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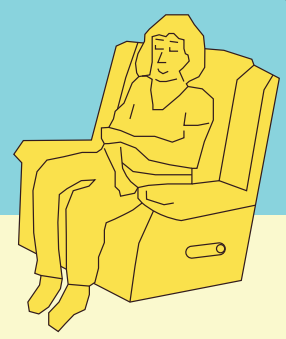
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# Housing and Health for All

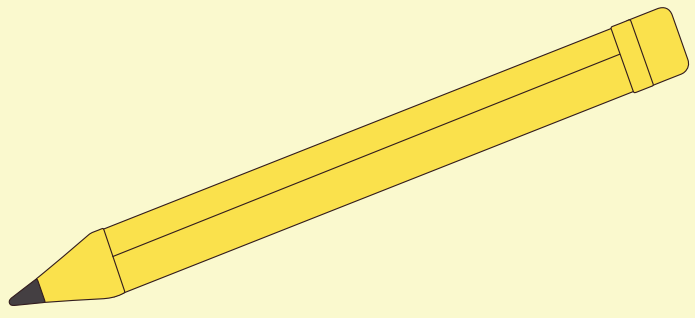
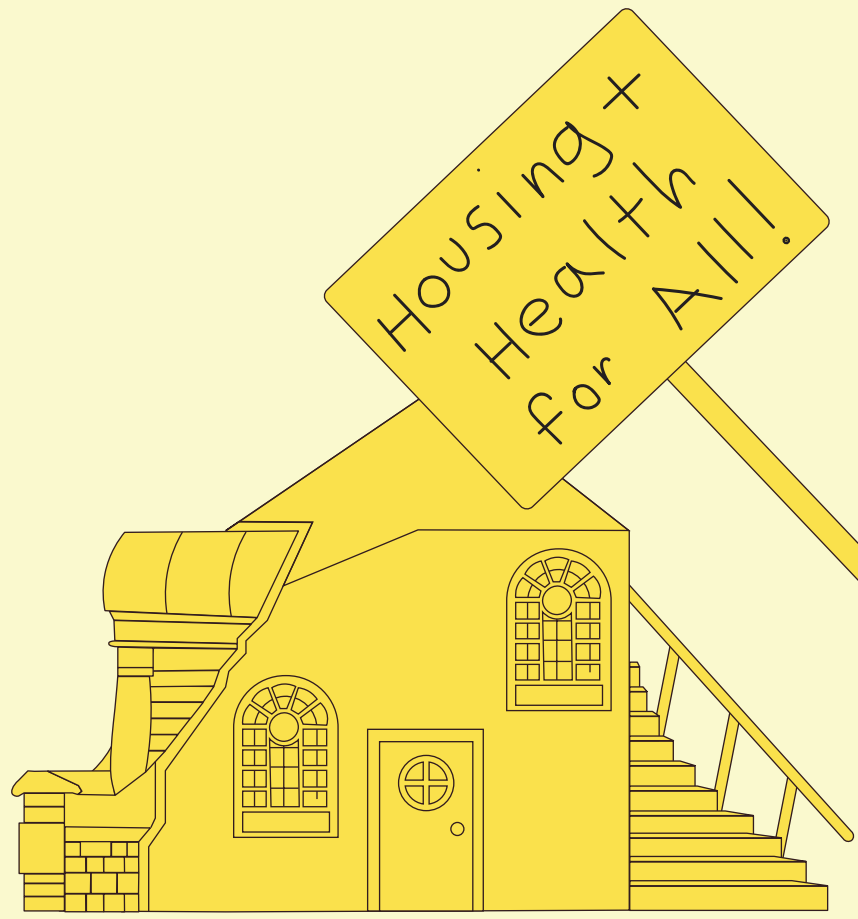
**A Research and Communications Toolkit for COVID-19 and Beyond**



# Housing and Health for All: A Research and Communications Toolkit for COVID-19 and Beyond



Human Impact Partners, with the guidance of housing organizers, developed this research and communications toolkit for advocates to leverage public health data for long-term housing justice. Our intent is for these resources to bolster the ongoing shared work of housing and health sectors' advocacy in building a more just and healthy future, as the pandemic continues to produce and reinforce deep-seated health and housing inequities.



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# The Ongoing Housing Crisis is a Public Health Disaster

A stable and affordable home is a basic necessity for our health, well-being, and dignity. But many communities in the US have been denied this basic right. Even before COVID hit, half of renters and a quarter of homeowners paid more than they could afford to stay housed, forcing impossible choices between housing, food, and medical care<sup>1</sup>— and the ongoing pandemic has drastically raised the stakes on this problem.

How did we get here? For decades, governments, banks, landlords, and developers have prioritized profit over people, creating skyrocketing rents, pushing faulty mortgages, and destroying affordable housing options. **Today's housing discrimination and corporate greed continue a long legacy of racist policies like redlining that have caused deep racial inequities, systematically benefitting White and wealthy communities and harming poor and working class, Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities (BIPOC).**<sup>2</sup> As a result, well over 50% of Black and Latinx households pay more than half their income in rent,<sup>3</sup> and our neighborhoods have been hit with mass evictions, foreclosures, community displacement, and houselessness. Housing speculators and other profit-aligned interests continue to amass significant power within political systems to maintain the commodification of a basic and universal necessity: a place to call home.



**COVID underscored how important our homes are for our health, and what housing protections can do for our communities' health and our children's futures. Beyond preventing COVID infections, emergency pandemic housing protections improved mental health outcomes, food security, self-reported health, and racial health equity.**

**When we keep our families and neighbors stably housed, we save lives.**

Since the pandemic hit, housing justice organizers have worked around the clock to keep people housed and safe from COVID — particularly working class, BIPOC, and other communities made vulnerable to losing their housing.<sup>4</sup> Advocates pushed lawmakers to enact and extend eviction moratoria nationally, statewide and locally, to stop encampment "sweeps," provide emergency housing for unhoused people, and implement rent relief programs. This organizing effectively forced government agencies to increase protections and resources to address the needs of communities. Although short-lived and imperfect, these policies kept people in their homes and reduced infections and deaths.

But many of these protections and resources have since been rolled back or removed outright, leaving millions of people to struggle alone through continued financial strain in the face of record-breaking inflation.<sup>5</sup> **Public health and housing advocates are at a pivotal moment in the fight for long-term recovery.** Now is the time for us to take action together to protect our neighbors from losing their homes and fight to make sure we don't sink deeper into the housing crisis. When we join together, we can create a different future – a world in which our homes are a place to rest, care for our loved ones, and pursue our dreams.

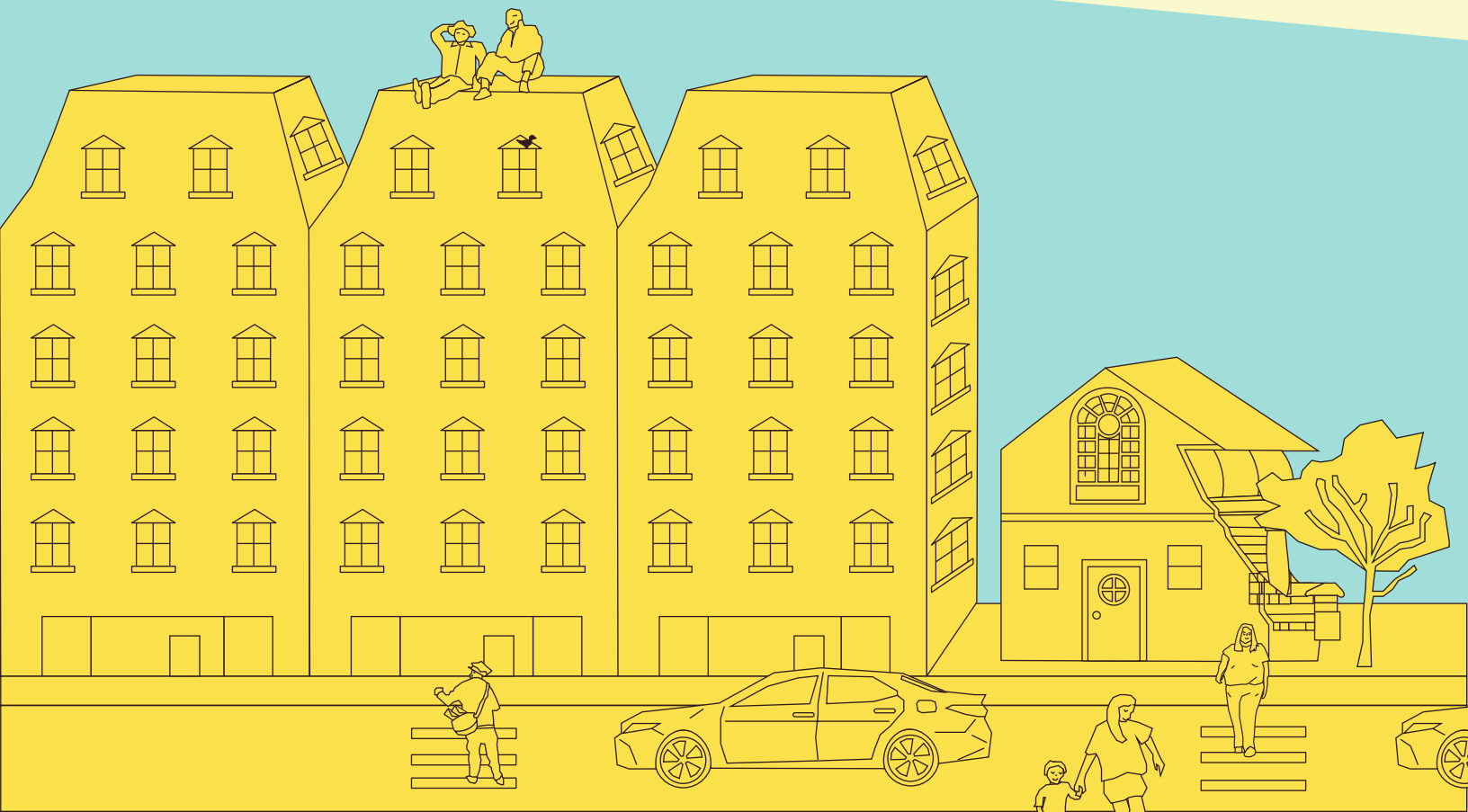


## Stronger Together: Health workers and organizations have a role to play in advancing housing justice

Public health isn't just about healthcare — it's about preventing harms to health before they happen, and ensuring that all people have what they need to survive and thrive.<sup>6</sup>

Health sector institutions, workers, and students have a unique and important role to play in supporting housing justice. Health outcomes, in the short and long term, are greatly shaped by our lived social and economic conditions in addition to access to healthcare services.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, many public health departments have named housing a top priority and joined in building deep relationships with housing organizers and advocates who are also working to shift inequitable conditions and increase access to key health-supporting resources.

Our shared goal of building healthier, thriving communities has much to gain from naming the connections between health and housing, and deepening partnerships across our sectors. Health departments and public health workers have long been involved in campaigns for housing justice, lending their data, voices, and expertise in their local communities and nationally.<sup>8</sup> This has included support of protections amidst the devastating COVID pandemic, from calling for halts to encampment sweeps by law enforcement to supporting rent, mortgage, and utility payment cancellations that allow people to shelter in place.



# Housing and Health Justice Talking Points

In this section, you'll find evidence-based talking points on why dignified and stable housing is essential to our mental and physical health, how historical and current policies have caused drastic racial inequities in housing, and what we can learn from pandemic-era housing protections like rent relief and eviction moratoria to improve health and access to housing more broadly. Health and housing advocates can tailor these talking points to their specific goals by adding relevant context, data, and stories. **We intend for advocates to be able to use this information to testify at local council meetings on housing policy, engage in state legislative campaigns, write reports for decision makers or community members, and more.**

The talking points are divided into three main categories, with a big picture narrative at the beginning followed by more specific talking points rooted in research.

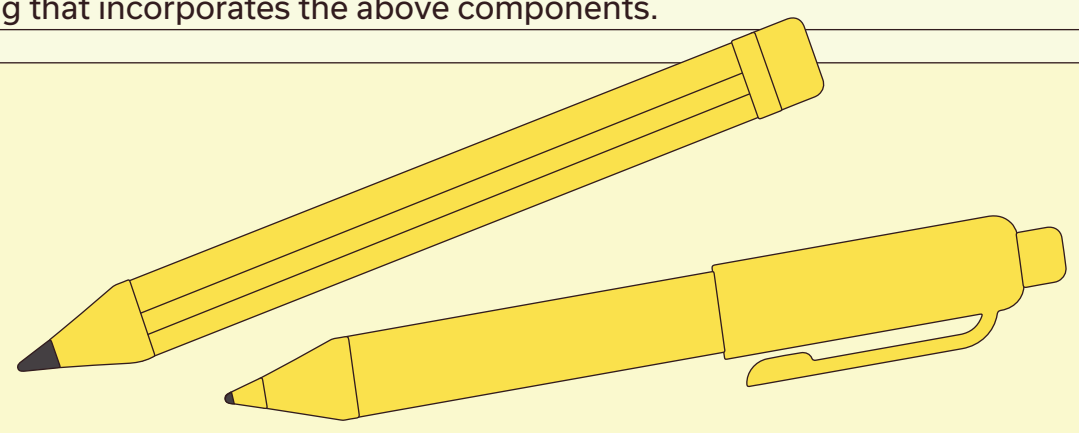
## Tips for Strategic Messaging

Before deciding what to **say**, it's helpful to identify what community members need decision-makers to **do**. Your message will be stronger if you solidify what you want to achieve before you start creating your message. Public health communication experts at Berkeley Media Studies Group developed the [Layers of Strategy](#) as a helpful tool for developing a strategic message.<sup>9</sup>

The [components of a strong message](#)<sup>10</sup> or talking points are:

- **The problem:** Clearly identify and name your concern and how it's harmful – but don't focus TOO much on the problem. Make sure to spend most of your time on solutions and values.
- **The values:** Tell your audience why this issue matters (e.g., dignity, fairness, justice, liberation, unity, interconnectedness, etc.) Connect the data to what's in our hearts. This can include personal stories or lived experience about why the issue matters to *you*.
- **The solution:** Lay out what you want to see happen, as specifically as possible (e.g. naming the decision-making body and when the decision needs to be made by).

You can find many other excellent health and housing communications resources from Berkeley Media Studies Group on their [Advancing Health Equity through Housing page](#),<sup>11</sup> including messaging that incorporates the above components.

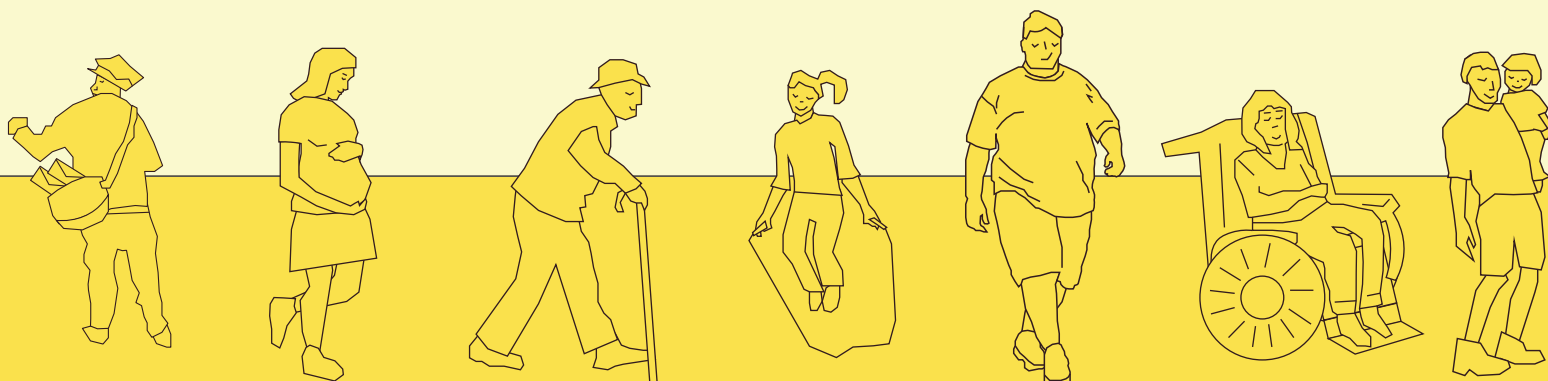


## Everyone Needs a Dignified, Stable Place to Call Home

### THE BIG PICTURE

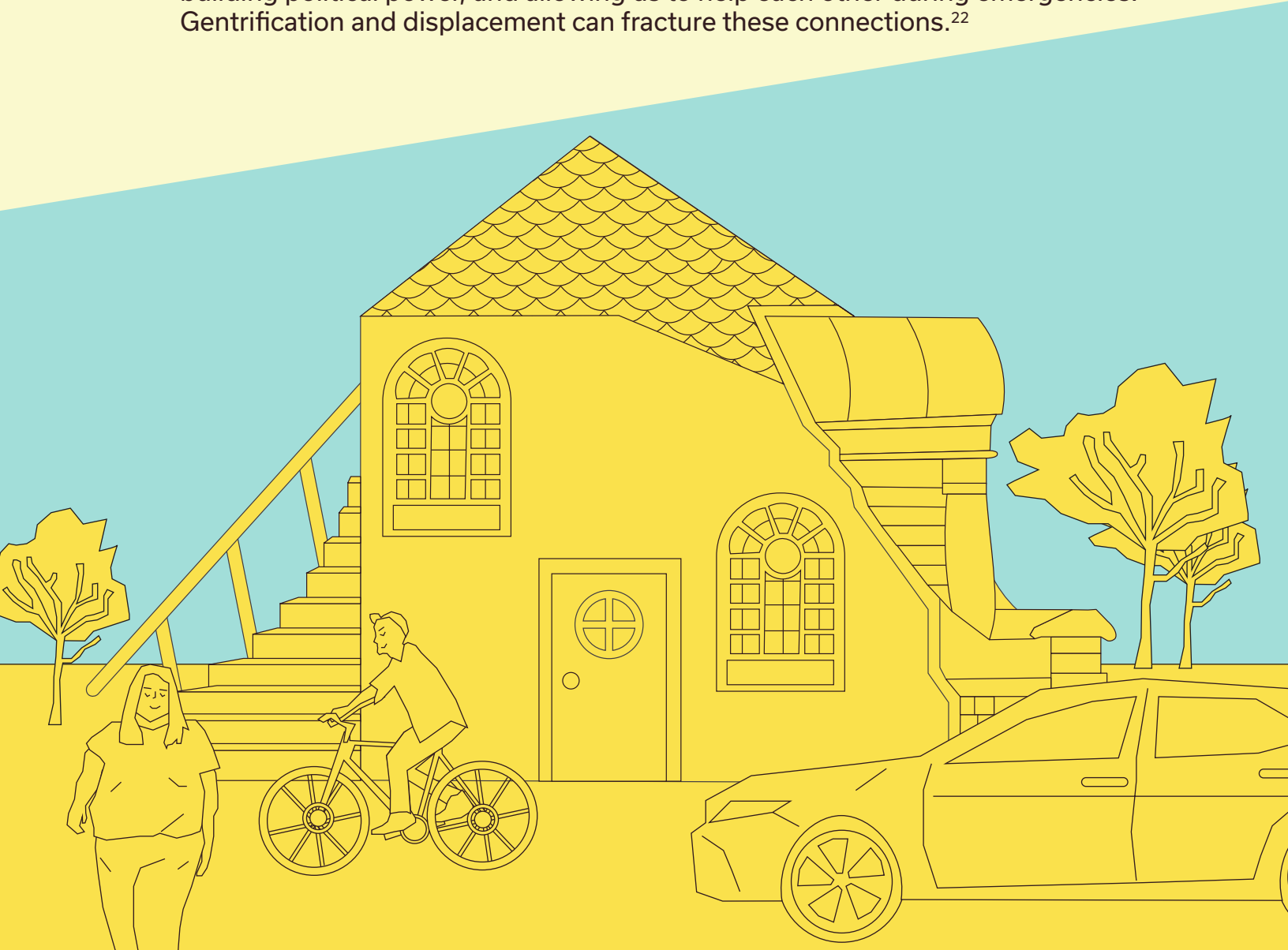
Shelter is a basic human need and a critical building block of health. Our homes should be places where we can be with our families and communities, make memories, find refuge in turbulent times, and access the resources we need to be healthy. But a handful of lawmakers — along with the real estate speculators, corporate developers, and landlords that fund their campaigns — have passed policies to turn a quick profit on housing instead of ensuring we have homes we can depend on. The result is mass evictions, foreclosures, community displacement, unsafe/uninhabitable housing, houselessness, and deep racial inequities.<sup>12</sup> We can't let the powerful few compromise the health and safety of all of us.

- **Evictions harm peoples' health:** *Public health research consistently shows that people whose landlords evict them from their homes — or even threaten to — are more likely to experience health problems. Housing stability, or the ability for people to choose when and why to move, is essential to health.*
  - Landlords can force people to leave their homes by raising rents too high for tenants to pay, failing to address serious issues with the quality of housing, or otherwise making it impossible to stay.<sup>13</sup>
  - People who are evicted are more likely to experience high blood pressure, depression, and anxiety, and are more likely to become unhoused, face long-term housing instability, and visit an emergency room.<sup>14</sup>
  - Eviction and other forms of housing instability, like having to move frequently, are particularly harmful for children. Stable housing results in fewer behavioral problems and struggles in school, and education itself is linked to better health and longer lives.<sup>15</sup>
  - Home foreclosure is also linked to poor mental and physical health.<sup>16</sup>
- **Affordable housing improves health:** *We should all be able to pay our rent or mortgage without sacrificing medical care, healthy food, or education for our children. Research shows that when housing costs are out of reach, food insecurity increases, and people delay getting the medical care they need because they can't afford it.*
  - Housing is affordable when people can pay their rent or mortgage consistently while meeting other basic needs for themselves and their families. Stagnant, low wages and inflated housing costs contribute to the lack of housing affordability,<sup>17</sup> which can cause people to settle for unsafe or poor quality housing.<sup>18</sup>





- Housing we can afford allows us to pay for other basic needs such as utilities, food, and medical care, which can reduce the incidence of negative health outcomes such as malnutrition, diabetes, anxiety, and depression.<sup>19</sup>
- **Quality matters:** *Everyone should have the right to live in housing that is healthy, dry, clean, maintained, adequately ventilated, and free from pests, contaminants, and other hazards. When we keep our families and neighbors safely housed, we save lives.*
  - Habitable housing is important for health at the individual and community levels. Living in homes free of hazards can reduce negative health outcomes such as injuries, asthma, cancer, neurotoxicity, cardiovascular disease, and poor mental health.<sup>20</sup>
- **Stable, thriving neighborhoods support health:** *We should all be able to live in socially, economically, and politically thriving neighborhoods with access to resources and relationships that help us be healthy.*
  - When we ensure our neighborhoods have easy access to public transportation, parks and recreation, quality schools, good jobs, healthy foods, and medical care, we reduce chronic disease, injury, respiratory disease, mortality, and mental health challenges.<sup>21</sup>
  - Connected neighborhoods that encourage supporting relationships can improve our health by reducing stress, increasing our ability to collectively address problems, building political power, and allowing us to help each other during emergencies. Gentrification and displacement can fracture these connections.<sup>22</sup>

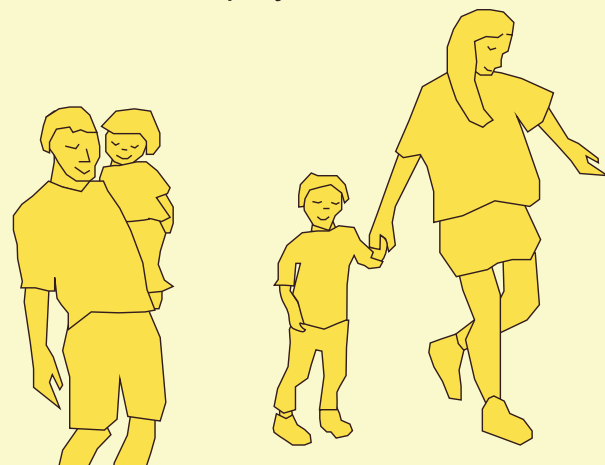


# Housing Justice is Core to Racial and Economic Justice

## THE BIG PICTURE

Housing justice is core to racial and economic justice. Housing policy has been a powerful lever of White supremacy, and it continues to leave deep wounds. Lawmakers, real estate speculators, corporate developers, and landlords have turned a quick profit at the expense of BIPOC people's economic stability, housing, and health, using racism to divide us and make us fear and criminalize our neighbors. But when we come together, we can address the harms of racism in our homes and neighborhoods, rewrite the rules, and make a future in which we all have a place to call home.

- **Healing a long history of racism:** *Today's housing discrimination and corporate greed continue the legacy of policies like redlining that have systematically benefitted White and wealthy communities and targeted poor and BIPOC communities.*<sup>23</sup>
  - The overtly racist policies of the past, like racially restrictive covenants, have left us a legacy of deeply divided and unequal cities. Many higher-resourced, Whiter neighborhoods have continued to exclude BIPOC people through mortgage and rental discrimination, exclusionary zoning, resource hoarding, and police intimidation of non-White people.<sup>24</sup>
  - While many BIPOC neighborhoods have created strong social, economic, and political networks, racist practices like redlining or mortgage discrimination have also denied many of these communities beneficial development and resources. Residents can be pushed into toxic areas, unhealthy homes, and high housing costs. Some BIPOC communities have also faced successive waves of displacement and gentrification, fracturing connections, and pushing residents further from the resources they depend on.<sup>25</sup>
  - Ongoing discriminatory housing and economic policies hit Black and Latinx renters especially hard—in 2019, well over 50% of these households paid more than half their income in rent.<sup>26</sup>
  - Collectively, rent debt sits at \$15 trillion with rent debt overwhelmingly impacting people of color and low-income households.<sup>27</sup>
  - Housing instability, such as displacement, eviction, foreclosure, and homelessness, also disproportionately harms working class communities and BIPOC communities.<sup>28</sup>
  - The same communities experiencing health impacts because of housing instability are also unequally experiencing health impacts due to environmental injustice/racism, food insecurity, lack of health access, and other institutional inequity.<sup>29</sup>
  - To create healthy neighborhoods for all, policymakers need to resource communities and racial groups that have faced disinvestment and discrimination, pass policies to stop displacement, eliminate exclusionary zoning policies, and challenge continued housing discrimination.<sup>30</sup>



- **COVID deepened the divide:** *The COVID pandemic has worsened economic and racial inequities.*

- Working class people, disabled people, undocumented people, and BIPOC — the same communities who have been systematically denied stable, safe, affordable housing for decades — have also suffered disproportionate economic fallout during the pandemic.<sup>31</sup>
- These communities experienced the highest rates of housing insecurity, displacement, and loss of community and home during the pandemic.<sup>32</sup>
- These communities also suffered the highest rates of COVID infections and death.<sup>33</sup>

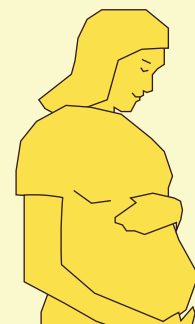


## Lessons from the Pandemic: Hard-Won Housing Protections Save Lives

### THE BIG PICTURE

Even before the pandemic, rising costs and discriminatory policies squeezed households and caused mass evictions, foreclosures, displacement, and homelessness.<sup>34</sup> But COVID underscored how important homes are for our health — and what housing protections can do for our communities' health and our children's futures. Organizers fought for and won emergency pandemic housing protections that helped curb the spread of COVID and improved health overall. Their work proved that basic housing protections are possible and that they work. Housing protections save lives. It's essential that we now build on pandemic-era housing protections. Withdrawing these protections and resources in the face of record-breaking inflation and continued financial strain on families will deepen the housing crisis and harm the quality of life and health of millions.<sup>35</sup>

- **Safe housing saves lives:** *Inadequately maintained homes, housing instability, and living in crowded places are risk factors for COVID and other communicable diseases.*
  - Well-maintained homes help reduce chronic diseases and respiratory conditions like asthma, reduce COVID exposure and outcome risks, and ease recovery — especially for vulnerable groups like young children and elders.<sup>36</sup>
  - Housing that is adequately ventilated and maintained is vital for health during the COVID pandemic.<sup>37</sup>
  - Pandemic-era evictions increased homelessness and caused households to double-up, increasing COVID infection risks for all.<sup>38</sup>
  - Moratoria on utility disconnections reduced COVID infections by just over 4% and reduced COVID deaths by just over 7%. Had policies been more universally adopted, we could have reduced COVID infections by 9% and deaths by 15%.<sup>39</sup>
- **Stopping evictions reduced COVID:** *Eviction moratoria reduced the spread of COVID and pandemic deaths, decreasing risks for all.*
  - Eviction moratoria reduced COVID infections by 3.8% and deaths by 11%.<sup>40</sup>
  - If eviction moratoria had been implemented across the country from March-November 2020, such policies could have reduced COVID infections by 14.2% and deaths by 40.7%.<sup>41</sup>
  - States that lifted their eviction moratoria had twice the infections and five times the deaths of those that kept them in place.<sup>42</sup>
- **Housing protections improve health overall:** *Beyond COVID infections, emergency pandemic housing protections improved mental health outcomes, food security, self-reported health, and racial health equity.*
  - Strong eviction moratoria during the pandemic improved health overall: in addition to preventing COVID infections, they reduced food insecurity, improved self-reported health, and alleviated mental stress, especially in Black households.<sup>43</sup>



- **Housing relief has been a lifeline:** *Pandemic-era rent relief and mortgage forbearance programs supported the financial security and health of families.*
  - Rent relief programs, when accessible, can be instrumental in keeping renters afloat. Administrators from one program shared that rent relief was “life changing” for tenants and improved their mental and physical health.<sup>44</sup>
  - Debt compromises residents’ mental well-being. During the pandemic, renters and homeowners with housing debt had worse self-reported health and mental distress. One study, which used data from Connecticut, found that households that received assistance experienced significantly lower levels of psychological distress than those on the waiting list.<sup>46</sup>
  - Mortgage forbearance programs helped to reduce inequalities — BIPOC and borrowers with low incomes utilized forbearance at significantly higher rates, helping to forestall the kind of mortgage crisis and losses in wealth to BIPOC families we saw during the last recession.<sup>47</sup>



# How to Use Public Data to Fuel Housing Campaigns: Sources and Case Studies

Community organizers understand the importance of bridging lived experience and hard data to tell a story about the impacts of housing crises on communities. **The combination of qualitative data (non-numerical) and quantitative data (numerical) can compel decision makers to acknowledge the seriousness of crises and act accordingly.** Qualitative data can include themes from focus groups, interviews, or photo-voice projects. Personal stories can also be used to humanize other data, such as short sidebars, pictures, quotes, and testimonies that illustrate and personalize broader patterns.

Housing data is collected by federal, state, and local government agencies, academic institutions, and private entities. Much of the publicly available data on housing is available through the U.S. Census Bureau, including the American Housing Survey, the American Community Survey, and more recently the Household Pulse Survey. Each of these datasets collects data on a range of housing indicators or variables for regions across the United States (see the table below). Evictions data and rental registry data are collected by some jurisdictions but not all. Eviction Lab presents up-to-date weekly eviction filings data from six states and 31 cities and evictions data from 2000-2016 nationally.



Date source	Geography	Time Period	Measures
US Census Bureau, <a href="#">American Community Survey</a> <sup>48</sup>	State, County, City, ZIP Code, Census Tract	From 2010 to 2020; collected on an annual basis	Tenure (length of residence); housing cost; housing cost burden; crowding; vacancies; commute mode
US Census Bureau, <a href="#">American Housing Survey</a> <sup>49</sup>	Metro areas	Between 1973 and 2019; collected on an annual basis	Tenure; housing cost burden; housing quality
US Census Bureau, <a href="#">Household Pulse Survey</a> <sup>50</sup>	State	Currently in Phase 3.5 of data collection (6/1/2022-8/8/2022)  Phases 1-3.4 from 4/23/2020 - 5/9/2022	Housing experiences during the pandemic (last month's payment status; current monthly rent; change in monthly rent; confidence in ability to make next month's payment; likelihood of having to leave the house; household energy use and spending)
Department of <a href="#">Housing and Urban Development</a> <sup>51</sup>	State, County ("Continuum of Care" regions, usually correspond to urban counties)	Between 2005 and 2021; collected on an annual basis	Homelessness (point in time counts)
<a href="#">Eviction Lab</a> Eviction Tracking System <sup>52</sup>	6 states (include list of states) and 31 cities*  State, county, city	March 2020 to present  Between 2000 and 2016	Eviction filings (weekly)  <i>Use data produced by local communities where available instead and/or check against local community data and experience.</i>  Number of evictions; eviction rate; eviction filing rate



Housing advocates can leverage this data to draw attention to inequities in housing access, affordability, stability, and quality, to inform housing policy, and in reports and messaging. However, it’s important to keep in mind that these datasets have their limits. Data can be outdated, difficult to access, and inaccurate in depicting the actual scale of housing instability.<sup>53</sup>

In the case study below, *Chainbreaker Collective uses eviction filing data to demonstrate exacerbating inequity among Santa Feans during the pandemic*, we describe the path to data access and how we used data to reveal the impacts of the eviction moratoria and the need for strong housing protections.

**CASE STUDY 1: Chainbreaker Collective uses evictions data to show exacerbating inequity among Santa Feans**

Using public records data on eviction filings from the New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts, [Chainbreaker Collective and Human Impact Partners](#) compared trends in 2020 eviction filings to prior years in the city of Santa Fe (2021).<sup>54</sup> The research showed that federal, state, and local eviction moratoria helped reduce eviction filings, however the effects of the policies wore off over time and didn’t completely eliminate eviction filings. Eviction claims for “nonpayment of rent” (which tenants were protected from under the moratoria) decreased in comparison to prior years, while the number of eviction claims filed for other reasons increased drastically. Eviction filings continued to disproportionately impact neighborhoods facing inadequate wages, displacement, gentrification, rising cost of rent, and excess COVID infection.

The path to acquiring the eviction filing data was challenging. Researchers hoped to present this information in a timely way to local decision makers in hopes of extending the eviction moratorium, but they received the requested data three months late. Additionally, the dataset was limited and missing three months of data. Eventually, the researchers were able to access a complete dataset through a different source and began analysis immediately.

This experience led the research team to propose recommendations for public data access: Agencies should be collecting and reporting public data in a way that is prompt and complete, and data should include key demographic factors often associated with housing insecurity (including cost of rent, household income, race/ethnicity, number of children in the home, single parent household, and disability status). In addition, local governments should initiate data collection systems that shed light on the status of health and safety code compliance, records of rental agreements, and trends in rental rates through rental registries. These improvements and initiatives would allow policymakers and advocates to prioritize resources for vulnerable communities.

Chainbreaker Collective and PolicyLink subsequently used the data to develop [policy recommendations](#), outlining 15 actions the city of Santa Fe can take to create equitable housing conditions for all residents.<sup>55</sup>



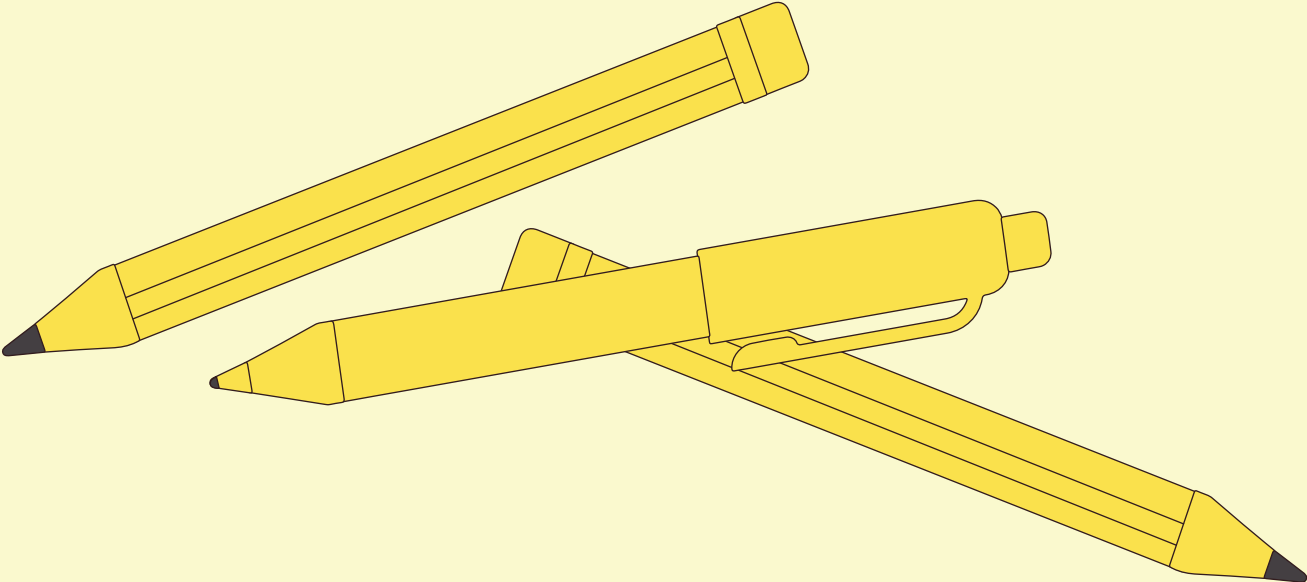
Many research-oriented grassroots organizations have begun to collect their own data to fill the gaps in eviction data from court systems.<sup>56</sup> The following case study describes how the Coalition for Economic Survival in the greater Los Angeles area worked with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, a collective of activists creating tools and maps for resistance and movement building against gentrification, to advocate to remove the Ellis Act.

**CASE STUDY 2: Coalition for Economic Survival and Anti-Eviction Mapping Project tackle the Ellis Act through data visualization**

The Ellis Act is a California state law passed in 1985 that supersedes local rent control laws and allows landlords to evict tenants to remove housing units from the rental market. Since 2001, tens of thousands of Ellis Act eviction applications have been filed by landlords and developers in Los Angeles, and tens of thousands of affordable rent control units have been lost – resulting in the displacement of thousands of tenants and the gentrification of neighborhoods throughout the state.

In 2022, community organizers at [Coalition for Economic Survival](#) and the Tenderloin Housing Clinic co-sponsored AB 2050 to reform the Ellis Act.<sup>57</sup> They worked with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project to update a powerful data visualization map to show the harmful impact the Ellis Act has had on Los Angeles residents over time. The map is an interactive time-lapse of the accumulation of Ellis Act evictions from 2001 to 2022.

[The map](#) used data from the [Los Angeles Rent Board](#) and showed a total of over [27,000 evictions](#),<sup>58</sup> targeting the city's [most diverse and working class](#) neighborhoods.<sup>59</sup> The visual was a key factor in underscoring the historical and ongoing housing crisis resulting from the Ellis Act.



# Long-term housing solutions

While eviction moratoria, utility moratoria, and rent relief and assistance programs protected health and saved lives in our communities in the ongoing COVID pandemic, they don't address the root of the problem. We need long-term solutions to make lasting change toward housing justice and equitable economic recovery, including policies that protect housing access and stability. Decision makers should adopt policies such as those detailed in the [Housing National Justice Platform](#),<sup>60</sup> [National Homes Guarantee](#),<sup>61</sup> [2022 Federal Housing Policy Priorities](#)<sup>62</sup> and [Communities over Commodities](#)<sup>63</sup> to:

- Increase the power of renters, mortgage holders, unhoused people, and BIPOC communities to determine their own housing futures.
- Protect renters and mortgage holders from displacement, through short-term protections like right to counsel and eviction and foreclosure moratoria, and mid-term solutions like rent control, just cause eviction protections, and anti-speculation measures.
- Take land and housing permanently off the speculative market, and into community control and ownership (e.g. community land trusts, social housing, well-resourced public housing).
- Identify and dismantle White supremacy in our housing system, by passing (and enforcing) policies to repair harm from centuries of racist policies, discrimination, gentrification, exclusion, policing, and Indigenous land theft
- Improve housing habitability, climate resilience, and ecological balance — and ensure that improvements are coupled with anti-displacement measures.
- Identify new resources to support the protection, preservation, and production of housing affordable to our communities.



## Acknowledgments

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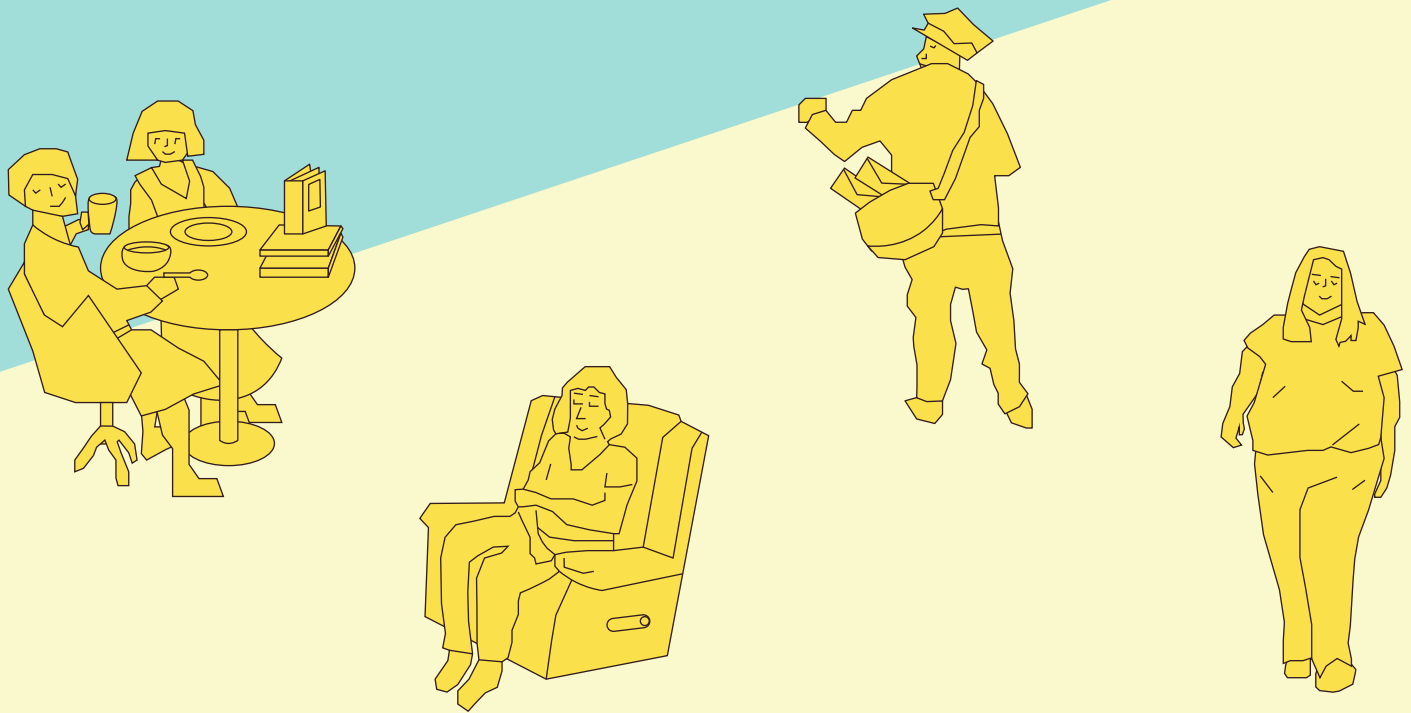
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Human Impact Partners transforms the field of public health to center equity and build collective power with social justice movements

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