

**HOW HOUSING MATTERS TO FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES  
RESEARCH COMPETITION**

**2009 GRANTEE ABSTRACTS**

**Cornell University, College of Human Ecology** (\$360,000 over three years)

Principal Investigator: Gary Evans ([gwe1@cornell.edu](mailto:gwe1@cornell.edu))

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The influence of housing and neighborhood quality on children's mental health and stress biomarkers

**Background:** The key goals of this research project are: (1) to better understand the effects that housing quality has on mental health and physiological stress trajectories over a 13-year period, beginning at age nine; and (2) to examine the moderating effect of neighborhood quality on the housing quality – health links.

**Design:** Researchers will use longitudinal data with growth curve modeling to study children's health trajectories over time in concert with objective, standardized indices of housing quality and neighborhood quality. The study will incorporate existing longitudinal data tracking children's environments and health at ages nine, 13, 17, and current data collection at age 22.

**Outcomes:** The research has multiple policy-related goals. First, it will provide rigorous evidence that housing matters. Methodological strengths such as objective measures of housing and neighborhood; longitudinal design; and multi-level modeling will ensure that the resulting evidence will be among the most compelling of its type to date. Second, by including physiological outcomes linked to physical health this study will move beyond more common mental health outcomes. Third, the inclusion of neighborhood quality effects allows for a more holistic approach and more varied policy approaches. Finally, by providing clarity regarding *when* housing matters most, this study could help to enable policymakers to time interventions for maximum efficacy.

**Columbia University, Department of Economics** (\$427,000 over two years)

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## Differential Impacts of Environmental Policy on Infants in Poor and Minority Neighborhoods

**Background:** The hazards people are exposed to are affected by where they live, and minority and low-income children may be both disproportionately exposed to environmental pollution less able to deal with the consequences of such exposure. Exposure during the fetal period and in infancy may be particularly harmful, and lead to lifelong consequences. Hence, policies to clean up pollution might be expected to have particular benefits for poor and minority infants. When measuring benefits, it is important to take account of the potential effects through the housing market. When an environmental policy is successful, it may increase housing costs and poor and minority children may be displaced. In such a case, housing market effects could undo some of the positive effects of environmental cleanups for these children.

**Design:** This research considers several such pollution-related policies, including Superfund cleanups, changes in regulations covering the Toxic Release Inventory, and the introduction of the electronic toll collection systems on roadways – initiatives that take differing approaches to ameliorating environmental problems. The study will explore whether vulnerable children suffer greater exposure, and whether such vulnerable children are benefit differentially from a given policy. This research will entail a statistical analysis of a unique longitudinal data base created from millions of U.S. birth records that includes large samples of African American, Asian, and Hispanic children. Less-educated mothers, teen mothers, and mothers in high-poverty neighborhoods also can be identified.

**Outcomes:** The results of this study will shed new light on the environmental justice literature by examining the extent to which environmental policies close gaps in exposures and outcomes between poor and minority infants and others, and on the extent to which these policies displace vulnerable mothers and infants from the newly-improved neighborhoods. These research outcomes also will show how spatial disparities in exposures arise, and how persistent they are likely to be. The ultimate goal of the research is to suggest policies to improve outcomes and minimize displacement. Since most neighborhood improvements can be expected to affect housing prices, the results will have relevance to other place-based policies, as well.

**Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Policy Studies** (\$300,000 over two years)

Principal Investigator: Sandra Newman ([snj@jhu.edu](mailto:snj@jhu.edu))

<http://ips.jhu.edu/pub/Sandra-J-Newman-Ph-D>

## Housing Affordability and Investments in Children

**Background:** A key feature that distinguishes families living in affordable housing from those who do not is increased disposable income. Thus, in principle affordable housing enables parents to spend more on their children – both for necessities, such as medical care, and for enriching materials and experiences, such as books, computers, and educational trips – and thereby can enhance their children’s health, behavior, and cognitive skills. Whether or not parents in affordable housing actually spend their additional resources this way has never been studied. This research will examine whether differences in housing affordability are associated with differences in child expenditures and the nature of these expenditures.

This research will provide insights into the decisions low-income households make that affect their children’s healthy development and the role that affordable housing in that process. It will shed light on past research that found that affordability had not effects on the cognitive, behavior, or health outcomes of children, by revealing whether low-income families living in affordable housing do not invest a portion of their greater disposable income in their children. The project also will inform existing theories about the effects that income has on child outcomes from economics (consumer preferences and future orientation) and child development (parental investment and family stress).

**Design:** The analysis will be based on four years of data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (2004-2007), which offers a large, nationally representative sample, a rich array of demographic and socioeconomic attributes of sample households, and detailed information on roughly 600 unique household expenditures. Findings will pertain to both overall child expenditures, expenditures on categories of current consumption (such as food) and future-oriented consumption (such as education and health care), which is akin to investment.

**Outcomes:** This research could have important policy implications. For example, finding that parents do not invest their additional income in their children because they are spending it on other necessities might argue for creating more affordable housing opportunities. Alternatively, increased expenditures on discretionary items that are unlikely to benefit children might argue for vigorous information dissemination, education, or counseling.

**Ohio State University** (\$646,000 over three years)  
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## The Impact of Housing on the Wellbeing of Children and Youths

**Background:** This research will entail a comprehensive study of the causal relationship between housing characteristics and conditions and on the cognitive, behavioral, and health outcomes of children and young adults. The primary hypothesis is that living in a high-quality dwelling as a child has a positive effect on child outcomes in both the short and long term, if other factors are held constant; secondary hypotheses are that the effects of housing differ by race, ethnicity, and income.

**Design:** The primary data set used in the study is the National Longitudinal Study of Youth-1979 cohort (NLSY79) and the Child and Young Adult surveys of the children of the female NLSY79 respondents. An important innovation of the study is that it will be able to use data on respondent addresses to merge publicly-available information about the dwellings they and their children occupy with the survey data. This will result in a rich longitudinal data set that will include as much as 30 years' information on parents and children, along with key measures of housing that are not available in the NLSY79 survey.

The study addresses a number of gaps in the literature, first, by providing a comprehensive view of housing. Dwelling characteristics to be analyzed include ownership status, square footage, persons per room, age of the dwelling, land area, type, and quality. Second, children's cognitive development, behavior problems, school progress, and physical and mental health will be studied. Researchers will measure the long-term effects that housing characteristics experienced during childhood have on young adult outcomes such as educational attainment, labor force participation, and earnings. Third, the study will use a long panel data set that has a relatively fine level of geographic detail. Finally, the survey will sample a sufficient number of minority and low-income households to yield reliable inferences based on separate analyses for these groups.

**Outcomes:** The study's findings will have direct relevance for housing policy by clarifying, for example, whether homeownership should be encouraged or opportunities to live in high-quality dwellings should be enhanced regardless of ownership status.

**Princeton University** (\$10,000 over two years)

Principal Investigator: Alexandra Murphy ([akmurphy@princeton.edu](mailto:akmurphy@princeton.edu))

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## The Social Organization of Suburban Poverty: Poverty Dynamics in a Poor African American Suburb

**Background:** During the 1990s poverty increased significantly in U.S. suburbs. The resultant geographic shift in poverty raises three key questions that guide this case-study research: (1) What is everyday life like for the suburban poor?; (2) How is the social and economic life of suburban communities organized around poverty?; and (3) To what extent are suburbs economically, politically, and socially isolated from broader metropolitan networks?

Suburbs often lack the unique features of urban built environments: suburbs have more single-family homes than apartments; commercial enterprises are zoned to strip malls; and there are fewer public spaces where people can congregate. This project will explore what these differences mean for three features of daily life of the poor: (1) the creation of networks and subsistence strategies, (2) access to antipoverty organizations, and (3) neighborhood social control.

**Design:** To get at the socio-political location of the suburb in the broader metropolitan ecology, the researcher examines a wide range of suburban institutions and the municipal government. The focus in this project is on the challenges that poverty places on institutions, the resources they have at their disposal, and the tools they use to address and/or control poverty.

Using the ethnographic method, the researcher has moved into a poor, African-American suburb of Pittsburgh to conduct participant observation in businesses, churches, public spaces, the planning and police department, and people's homes. She currently follows several poor suburban families, attends a variety of community meetings, and conducts in-depth interviews with organizational leaders, business owners, and public officials. She also collects spatial data (e.g. addresses of vacant lots, code violations) to create maps useful in understanding the spatial relationships of suburban social life.

**Outcomes:** This research will explore the idea that suburbs exist in "policy blindspots," and identify the ways in which current policies ignore the needs of the suburban poor and could craft more appropriate tools to address these needs. With respect to housing policy specifically, this research will result in a better understanding of how housing shapes the social isolation of the suburban poor, how suburban governments use housing policies to control and contain poverty, and how the social isolation of the suburbs disconnects actors from leveraging important housing resources for the poor.

**RAND Corporation** (\$300,000 over two years)

Principal Investigators: Heather Schwartz ([hschwartz@rand.org](mailto:hschwartz@rand.org)) and Martin Wachs ([wachs@rand.org](mailto:wachs@rand.org))

<http://www.rand.org/education/about.html>

## Inclusionary Zoning and Schools

**Background:** Most affordable housing programs in the U.S. do not situate low-cost housing in communities that have very low rates of poverty. Inclusionary zoning (IZ) has become an increasingly-popular tool that is designed to provide affordable housing in an economically-integrative manner. Although IZ policies vary in design, they typically require developers to set aside a proportion of units in market-rate residential developments so they can be made affordable for lower-income households, in exchange for development rights or zoning variances. Since IZ policies were first adopted in the 1970s they have become relatively common in high-cost localities in four states and in several metropolitan areas. For example, in California approximately one in three jurisdictions had an IZ program as of 2006.

**Design:** Despite IZ's growth, little is known about its success in providing low-income families with access to housing in low-poverty neighborhoods, and, even more importantly, access to low-poverty schools. For example, no prior study has examined the neighborhood and school characteristics of IZ recipients in multiple localities – a gap that this proposed research seeks to fill. Further, the question of whether IZ programs promote residential stability among low-income participants has not been studied.

To test the effectiveness of IZ as an integrative tool, researchers will examine the school and neighborhood characteristics and the residential stability of IZ households in eight to 10 cities or counties.

**Outcomes:** Findings regarding whether or not IZ provides access to low-poverty settings could influence future IZ program designs, and will highlight the role of housing policy in children's education. For example, if IZ programs *do* in fact promote residential stability and integrate low-income families into low-poverty neighborhoods and schools, they could be a significant policy intervention, because research shows that poverty rates in schools are among the most important school factors that influence student achievement, and that schools have a bigger impact on students' performance than neighborhoods do. The ramifications that IZ has for children's schooling are important because educational attainment is an increasingly-important factor in children's future employment, earnings, and attendant life chances.

**St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto** (\$738,000 over three years)

Principal Investigator: James Dunn ([jim.dunn@mcmaster.ca](mailto:jim.dunn@mcmaster.ca))

<http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/research/profile.php?id=dunn&>

## Effects of Housing Redevelopment on Mental Health, Child Development and Community Life in Toronto's Regent Park

**Background:** Built more than 50 years ago, Regent Park is one of the oldest and largest concentrated public housing communities in Canada. It occupies a 69-acre site just east of downtown Toronto and houses 7,500 people in 2,087 social housing units. Although Regent Park – initially a slum clearance initiative – was designed to create a “garden city,” the community has come to be known for its deteriorating buildings, poverty, violence, drug use, and poor health and educational outcomes. Over the next 15 years, Regent Park is slated to be demolished and re-built in six phases, growing to 5,000 units of mixed-income housing, including rent-geared-to-income social housing units, below-market rentals, and privately-owned condominiums.

**Design:** This research project will investigate the effects that Phase 1 and 2 of the Regent Park's redevelopment have had on adult mental health, on child development, and on social and community life. Specifically, the study will:

- (1) determine if adults (ages 18 and above) who are re-housed into new housing units in Regent Park show significant changes in mental health and general health status;
- (2) investigate the effects of the redevelopment on other outcomes, such as: social support; collective efficacy/social cohesion/social trust; labor force activity; perceptions of crime and safety; residential satisfaction; sense of community; and life satisfaction;
- (3) investigate social mixing among public housing tenants, purchasers of market condominiums, and non-resident users of new commercial (grocery store, bank, coffee shop) and public (aquatic centre, park) services, by examining how the new services influence interaction between residents of differing social groups and affect the experiences and perceptions of social exclusion/inclusion and attitudes of (in)tolerance among these groups.

**Outcomes:** The study will help to fill a large knowledge gap regarding the effects that socially-mixed housing redevelopment have on health, child development and community life. Moreover, it will make a unique and important contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of planned social-mix communities, and the role that public and commercial spaces play as venues for interaction among disparate social groups.

**University of Illinois at Chicago, Jane Adams School of Social Work** (\$390,000 over three years)

Principal Investigator: Von Nebbitt Sr. ([vnebbitt @howard.edu](mailto:vnebbitt@howard.edu))

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## Economic Downturns and Migrations into Private Renter Housing Environments: An Assessment of Adolescents' Wellbeing in the District of Columbia

**Background:** Subprime loans and adjustable interest rates have forced many families into foreclosure, which has caused many previous home-owners to migrate into low-income apartment complexes. Although the low-income renters' market provides an affordable housing option for foreclosed families, many of these communities are rough places in which to live, which increases the likelihood of deleterious outcomes for adolescents in such households. There is no research that assesses the relationship between foreclosure stress and migration into the low-income renters' market and adolescents' health. To address this gap in knowledge, this investigation will assess how living in low-income apartment complexes in Washington, D.C. is related to hypercortisolism, drug use and depressive symptoms in a sample of adolescents from foreclosed households.

The study will examine three questions:

- How is the experience of foreclosure related to drug use, depressive symptoms and cortisol levels among adolescents in foreclosed households?
- How do drug use, depressive symptoms and cortisol levels differ between youth in foreclosed households and youth living in high-risk private and public housing?
- What are the trajectories for readjustment among adolescents three years after the foreclosure?

**Design:** The study will use a longitudinal research design to assess adolescent adjustment over time. It also will use Structural Equation Modeling to test a model of adolescent readjustment after foreclosure. Three waves of data will be collected from a sample of adolescents living in three settings. The first sample will include youth whose family faced foreclosure and who currently lives in low-income private rental housing in D.C.; the second will be youth living in low-income private apartment complexes in D.C.; and the third will include youth living in D.C. public housing. Cortisol levels, drug use and depressive symptoms are the outcome variables, and standardized measures normed with urban youth will be employed.

**Outcomes:** This study has implications for programs and services that provide social safety nets for adolescents in foreclosed households. The research also has implications for social policies designed to alleviate the adverse effects of foreclosure on adolescents in such households.

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Social Work** (\$226,000 over two years)

Principal Investigator: Jung Min Park ([parkjm@illinois.edu](mailto:parkjm@illinois.edu))

<http://www.socialwork.illinois.edu/people/faculty/parkJungMin.html>

## The Impact of Housing Instability and Housing Assistance on Health Outcomes

**Background:** This study will investigate whether housing assistance mitigates poor health outcomes among low-income children. The main research aims are to: (1) explore whether and to what extent the health outcomes of children in families living in public housing and those receiving rental subsidies differ from the health outcomes of other low-income children; (2) determine the relative contribution that housing assistance programs, including public housing and rental subsidies, have on children's developmental and health outcomes; and (3) examine whether the impact of housing assistance on health outcomes varies as a result of housing instability, racial and ethnic groups, and jurisdictions.

**Design:** This study entails a prospective cohort design. The dataset, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, will enable researchers to follow children in families in 20 large U.S. cities who received housing assistance and those who did not. The data comprises rich information on their health status and a wide range of risk and protective factors. The study's longitudinal design allows for the investigation of the temporal sequence of housing status and health outcomes, which will make it possible to untangle the effects that housing assistance has on changes in health outcomes. The study also will compare children in assisted housing families with those in unassisted families and assess geographic variations in the relationship between housing and health outcomes.

**Outcomes:** This study will expand the current knowledge base by assessing whether there are differences in health outcomes among low-income children with and without housing assistance and, if so, when the differences begin to emerge; and by clarifying the pathways through which housing assistance affects health outcomes, taking into account housing instability, demographic, familial, and community characteristics. By determining the extent to which housing assistance and other individual and environmental factors influence health outcomes for children, this study also could help guide the direction of interventions, identify effective points of intervention, and, in the long-term, decrease the subsequent need for healthcare for this vulnerable population.

**University of Michigan, National Poverty Center** (\$750,000 over three years)

Principal Investigator: Kristin Seefeldt ([kseef@umich.edu](mailto:kseef@umich.edu))

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The Effects of the Housing Crisis on Vulnerable Workers and Families:  
Evidence from a New Panel Survey

**Background:** This project will examine how housing instability – foreclosures, evictions, spells of homelessness, doubling-up to share expenses, and frequent moves – affects people’s health and mental health. Researchers also will analyze how the policy changes included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and other recent legislation help ameliorate adverse housing and health outcomes brought on by the recession, with a focus on policies that aim to replace income, extend health care coverage, and help those who are at risk of losing their housing.

The key research questions to be answered are: (1) Do experiences of housing instability, regardless of the type, cause and previous ownership status, have a detrimental effect on an individual’s health and mental health?; (2) Do foreclosures have a greater negative effect on health or mental health than do other types of housing instability?; or (3) Do other types of housing instability (e.g., eviction, doubling-up) have a greater negative effect on health or mental health than foreclosures? Researchers also will examine whether policy interventions (e.g., extended Unemployment Insurance benefits, increased food assistance benefits) have a protective effect against poor outcomes.

**Design:** Over the next three years, the research team will collect and analyze longitudinal survey data gathered from a stratified random sample of 1,000 individuals living in Southeast Michigan. The first wave of in-person interviews is now underway, and subsequent waves will be fielded in late 2010 and late 2011. The survey addresses eight principal domains: housing instability, demographics, employment and the labor market, income and assets, health and mental health, material hardships, credit and debt, and public program use.

**Outcomes:** While research has shown that employment instability is associated with poorer health, little is known about the ways in which different types of housing instability affect health, and if they affect owners and renters differently. In addition, the current economic environment presents a unique situation because of the large increases in social welfare spending brought about by the ARRA. This research will provide a better understanding of the associations between housing instability, labor market instability, and health outcomes and insight regarding the most promising ways that policy can intervene.

## University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty

(\$194,000 over two years)

Principal Investigator: Robert Haveman ([haveman@lafollette.wisc.edu](mailto:haveman@lafollette.wisc.edu))

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### The Effects of Section 8 Housing Voucher Receipt

**Background:** With prior support from the MacArthur Foundation, researchers have used a very large longitudinal dataset that contains several years' administrative information on Wisconsin low-income benefit recipients to study how the receipt of federal low-income housing vouchers, including household-head employment, earnings, family composition, neighborhood quality, and the use of a variety of public programs and child care services. The results of these analyses, which are available in a series of papers, show that housing vouchers have complex and dynamic effects on their recipients. In addition, the short-term effects appear to differ from longer-term outcomes, and there are diverse patterns of response across demographic subgroups.

**Design:** The current research will extend previous work and undertake three new lines of inquiry. To extend the earlier research, this project will add two more calendar years of data to all sample observations. These additional data will make it possible for researchers to estimate the effects of voucher receipt from the time of initial receipt (2001 for the first cohort) through 2008, and provide as much as eight years of estimated impacts. This extension will allow for a more confident assessment of the long-term effects of the program than now possible.

In addition, this project will study the effects of receiving a housing voucher on two additional outcomes: children's educational opportunities and recipients' participation in worker assistance/training programs. Finally, in light of the recession that began in 2007, researchers plan to use 2007 and 2008 data to understand how the behavioral responses and other effects of receiving a Section 8 housing voucher were affected by economic downturn. All analyses will use the extended dataset that has been constructed. Propensity score matching techniques coupled with difference-in-differences regression adjustment will be used to reliably determine whether voucher receipt has statistically significant effects on the social, educational, and labor market outcomes described above.

**Outcomes:** Housing voucher receipt has complex effects on labor market behavior. In the short term, it causes reductions in the earnings of recipients, but it increases household-head employment in the long-term. Socially, voucher receipt causes a reduction in the number of adults in the household, which is an indication that vouchers facilitate the establishment of independent households. Voucher receipt is also found to induce movement to higher quality neighborhoods and spur enrollment in many publicly provided programs, including TANF and state-subsidized child care. Estimates of the social benefits and costs of the program based on first year behaviors indicate that the program produces substantial net social benefits.

**Urban Institute** (\$750,000 over three years)

Principal Investigator: Mary Cunningham (mcunningham@urban.org)

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## Child Welfare and Housing Impact and Cost Study

**Background:** Inadequate housing threatens children's safety and well-being and frequently is at the root of child welfare involvement, out-of-home placement, and delays in reunification among low-income families. While past research clearly demonstrates this link, none has looked empirically at the *impact* that housing vouchers have on reducing child welfare involvement, and the potential cost offsets or savings that could result. The Urban Institute is undertaking a research study that will investigate this question by evaluating the effects of the Family Unification Program (FUP). This research will test three hypotheses to determine whether or not:

- FUP vouchers reduce out-of-home placement of children among families that are at imminent risk of having children removed.
- FUP vouchers reduce homelessness among child welfare involved families.
- FUP reduces costs associated with homelessness and child welfare services.

**Design:** To test these hypotheses, the research team will launch a multi-site, randomly controlled trial with a cost-analysis component. The study, which will include four FUP sites, will randomly assign and collect administrative data for 800 families (400 treatment families and 400 control families); create cost estimates for units of child welfare, homelessness, and housing services; and complete a cost analysis that examines the costs and benefits of the FUP program to the child welfare and homelessness systems. The study will track outcomes using linked administrative data from three sources – child welfare agencies, homeless service providers, and public housing agencies.

**Outcomes:** This study has implications for two service systems: child welfare and homelessness. The child welfare field has a great need for evidence regarding the types of strategies that work in preventing child maltreatment and out-of-home placement. In addition, homelessness practitioners are currently struggling with how to provide services to high-need homeless families, who are often involved in the child welfare system. This study will explore why housing matters to these families and to those two service systems, and will fill critical gaps in knowledge by helping policymakers, practitioners, and advocates understand the full and potentially very valuable effects that housing vouchers have on low-income families.

**Yeshiva University, Albert Einstein College of Medicine** (\$750,000 over three years)  
Principal Investigators: Emily Rosenbaum (rosenbaum@fordham.edu) and Earle Chambers  
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**Background:** The goal of government subsidized housing is to establish stable, affordable housing by reducing participants' rental costs. Because housing mobility is the primary "mode of exit" from disadvantaged neighborhoods, housing programs that improve housing choice while dealing with affordability may contribute to closing the gap in racial and ethnic disparities in health. Research shows that individuals who live in neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated have poorer cardiovascular health. These neighborhoods tend to lack material resources such as safe and accessible places to be physically active and access to healthy food options, which is likely to contribute to the types of unhealthy behaviors that predispose one to heart disease. A further consequence of neighborhood disadvantage is that such environments can be stressful, which further promote unhealthy behaviors among residents.

**Design:** The goal of this project is to determine whether Latino adults who are eligible for low-income housing in the Bronx, New York and live in Section 8 subsidized housing environments are more likely to be physically active and eat more healthy foods than those who live either in a subsidized housing development or in unsubsidized housing. Furthermore, it will examine whether access to healthy food stores and recreational space and living in a threatening neighborhood environment mediates the association between subsidized housing condition, physical activity and dietary choices. The project will entail a stratified cluster sampling design to select a sample of Latino adults (ages 18 to 64) in the south and west Bronx who are eligible for low-income-housing assistance. Researchers will administer a survey to sampled Latinos during in-home visits to collect data on physical activity and diet, and a broad range of socio-demographic, health, and attitudinal correlates of diet and physical activity, and of housing assistance. They also will measure weight, height, and waist circumference during the home visit. Aspects of neighborhood environment will be measured using census and administrative data, and data obtained from commercial services.

**Outcomes:** This study will examine the interrelationships between affordable housing, social environment, and cardiovascular health risk. Findings concerning the health benefits of housing assistance will have direct implications for housing policy, particularly in the area of increasing current levels of assistance for eligible households.