

NEIGHBOURHOOD HEALTH INITIATIVES: MAKING A DIFFERENCE.



Social housing replacement units at 30 Regent Street, Toronto

Some examples of CRICH neighbourhood-level interventions research underway right now:

- **Peel Healthy Development Tool:** With the Region of Peel and colleagues from municipal planning departments, CRICH scientists are adapting a tool (previously used for environmental assessment) for use in health-oriented urban planning. Municipalities will be able to use this tool to judge the potential health impacts of proposed housing developments, taking into account how street connectivity, land use mix, and population density may encourage physical activity and reduce obesity. Learn more at www.peelregion.ca/health/urban.
- **Effects of the Regent Park Social Housing Redevelopment on Adult Mental Health and Child Development:** Canada's largest and oldest publicly funded community, Toronto's Regent Park, is being demolished and redeveloped to include new community, recreational, and cultural services. CRICH is looking at how the neighbourhood's revitalization is impacting residents' mental health. This study has the potential to substantially enhance our understanding of how social and physical environments shape health - more specifically, the mental health of low-income adults and their children. The first of its kind in Canada and one of the first in the world, this study will provide an important evidence base for social housing redevelopments and urban planning across Canada. Learn more at www.regentpark.ca.

Many health initiatives can take place at the neighbourhood level, and may complement and have certain advantages over interventions that focus on individuals.

WHAT IS A COMPLEX INTERVENTION?⁽¹⁸⁾

- A program or policy that has **multiple active ingredients** (no 'silver bullet').
- A program or policy that **relies upon participants' actions, volitions, or beliefs** to take effect.
- A program or policy whose implementation and outcomes are **affected by context**.
- A program or policy that has a "feedback effect" - the results of the intervention affect the intervention itself and **change over time**.
- A program or policy that **may require a lengthy period of time** to achieve full impacts.

WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD-LEVEL, POPULATION HEALTH INTERVENTION?

A neighbourhood-level, population health intervention is a program designed to improve the health of all residents of a neighbourhood. For example:

- **Improved city planning** can promote physical activity among residents, and can provide better access to healthy food choices. See the sidebar to the left to learn more about a tool that CRICH is developing to support healthy urban planning in the Peel region.
- **Neighbourhood redevelopment** (improvements to buildings, recreational services, green space, etc.) may improve residents' health. See the sidebar to the left for a description of the Regent Park Revitalization Initiative - a neighbourhood-level, complex, population health intervention happening in Toronto right now.

Because they benefit all residents in a neighbourhood, neighbourhood-level interventions can help avoid the stigmatization and victim-blaming that can sometimes come with targeting "at risk" individuals. It's also possible to use neighbourhood-level interventions to make a difference for a person who may be in need of services but, for various reasons, does not seek them.

THE BIG PICTURE: HOW DO NEIGHBOURHOODS AFFECT OUR HEALTH?

Research consistently shows that some of the strongest influences on whether we get sick or stay healthy are not individual behaviours or genetics, but the economic and social factors that affect the way we live. This means that a person's health can be affected by their income and education levels, race and ethnicity, immigration status, language, and community ties. These factors are all evident in – and often define – our neighbourhoods.

A growing body of literature shows that physical, psychological, social, and spatial neighbourhood characteristics (examples below), acting independently or interacting with individual level factors, can have a powerful influence on our health⁽¹⁻¹⁷⁾.

Examples of neighbourhood characteristics that can affect our health include:

Social Factors:

- High unemployment rates
- Social disorder (e.g. youth violence)
- Collective action to improve neighbourhoods

Psychological factors:

- How we identify with our neighbourhood
- Sense of security and satisfaction
- Collective stress

Policy factors:

- City planning & zoning practices (e.g. access to services and resources like public transportation, parks, grocery stores, primary health care)
- Safe places to walk/bike

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The Centre for Research on Inner City Health (CRICH) is part of the Keenan Research Centre in the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital.

Our mission is to reduce health inequities through innovative research that supports social change.