

Stable, affordable homes don't just help patients, they save taxpayer dollars

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Where you live is a significant predictor of health, and unstable housing is associated with a range of health complications, including asthma, depression, and exposure to lead and other toxic elements.

Not only is unstable [housing](#) deepening these [health disparities](#) among vulnerable communities, it is draining dollars from the U.S. [health](#) care system. Five percent of hospital users are responsible for half of health care costs in the U.S., and most of these patients live below the poverty line and are housing insecure.

By investing in housing, hospitals can help build healthier communities and save money by stemming the tide of [emergency room visits](#) and costly health interventions, argues Dr. Megan Sandel, a Boston Medical Center (BMC) pediatrician and principal investigator at Children's Health Watch, in *JAMA* Viewpoint.

Sandel suggests hospitals create new partnerships with developers, investors, and community organizations to invest in [affordable housing](#) initiatives, using Baltimore's Bon Secours Health System and Nationwide Children's Hospital in Ohio as examples of health systems that are using hospital dollars to build affordable housing units and fund community improvement projects.

"When we think about 'return on investment' for projects like these, we have to go beyond portfolio profits or [health care costs](#) saved," says Sandel, who is also an associate director of the GROW clinic at Boston

Medical Center. "Most importantly, we are building healthy communities, where families can thrive financially and physically."

To make affordable housing programs even more successful, Sandel suggests combining them with wraparound services that include wellness initiatives, medical care, and social services. Research has shown hospital stays and emergency room visits declined when homeless individuals were offered stable housing and wraparound care. "We know this can work, now we need to determine the best ways for hospitals to invest in housing on a large scale," says Sandel.

Provided by Boston Medical Center

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