages the brains and nervous systems of children.

Visit https://tinyurl.com/Healthy-AffordableHousing to sign on.

ENDORSEORS

Health Care
Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association
Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
Boston Medical Center
Cambridge Health Alliance
Community Care Cooperative (C3)
Association for Behavioral Healthcare
Beth Israel Lahey Health
UMass Memorial Health Care
Berkshire Health Systems
Boston Children’s Hospital

Public Health, Social Service, and Consumer Advocacy
Alliance for Community Health Integration
Massachusetts Public Health Association
Health Resources in Action
Enterprise Community Partners
Hebrew SeniorLife
AIDS Action/Fenway Health
Revitalize Community Development Corporation
Alliston Brighton Health Collaborative
Jane Doe Inc. (JDI), the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts
Main South Community Development Corporation
Blue Hills Community Health Alliance
MLPB
Way Finders, Inc.
Institute for Community Health

* This statement is adopted from “Principles for Healthy and Affordable Housing,” developed by the national Health Care Anchor Network and the Democracy Collaborative.

1 - Out of Reach 2019, National Low Income Housing Coalition
3 - Lauren A. Taylor, “Housing And Health: An Overview Of The Literature,” Health Affairs Health Policy Brief, June 7, 2018. DOI: 10.1377/hpb20180313.396577