

# Maternal Health & Housing Fact Sheet

## Pregnancy & Homelessness

- Pregnancy can increase an individual's risk of becoming homeless<sup>1</sup>
- Pregnant persons face significantly greater health risks while unstably housed<sup>1</sup>
- Among women ages 18-25 who experience homelessness, 44% are pregnant or parents (impacting 1.1 million children annually)<sup>2</sup>
- Persons living in shelters during or shortly after pregnancy had higher rates of substance use disorders, anxiety, depressive disorders, and injuries<sup>3</sup>
- Persons experiencing homelessness during pregnancy had higher odds of giving birth preterm and to an infant with low birthweight<sup>4</sup>
- Experiencing homelessness 12 months before or during pregnancy was associated with the greatest increase in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) scores among children by age 3<sup>5</sup>



## Challenges to Receiving Prenatal Care While Experiencing Housing Insecurity

- Fragmentation of health services and low accessibility/long waitlists<sup>6</sup>
- Inadequate care that does not recognize complex and diverse needs<sup>7</sup>
- Attitude and treatment from healthcare providers (stigma)<sup>6</sup>
- Difficulty navigating and maintaining insurance/Medicaid<sup>7</sup>
- Feelings of shame, embarrassment, isolation, and poor mental health<sup>6</sup>
- Transportation, geographical location<sup>6</sup>
- Competing lifestyle demands<sup>6</sup>
- Fear and distrust of Child Protection Services<sup>6</sup>

## The Influence of Housing Discrimination on Maternal Health

- Individuals giving birth in communities impacted by historically racist housing policies and practices are more likely to:
  - Be experiencing epigenetic risk factors due to historical trauma<sup>8</sup>
  - Be exposed to stress related to housing instability and cost<sup>8</sup>
  - Be living in housing with greater indoor environmental risks and hazards (i.e., lead or pests)<sup>8</sup>
- Infants of parents in communities impacted by historically racist housing policies and practices are more likely to be born preterm<sup>8</sup>



## Women's Housing During and Beyond COVID-19

- Gender disparities continue to be exacerbated during the pandemic; at least 2.5 million U.S. women have dropped out of the labor force since the start of the pandemic (leaving or losing jobs at four times the rate of men)<sup>9</sup>
  - This results in challenges for women with children, contributing to the wage gap and increasing precarious housing situations
- Without stable housing, women with children may be forced to move into unsafe housing, live with an abuser, stay in a shelter, or live in their car<sup>9</sup>
  - These stressful situations can increase their risk of COVID-19 infections, leading to lifelong poorer health and well-being<sup>9</sup>

# Maternal Health & Housing Policy Suggestions

## What Can You Do to Improve Housing for Pregnant/Postpartum People?

- Advocate for shelter-based interventions providing prenatal care
- Advocate for expansion of programs which provide units conducive for families (i.e., not studios or individual-sized units)
- Advocate for policies that support fair and just housing, such as eliminating racist restrictive covenants in housing and property deeds
  - More funding for federal housing programs (National Housing Trust Fund)
- Increase access to consistent preventive care
- Reconfigure services to be delivered in a way that recognizes and meets homeless people's complex and diverse needs
  - Decrease fragmentation of health services
  - Staff training on working with homeless populations
- Continue supporting or building upon legislation passed during COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., emergency rental assistance, sealing eviction records, and foreclosure moratorium)
- Ensure community safety and economic stability, through:
  - Institutional policies promoting and enforcing screening in health care systems
    - Substance use disorders, mental health, safe housing, intimate partner violence
  - Social policies to support the education and employment of women & provide adequate day care for working parents
  - Funding to provide victim assistance & housing to support pregnant/postpartum people needing to leave violent intimate partners
  - Paid Family Leave



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