

For immediate release

2015 Report of the Director of Public Health for Montréal

Healthy and affordable housing: A public health issue for Montrealers

Montréal, 14 September 2015. About 210 000 households on the island of Montréal have to allocate more than 30% of their income to paying rent. Released today during the Montréal Forum on Housing and Health, *Toward Health and Affordable Housing – Report of the Director of Public Health for Montréal* reveals that 95 000 of those households suffered from food insecurity and over 50 000 did not have enough food due to a lack of money. “The problem caused by access to affordable housing prevents thousands of Montrealers from eating properly. We must quickly come up with solutions, because a poor diet can cause many health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and several cancers,” says Dr. Richard Massé, director of public health for Montréal.

Update on access to affordable housing

In his report, the director provides an update on affordable housing, particularly for Montréal families. The situation has deteriorated over the past 15 years. For example, rents for three-bedroom apartments rose 38%, while the rate of inflation increased by 28% during the same period. In 2014, the vacancy rate for three-bedroom apartments that were under \$700 a month was almost 0% on the island of Montréal, a difficult situation for low-income families with children.

Sanitary conditions of the rental housing stock

The report shows that in 2014, nearly 30% of Montréal households had at least one sanitation problem in their homes: 21% had visible mould or signs of water infiltration; 9% had mice or rats; 3.4% had bed bugs and 3.3% had cockroaches. Almost 30% of renter households reported having visible mould or signs of water infiltration in their homes, which is three times more than owner households (11%).

Health effects

Lack of access to healthy and affordable housing can have an impact on health and well-being. Food insecurity experienced by the thousands of households who don't have access to affordable housing can cause dietary deficiencies and poor mental and physical health in both children and adults. Children's physical development can also be affected over the long term and some may even suffer from overweight. In addition, sanitation problems such as mould, excess humidity and vermin are associated with development or aggravation of respiratory diseases such as asthma, allergic rhinitis or respiratory infections. On the island of Montréal, 5000 children suffer from asthma linked to excess humidity or mould in their homes.

Montréal's distinctiveness

According to data from the report, Montréal differs from the rest of the province in various ways and faces many challenges: a higher number of households live below the low income cutoff (26% vs 15%); there is a greater proportion of renter households (61% vs 39%); nearly twice as many families with children spend over 30% of their income on rent (29% vs 17%); and there are more dwellings built over 50 years ago (42% vs 28%).

Recommendations for different levels of government

In his report, Dr. Massé recommends that the federal government reinvest in social and community housing programs. He says that Canada is the only OECD country that does not have a comprehensive national housing strategy. He asks that Québec work in partnership with cities towards adopting a provincial housing policy to provide investment in social and community housing for families as well as a renovation program for private homes. The director also recommends that all municipalities on the island of Montréal adopt healthy housing regulations, and the ones that already have such regulations improve their practices by allotting the human, material and financial resources needed to apply those regulations.

Commitment of the director of public health for Montréal

For his part, the director will maintain a specialized regional team that can act on housing issues. He encourages the health and social services network to prioritize housing issues in its interventions with vulnerable populations. He will work with the City of Montréal in carrying out its action plan to combat unsanitary housing, and support the implementation of housing interventions proposed in its framework document entitled Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de l'île de Montréal.

To access the report and the synthesis report, go to: dsp.santemontreal.qc.ca

-30-

Source: Regional public health department
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