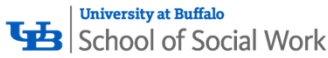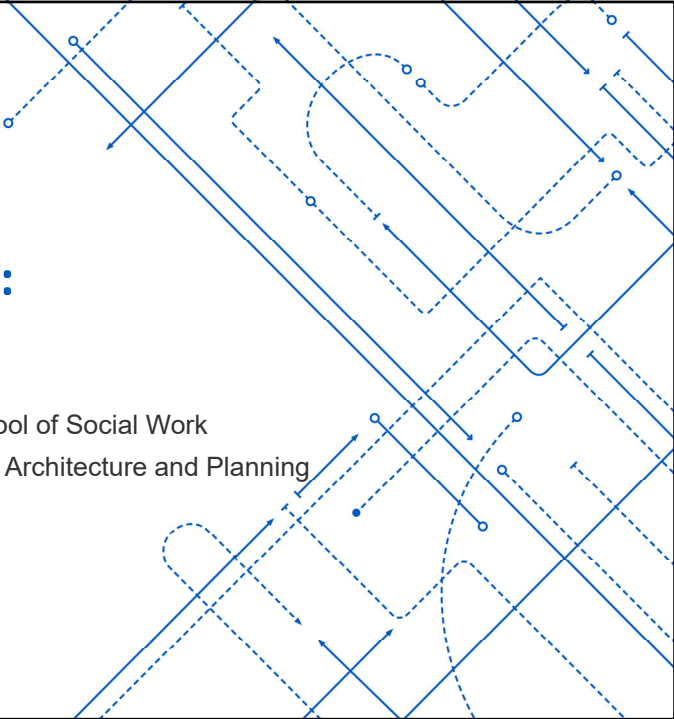# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOUSING SECURITY AND HEALTH:
IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

Dr. Elizabeth Bowen, University at Buffalo School of Social Work

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Pathways between housing security and health

1. Physical quality and condition

2. Residential stability

3. Housing affordability

4. Area context

5. Care and connection

(Swope and Hernández 2019; Taylor 2018; Holtan, Bowen, Maisel and Riva forthcoming)

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1. Physical condition and quality
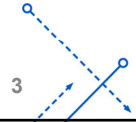
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2. Residential stability: Lessons from COVID-19 era housing policy

- Residential stability: foreclosure, frequent moves, houselessness, voluntary and forced migration and displacement
- Residential crowding
  - Accounts for some of the age disparities in low-income countries [4]
  - Drives excess mortality in Chilean municipalities [5]
- Incidence and mortality increase after eviction moratoriums are lifted in the U.S. [6]

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2. Residential stability: Lessons from COVID-19 era housing policy

*CDC Pandemic Protocol: Frequent Hand Washing, Cleaning Masks, Self-Quarantine, Shelter in Place, Social Distance
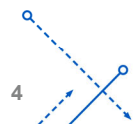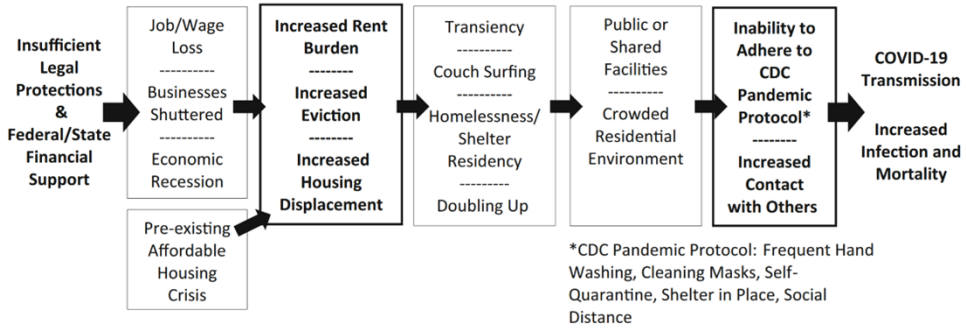
Benfer, E. A., Vlahov, D., Long, M. Y., Walker-Wells, E., Pottenger, J. L., Gonsalves, G., & Keene, D. A. (2021). Eviction, health inequity, and the spread of COVID-19: Housing policy as a primary pandemic mitigation strategy. *Journal of Urban Health*, *98*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-020-00502-1

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2. Residential stability: Climate change

Golovin, Alaska, November 2022
Source: Alaska Public Media, Josephine Daniels

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2. Residential stability: Fairbanks, Alaska Housing First

Item	Baseline	18 months
Drinking daily	51%	31%
Emergency room visits	60.9%	42.9%
Average cost to community per tenant of emergency services	$4,175	$1,749
Average health costs per tenant, per year	$25,763	$14,321

"My stress level done went down 'cause I know I got a place to come and be safe, be warm." – Tenant [7]

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3. Housing affordability

Percent of income spent on rent in the United States

48.10% — Under 30%
9.20% — 30 to 34.9%
42.70% — 35% +

Considered unaffordable
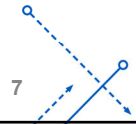
U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 1-Year Estimates
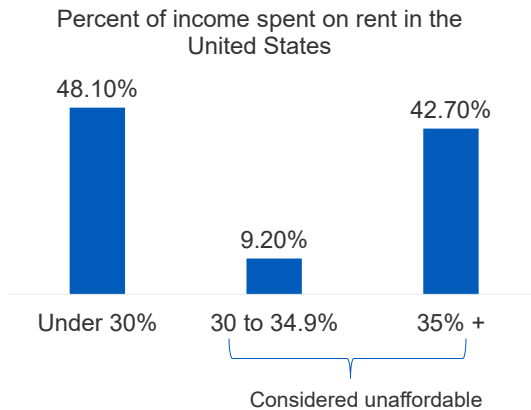
High rents and housing costs leave less money for other things that benefit health:
- Food
- Transportation
- Heating
- Health care
- Education
- Hobbies
- Taking care of others

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4. Neighborhood and area context

Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Medellin, Colombia

Anchorage, Alaska, USA

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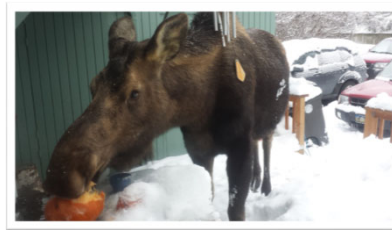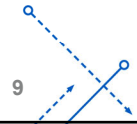
5. Care and connection in housing

- **Design**: Treatment of common areas in multifamily developments [8]

- **Policies**: Age-restricted housing developments not always great for caregiving relationships [9]

- **Programs**: Importance of case management in housing for people exiting homelessness [10]

Vencidad in Mexico City
Source: Bloomberg Photographer: Alejandro Cegarra

Image Credit: French2D / Neshamkin French Architects
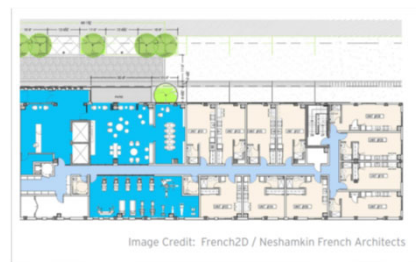
Microunit apartments, Boston
Source: Hannah Hoyt, More for Less?

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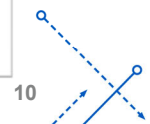
Historical roots of pathways between housing security and health

Map source:
https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/69965/map-of-the-white-earth-indian-reservation-the-minnesota-and-iowa-land-co
https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map/NY/Buffalo/areas#loc=12/42.898/-78.965

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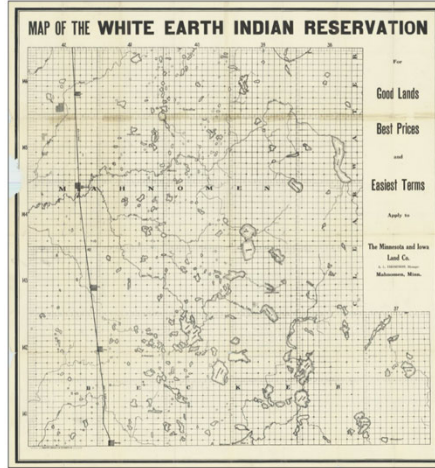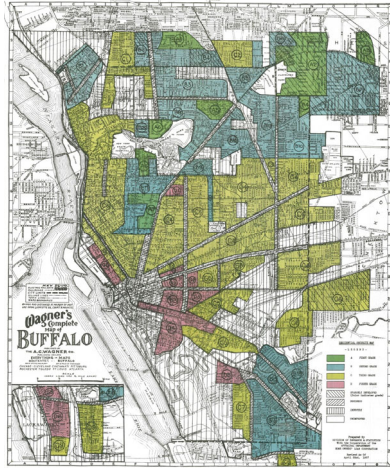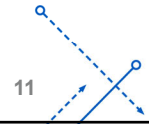
Intersections across pathways perpetuate inequities

Housing unaffordability → Housing insecurity → Health consequences → High healthcare costs → (cycle)
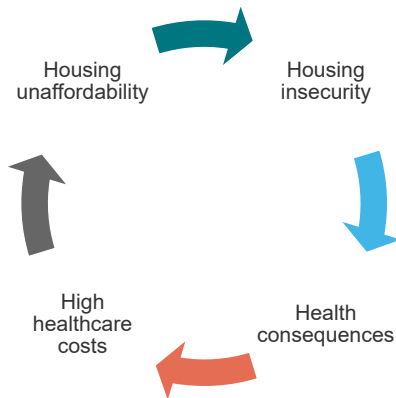
The cyclical relationship between housing unaffordability, housing insecurity, health consequences, and healthcare costs [13]

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Toward the Goal of Health Equity

- **Health equity** is the idea that all people have the opportunity to be as healthy as they can possibly be, and to define what health looks like for them [14]

- This is not possible without access to housing that is safe, stable, and affordable!

- Global policy implications:
  - The right to housing
  - Trauma-informed care and design
  - Co-design

Artwork from the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, displayed in Fall 2021

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Global Policy Implications: The Right to Housing

- How can we advocate for policy change at local, state, national, and international levels to protect **housing as a human right**?

- Example legislation – Canada's 2019 National Housing Strategy Act [15]
  - Acknowledges housing as a human right
  - Requires Canadian federal government to develop and implement a national housing strategy, with emphasis on inclusion of people with living experience of housing challenges

Kizito Musabimana of the African-Canadian Housing Solutions Lab
Source: National Housing Strategy website

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As of 2020, only 44% of the 189 UN member states include a constitutional right to housing

Oren, M. L., Alternman, R., & Agrawal, S. (2022). The right to adequate housing around the globe: Analysis and evaluation of national constitutions. In *Rights and the City: Problems, Progress and Practice* (1st ed., pp. 159–185). University of Alberta Press.

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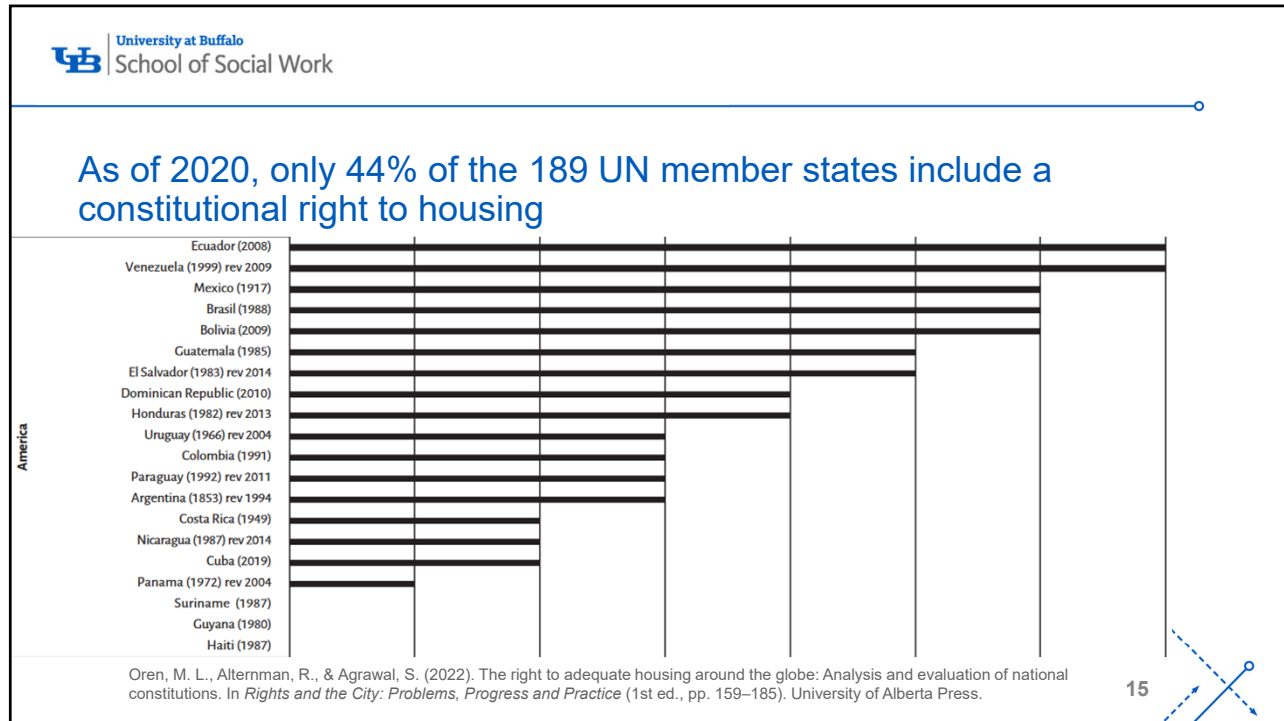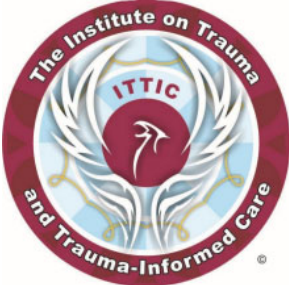
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Global Policy Implications: Trauma-Informed Care and Design

- Policy must also recognize the trauma and powerlessness of homelessness and housing insecurity [16]
- A **trauma-informed approach** in policies, programs, and design is essential: [17]
  - Safety
  - Collaboration
  - Trust and transparency
  - Choice
  - Empowerment
  - Intersectionality

University at Buffalo Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care

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Global Policy Implications: Co-Design

- Example: Sekuwe (My House) collaboration between two Dene First Nations communities and University of Manitoba [18]
- Developed in response to health crisis including elevated TB due to overcrowded, poorly ventilated housing
- **Co-designed housing** incorporating Dene design elements:
  - Use of local materials
  - Public and private spaces for traditional activities
  - Energy independence
  - Traditional food production and storage
  - Long-term maintenance and repair

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Conclusion

- Research on the pathways between housing and health is extensive and ever-growing
- Addressing housing inequities is essential to making health equity a reality
- Policy change promoting the right to housing and trauma-informed and co-designed programs and services can be a part of the solution
- Different communities will have different solutions. We have much to learn from each other.

Mural in San Francisco, USA: "Everyone Deserves a Home"

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Thank you!

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Meghan Holtan mtholtan@buffalo.edu

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