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MANITOBA HOUSING RESIDENTS SURVEYED ON ACCESS TO SERVICES

Report finds Manitoba Housing residents face challenges in accessing social, health, and information services

A student-led study on social housing by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine found that Manitobans living in social housing face challenges accessing information about services available to them. The survey-based study follows the 2013 MCHP report *Social Housing in Manitoba*, which analyzed health data on 31,000 Manitobans living in social housing complexes. This earlier study found higher rates of illness, teen pregnancy, and mental health issues compared to those not living in subsidized social housing.

"Combining results from these two studies, which used very different research techniques, allowed us to develop a much better understanding of the needs of social housing residents, and where they wanted government priorities to be focused," says Mark Smith, MCHP Research Scientist and Project Supervisor.

The new project responded to the recommendations made in *Social Housing in Manitoba*. Eleven focus groups were held among 100 Manitoba Housing residents. Researchers asked where, and to whom, residents turn when they need to access a service, as well as what resources they typically use to learn about health and social programs.

Researchers found a consensus among study participants that principal concerns are lack of onsite access to mental health resources, childcare, and telephone access to social services. Residents identified pamphlets and word of mouth communication as their primary means of receiving information about available services, mainly due to limited internet access. Additionally, residents faced emotional challenges when attempting to access information.

[&]quot;Feeling stigmatized due to economic status or housing arrangement was a

significant barrier for many participants, which prevents them from accessing programs or returning for further care and services," says Smith.

For these reasons, Community Health centres and Family Resource centres were identified as the preferred access points for health and social services. Residents felt the atmosphere at these places was welcoming and non-judgmental. However, communication issues between residents and service providers were cited as a common problem by all focus groups.

Recommendations derived from this survey include: provide more information and more onsite services in social housing complexes through family resource centres; continue to support community development initiatives and community outreach; develop and promote user-friendly information resources; and improve communication between clients, service providers and government systems.

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The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) is a research unit in the Department of Community Health Sciences in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba. Research scientists and their collaborators at MCHP study health services, population and public health, and the social determinants of health using data from the entire population of Manitoba.

The full report, Investigating Access to Health and Social Services for Residents of Manitoba Housing can be downloaded from the MCHP website at: umanitoba.ca/medicine/units/mchp

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