

NEIGHBOURHOODS & MENTAL HEALTH.



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

“Mental health” refers to the psychological well-being of a person. This may include positive mental states such as happiness, being satisfied with life, and being stress-free. Mental health includes poor psychological states such as being highly stressed, feeling anxious, fearful, bored, or unhappy. Mental health can also include mental illness like major depression.

The neighbourhood we live in can have an important influence on our mental health⁽¹⁻¹⁷⁾. Some examples from the literature:

- **Low neighborhood income** is significantly associated with a higher risk of hospitalization for a mental health disorder. This association exists even after adjustment for individual income and education⁽²⁶⁾.
- Residents in more **disadvantaged neighbourhoods** (e.g. high rates of poverty and mother-only households) have higher levels of depression than those who live in advantaged neighbourhoods^(27,28).
- **Neighbourhood green areas** can have positive effects on residents’ physical and mental health. An absence of well-maintained green areas can contribute to residents’ stress⁽³¹⁻³⁴⁾.
- **Social disorder** (e.g. crime) **and pervasive feelings of mistrust** in neighbourhoods are associated with poor mental health outcomes for residents^(7,8,12,21-25, 29).
- **High levels of social capital** (e.g. neighbourhood trust, social participation) can have a protective effect on individual mental health^(27,29,30).
- **Housing cost, quality, and security** can influence our mental health. High housing costs, poor-quality housing, and risk of eviction have been shown to lead to significant stress⁽³⁵⁻³⁹⁾.
- **A child’s neighbourhood** can play an important role in his or her physical, mental, and emotional development. Studies show that a person’s socioeconomic status in childhood can profoundly affect their health, performance in school, and achievement in later life⁽⁴⁰⁻⁴²⁾. See our [Neighbourhoods and healthy child development](#) primer for more details.

WHEN IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD A MENTAL HEALTH RISK?

When stressors in a person’s environment overwhelm his or her personal and social resources, depression or anxiety can result^(18-20, 43, 44). For example, a person who lives in a neighbourhood with high levels of crime and mistrust may respond by staying inside his or her home and limiting social exchanges to only close friends and family. This isolates that person from their social resources, such as family support. Feelings of isolation, resentment, and powerlessness can break down personal resources, like self esteem (see table below).

A neighbourhood stressor could be:	Social resources in a neighbourhood can include:	Residents’ personal resources can include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High unemployment or crime rates • Social disorder such as youth violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal social support from neighbours • Psychosocial resources like women’s groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of optimism and control over one’s own life • Self esteem

In the same way that neighbourhood stressors can compromise individuals’ ability to cope, some neighbourhood “buffers” such as community cohesion, social services, and green areas can have positive impacts on residents’ mental health⁽⁵⁾. There is great promise in improving mental health through targeted, neighbourhood-level interventions and programs. See our [Neighbourhood-level, complex interventions](#) primer for more details.

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