

Making Madison Heights Healthy and Safe



Improving Affordable Housing

Quality, affordable housing fulfills the basic need for shelter, but also has community-wide impacts that have positive implications for everyone in the surrounding community, including residential stability, economic development, neighborhood social cohesion, and improved health outcomes.

Madison Heights is an affordable housing community located in Avondale, Arizona that has not seen major capital improvements since initial construction in 1973. The Housing Authority of Maricopa County (HAMC) owns and manages the property, and has proposed to redevelop it in order to improve site facilities and surrounding infrastructure. The proposal also involves consolidating two other affordable housing communities, Avondale's Norton Circle and Buckeye's HM Watson Homes, into the new Madison Heights, thereby doubling its capacity.

HAMC and Gorman and Company, a real estate developer, requested that a health impact assessment be conducted to inform the redevelopment and promote the health and safety of residents and the surrounding neighborhood. As a result, individuals from the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Phoenix (LISC), and Health in Policy & Practice worked together to conduct a health impact assessment on the Madison Heights affordable housing community and the surrounding neighborhood. The project was funded by LISC Phoenix and a grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

What Is a Health Impact Assessment?

A health impact assessment (HIA) is a public health tool that helps decision makers consider the possible and unforeseen health effects of a proposed project, policy, or plan. Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to assess existing conditions and potential health impacts in order to develop recommendations for decision makers.

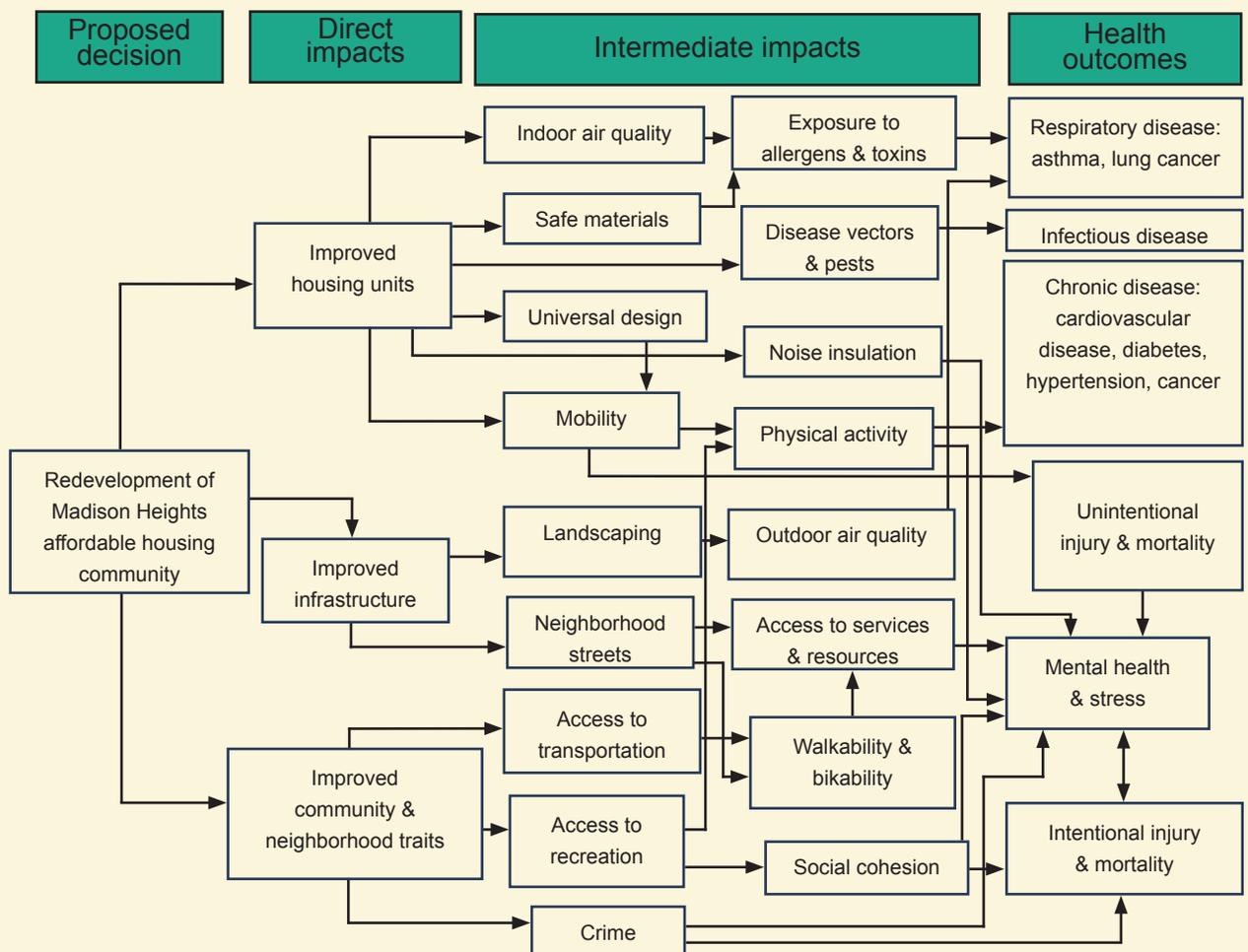
The goal is to maximize positive health effects while minimizing negative outcomes. Community stakeholders, especially vulnerable populations, are engaged so that impacts on all affected populations are assessed and considered prior to proposal implementation.

For the purpose of HIAs, “health” encompasses all social, environmental, economic, and political factors that directly and indirectly impact physical and mental well-being. Keeping this broader perspective in mind, a HIA is guided by the following principles:

- Democracy – public engagement that emphasizes the right of all people to participate in decisions that affect their life, both directly and through decision makers.
- Equity – consideration of health impacts that affect all populations, especially vulnerable groups, to reduce disparities among different population groups.
- Sustainable development – assessment of short- and long-term impacts to support the development needs of current and future generations.
- Ethical use of evidence – use of a rigorous, transparent, and objective process to ensure utilization of the best available evidence in assessing impacts and informing recommendations.
- Comprehensive approach to health – consideration of a broader definition of health to reinforce that a wide range of factors from all sectors of society determine physical, mental, and social well-being.

How Housing Affects Health

A pathway diagram visually demonstrates ways in which the proposal could affect health outcomes. As shown, the redevelopment of Madison Heights has the potential to directly and indirectly influence health outcomes including infectious and chronic disease, injury, and mental health.





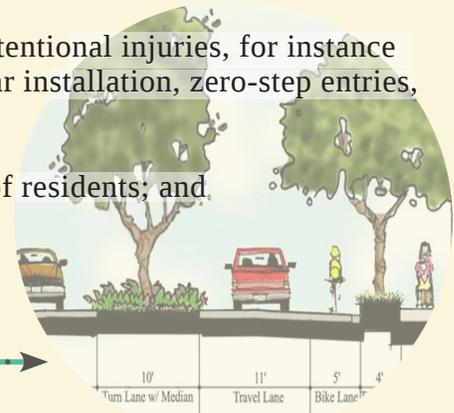
Key Findings and Recommendations

Based on existing community health status and evaluation of existing conditions and potential impacts, several overarching health issues were identified: safe housing; safe, active neighborhoods; access to healthy food and healthcare services; and thriving, resilient communities. Certain issues and recommendations fall into several categories, underlining the importance of integrating community efforts to address health as a whole.

Safe Housing

Safe, quality housing is an important determinant of health. Due to the high percentage of older and disabled adults in the three communities, special attention is paid to the redevelopment’s potential impact on these particular populations. Intentional design and construction can prevent expensive future renovations and repairs while increasing safety, mobility, and comfort of all residents. This HIA recommends:

- Inclusion of universal design features to prevent falls and other unintentional injuries, for instance wider hallways and doorways, reinforced bathroom walls for grab bar installation, zero-step entries, and easy-to-reach doorknobs, light switches, and thermostats;
- Improved noise insulation, given the increased number and density of residents; and
- Use of safe, non-toxic, and sturdy construction materials.



Safe, Active Neighborhoods

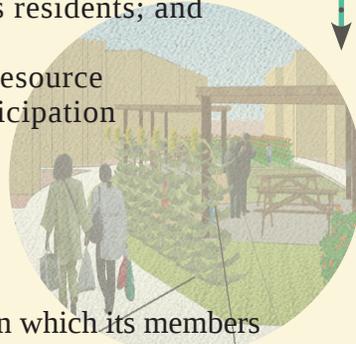
Regular physical activity can greatly reduce the risk of several chronic diseases, clearly impacting physical and mental health. A safe, walkable and bikable neighborhood helps ensure access to recreation and physical activity, especially for those who are less mobile or lack access to recreational centers. Considering the heavy, speeding traffic and inadequate shade cover that make the area inhospitable to pedestrians and bicyclists, recommendations include:

- “Complete street” policies for Dysart Road and Central Avenue that include ample lighting and shade, bicycle lanes, and a buffer between the road and sidewalk to improve safety for all multimodal users;
- Add sidewalks along the east side of Palo Verde Drive;
- Conduct a crosswalk study at the intersection of La Canada Boulevard and Palo Verde Drive; and
- A joint-use agreement between the First Southern Baptist Church and the City of Avondale to expand playgrounds and fields in the area surrounding Madison Heights.

Access to Healthy Foods and Healthcare Services

Healthy diet and nutrition are central to health and well-being, and access to quality healthcare services helps ensure prevention, detection, and treatment of disease and disability. Fortunately, there are several grocery stores that sell fresh produce in the Madison Heights neighborhood, and two primary health care clinics are within walking distance. Consequently, the recommendations of this report focus primarily on:

- Publicizing existing resources and services, including farmer's markets and public transportation options that could improve access to both healthy foods and healthcare services;
- An on-site community garden to promote healthy eating and physical activity while fostering greater community cohesion among Madison Heights residents; and
- A partnership with the Care 1st Resource Center to encourage resident participation in their new community garden.



Thriving, Resilient Communities

A thriving, resilient community is one in which its members are able to respond to and manage stress while feeling a sense of “togetherness” due to shared interests, action, and/or engagement. This sense of community—also called social cohesion—is crucial to physical and mental health, and can help protect against pain, discomfort, and disability. The varying ages, household structures, cultures, and levels of ability within the three communities can become an asset in the new Madison Heights if opportunities to form new, diverse social support networks are offered through the following ways:

- Formation of a resident council to improve communication, trust, and sense of autonomy and control;
- Design of multigenerational community areas that encourage social interaction and safe recreation for residents of all ages and abilities;
- Consistent and streamlined communication regarding the status and timeline of the proposed redevelopment to minimize residents’ uncontrollable stress;
- Limit school transfers and instability for children during the construction and relocation process; and
- Continued meetings with HIA Advisory Committee members to identify new resources and build on existing partnerships.

Health in Policy & Practice (HIP²) is supported by a grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Health Impact Project, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation or The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The Health Impact Project is dedicated to promoting the use of health impact assessments in the United States. More information, including a searchable map of HIA activity in the United States, is available at www.healthimpactproject.org.

Additional funding and support was provided by LISC Phoenix.

For more information on the Madison Heights HIA please visit www.azhip2.org/completed-hias.html or email info@azhip2.org.

HIP² is a catalyst for healthy communities throughout Arizona.



Health in Policy & Practice