

# Health Goals for Housing\*

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## OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMITTEE

THE Committee on the Hygiene of Housing was established in 1937, at the request of the Housing Commission of the Health Organization of the League of Nations, and as one of the national committees corresponding with that Commission. Since that time it has served as the active housing arm of the American Public Health Association, and as a national clearing agency on health aspects of housing.

The committee's work is addressed to basic problems having practical significance for housing, nationally and internationally. Its aims have in the main been twofold: (a) to develop technical and administrative tools for housing improvement: standards for housing based on public health knowledge, means for evaluating departures from such standards, and legal and administrative procedures for the regulation and improvement of housing; (b) to enlist the interest of housers in health and of health workers in housing, and to promote coöperation between these workers and related groups in a comprehensive attack on the housing problem.

The members of the committee include representatives of public health and housing administration, city planning, sanitary engineering, architecture and construction, heating and ventilating research, sociology, home economics, research in statistical methods, and the law.

Programs are laid down and general policies shaped at annual or semiannual meetings of the full committee. Investigations are carried out by research subcommittees (including coöpted expert members from pertinent special fields), which conduct interim work-meetings as needed and are serviced by the committee's full-time staff.

The first adventure of the committee was the preparation of a report on "Basic Principles of Healthful Housing" (first published in 1938, with a slightly revised version in 1939). This report outlined in specific form thirty essential health needs which must be met if the dwelling is to provide a healthful environment for the family of the future. These are grouped under the four headings of Fundamental Physiological Needs, Fundamental Psychological Needs, Protection Against Contagion and Protection Against Accidents. This pioneer effort has been received with gratifying interest and has been generally accepted by authorities in many countries. It has recently been chosen by the American Institute of Planners as one of two American documents to be translated into Spanish, Russian, and other languages.

The committee next set about the expression of these Basic Principles in more concrete terms of performance through which the aims of adequate housing could be implemented by health officers and by public bodies and private groups and individuals interested in one

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way or another in the erection of future dwellings. Many collateral studies were carried out, some of which are described in a book, *Housing for Health*, in 1941, embodying the results of a conference called by the Milbank Memorial Fund. The major lines of work undertaken will be discussed in succeeding paragraphs of the present report. After ten years of the life of the committee, it seems timely to review our accomplishments and to chart our general course for the future.

This is particularly important, since the committee seems to stand today on the threshold of greater opportunity. Thanks to the continued generous support of the Milbank Memorial Fund and to the contributions made from time to time by other foundations and agencies, we have kept the ship afloat, although sometimes with anxious and difficult moments. The loyal support of the headquarters office of the American Public Health Association, the widespread and enthusiastic support of our efforts from the U. S. Public Health Service, city and state health officials, housers and planners, and the dawning interest in our work in other countries, gives us confidence that this work will continue—and on an expanded scale.

The program presented below embodies five major lines of activity, all more or less clearly visualized in earlier memoranda, but presenting, in greater or less degree, immediate challenges for the future. These objectives must be considered somewhat in detail. In many cases a present or clearly impending pressure on the committee from outside sources, growing out of recognition of past achievements, has been brought to our attention.

### I. *Measuring the Quality of Existing Housing*

A central question in any program of housing improvement is: How bad and how extensive are the conditions to be

remedied? The health deficiencies and general quality of housing in slum areas must be measured objectively if enforcement policies of local health and building departments are to be intelligently shaped, and if rehousing programs are to meet real needs. At the time of the committee's inception no adequate method for such measurement existed. The survey procedure most widely used by housing authorities in judging the need for public housing has been the Real Property Inventory, a method of very limited usefulness because of the few factors covered and dependence on subjective schedule items. Inspection data from local health and building departments have usually been even less helpful to the housing agencies, because problem areas have not been systematically covered, because of unclear inspection forms, lack of any qualitative summation of the findings, and other factors.

In response to requests from health officials and housing authorities, the committee has concentrated a major part of its effort in the past several years on developing an inspection and appraisal method to meet this need of both enforcement and reconstruction agencies.

The appraisal method provides for observing a sufficient number of objective factors in housing quality to permit conclusive judgment as to the healthful adequacy of individual dwellings and of entire problem areas. The measurement of housing quality is expressed through a system of scores which has been thoroughly tested and has gained the approval of competent statisticians in the field of scale measurement. The results are finally expressed in the form of quantitative penalty scores and of specific basic deficiencies. The latter can be immediately used by the health department or other regulating authorities for rehabilitation orders or condemnation. The penalty scores, when

plotted on a map, provide the planner and the housing authority, as well as the health officer, with invaluable data for long-range policies.

The appraisal procedure was prepared with the greatest care and with the counsel of the best available experts. It was tested and retested on a practical scale and finally embodied in three monographs: one on the general philosophies and procedures involved, one on the appraisal of the dwelling unit itself, and one on the appraisal of the environment—a wholly new contribution to the housing problem. The first of these three volumes was issued over a year ago, the second will be issued in the immediate future, and the third is complete in manuscript and only delayed by shortage of staff at the printers.

This part of our job is done; and the reception of the appraisal procedure has been more enthusiastic than we had dared to hope. It has been officially used in Brookline, Mass.; in various small semi-rural areas of Connecticut; in Los Angeles, Calif.; Milwaukee, Wis.; New Haven, Conn.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Portland, Me.; St. Louis, Mo.; and Washington, D. C.—as well as in Panama City, Republic of Panama. The studies at Los Angeles and Milwaukee have already been conducted for over a year.

In these cities the findings are being used as the basis for the coordinated administrative policy of official agencies. Philadelphia, after a preliminary trial, has embarked on large-scale use of the technique to guide its ambitious program of urban redevelopment. Wherever it has been really tested this appraisal method has won ardent converts; and the U. S. Public Health Service is making earnest efforts to promote its use throughout the country.

We have now an acceptable, and accepted, measuring stick for the substandardness of housing.

## II. *Establishment of Standards for Housing of the Future*

Our second problem, in a sense complementary to the first, was the formulation of broadly conceived but specific standards of performance for the new housing to be constructed in the years to come. We instituted this project in 1944 by the appointment of four subcommittees, to deal respectively with the Neighborhood as a suitable environment for the home, the Occupancy Standards involved in planning the dwelling, the Construction of the home and its' Equipment. These subcommittees, under the chairmanship, respectively, of Frederick J. Adams, James Ford (succeeded by Clarence W. Farrier), Henry S. Churchill and Helen W. Atwater (succeeded by Mary Rokahr) have attacked their problems effectively. We have recently decided to concentrate the last two of these reports into one so that the final series will include three volumes, as follows:

1. The Neighborhood Environment of the Home
2. Planning the Home for Occupancy
3. Construction and Equipment of the Home

In each of these three monographs it is hoped to formulate definite and specific performance standards with regards to neighborhood and site planning, planning of the home itself for occupancy and construction, and equipment of the home. "Standard" requirements will be suggested which should govern all new construction; and, where appropriate, a "lowest tolerable minimum" (failure to meet which would justify legal action for rehhabilitation or condemnation) has been indicated; also, at times an "optimum," desirable where financial resources make it possible to exceed the "standard."

In the preparation of this series of monographs, we have been fortunate in the cooperation of the National Housing Agency, which during the past fall and

winter worked with us closely and intimately so that our joint conclusions will have assurance of official backing.

Volume I of this series, dealing with the Neighborhood Environment of the Home, was approved for publication at the March meeting of the committee. The preparation of the other two monographs is now our primary task and it is hoped that this task may be completed by the close of the calendar year. It is vital that the work be accomplished without delay, since so much of the home construction now under way is of so poor a quality as to constitute little more than an addition to our slum problem.

### III. *Strengthening and Clarification of Housing Regulation and Their Enforcement*

A third major project, envisaged in our earlier memoranda, was the study and improvement of practice in the field of housing regulation by health departments and other official bodies. In this field there is a considerable amount of valid precedent. Though out of date in some particulars, Veiller's Model Housing Law of 1920 (adopted in whole or part by several states and cities) is a landmark of constructive thinking and sound practice. In the two decades since Veiller, many kinds of specific regulation have been developed for particular local needs, and various devices for improving enforcement practice or clarifying administrative responsibility have been tried.

The total picture of housing regulation, however, remains chaotic. Laws or ordinances are developed in one place and slavishly copied in another, where conditions may be wholly different. Requirements for new dwelling construction are generally buried in building codes, where preoccupation with the structural requirements of many other types of buildings results in neglect of fundamental health requirements such

as protection of water supplies and sewage disposal, adequate spacing of buildings, reasonable room sizes, or even the requirement of basic heating and sanitary facilities.

In most communities the requirements for existing dwellings (maintenance of repair, permitted occupancy, services required in multiple dwellings, etc.) are both archaic and uncodified. Scattered through many ordinances and codes, they are hopelessly obscure as a basis for enforcement even where their provisions are reasonably in line with modern thinking.

From its earliest days, the committee has been repeatedly approached by local and state health officials and by the national housing and public health agencies for advice or assistance in framing or revising regulatory housing laws and ordinances, in order that these might reflect contemporary health criteria of housing adequacy.

In response to such requests the field of legislative control has been recognized as the third concentration area for the committee's investigative effort, and basic studies addressed to urgent practical problems in this field have been initiated.

It has seemed to the committee desirable to differentiate, in our initial approach, between Building Codes, designed to cover the erection of new structures, and Housing Codes, governing action with regard to rehabilitation or condemnation of existing dwellings. We recognize that some states have "Housing Codes" dealing with both new and old dwelling structures. On a local level, however, this combination rarely exists; and for the present discussion, we shall use the terms as defined above. In this sense, the Building Code normally deals with all structures, including dwellings, and is commonly enforced by a building department. The Housing Code, in the sense in which we have used the term, deals with occupied

dwellings and—in large measure—with conditions of dilapidation and occupancy. Yet the two fields are obviously closely related. In both instances, three different problems are basically involved:

1. What should be the basis, in administrative law, upon which such codes should be established and how specific should they be, that is, how far should authority on detail be delegated to the enforcing agency?
2. What specific body or bodies in a municipality should exercise the power of preparing such codes and enforcing them?
3. What should be the substantive content of such codes?

The subcommittee appointed to deal with this problem, under the leadership of Charles S. Ascher, has made substantial contributions in several brief reports on the first of these questions. In an address on "The Regulation of Housing," delivered at the Inservice Training Course in Housing at Ann Arbor last August, he presented an admirable exposition of the subject and demonstrated his conviction that housing regulation should be accomplished—not by expansion of the general powers of the health department to control nuisances under the common law, and not by invoking the right of eminent domain, but by the adoption of a single uniform code dealing with all aspects of health and safety under the police powers of the community. The substance of Mr. Ascher's article, if presented in more formal terms, would be an excellent report for our committee, and we hope that it may be developed in such fashion during the next few months. It is hoped that the report may point out the extent to which it should be possible to reduce both Building and Housing Codes to relatively simple performance standards, delegating to the enforcing authorities the power to determine the degree to which particular conditions meet such broad performance standards.

The minuteness of the specifications

in many present codes is nothing less than fantastic, and works incalculable harm by freezing someone's haphazard judgment of the moment into shackles which may impede sound engineering progress and increase construction costs for decades to come.

A second vital point relating to administrative machinery for enforcement is indirectly answered by Mr. Ascher's subcommittee in the recommendation that the Housing Code be framed by a committee to be set up in a given community to represent various agencies involved in housing supervision. Professor Spencer Parratt, in a valuable recent paper on "Administrative-Legal Methodologies in Elimination of Substandard Housing,"\* appears to favor transferring all such powers to a separate housing administration. The health department, however, has certain fundamental day-by-day responsibilities with regard to health which can scarcely be abrogated. It is fundamentally bad administration to have two or more sets of inspectors routinely visiting the same premises for closely allied purposes. It would seem wiser, instead of introducing a sixth new agency in the regulatory field, to suggest a procedure by which the health department, the building department, the fire department, the police department, and the zoning board would cooperate in framing both Building and Housing Codes. Special legislation might be desirable which would permit the issuance of jointly supported Building Codes and Housing Codes, but in any case the existing powers of health departments to draft housing regulations having the force of law should be preserved.

The Building Code might logically be enforced by the building department, which grants permits for all new structures, while the Housing Code might

\* *Law and Contemporary Problems: Housing*, School of Law, Duke University, Vol. XII, Winter, 1947, p. 110.

primarily be enforced by the health department (with the building and fire departments cooperating where desirable). In any case our committee should decide on a recommended policy—or alternative policies—and formulate its conclusions with a minimum of delay.

Finally, the third problem—that of the substantive content of a Housing Code—has not as yet been attacked effectively by our committee, although the appraisal procedure and the “minimum tolerable” conditions in our monographs on standards for future housing furnish much of the material needed for such a code.

Action in this field—and prompt action—seems to be of vital importance. It has therefore been decided to appoint a new Subcommittee on Substantive Content of a Housing Code. This subcommittee will be headed by Health Commissioner E. R. Krumbiegel of Milwaukee, and should include representatives of the fields of building inspection and fire protection. Our present Subcommittee on Housing Regulation should attempt to answer question 1 above. Both subcommittees should cooperate in answering question 2. The new subcommittee should deal with question 3.

In regard to questions 1 and 2, our subcommittees might properly deal with both Building and Housing Codes, but in approach to question 3 we believe that we should, first of all, approach the question of the substantive content of the Housing Code. There are three reasons for this order of approach. In the first place, Housing Codes frequently fall within the direct responsibility of our primary client, the health officer, while Building Codes do not. In the second place, Building Codes are fully crystallized in forms which are generally archaic and inadequate but supported by powerful vested interests and traditions, while Housing Codes are either wholly absent or still fluid and can

readily be improved. Finally, perhaps the best way to approach the citadel of the Building Code is to establish good Housing Codes and then develop the deficiencies of the Building Codes by demonstration of the inadequacies and unreasonablenesses of their requirements.

#### IV. *Promotion of Use of the Committee's Findings*

The first three objectives which have been outlined all deal with the development of standards, procedures, and policies which we hope may be applied by others. Without such application, they are merely pious aspirations on paper. Our committee, although primarily a research body, has recognized from the outset both an opportunity and a responsibility for promoting wider understanding and habits of cooperative attack among those agencies and professions whose functions impinge on the public health aspects of housing. Such understanding and attack have been promoted first by the varied composition of the committee, whose membership brings together expert technicians and administrators from a dozen branches of the housing and public health movements, and second by the selection of its projects and the character of its open meetings, at which even wider groups have been convened to cooperate in the committee's program or to review parallel developments from other sources. A considerable list could be adduced of the significant lines of investigation by other groups, or of wholly new kinds of inter-agency cooperation which are directly or indirectly traceable to this conscious emphasis of the committee.

Certain main lines of essential public relations are clearly indicated, as follows:

##### *A. Promotion of Use of the Appraisal Procedure:*

1. To stimulate official and professional interest in the practical signif-

icance of the appraisal method by obtaining early publication in appropriate journals of the comparative results (graphically presented, with simple text) of three to five of the studies now completed or in process (Milwaukee, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, St. Louis, perhaps Washington or New Haven).

2. To extend the machinery available for local installations of the technique by carrying through with the U. S. Public Health Service contemplated training of housing specialist personnel of its district offices.

3. To interpret accumulating experience with the technique (for the general benefit of users and for needed adaptations to regional or other problems) by maintaining an advisory relation to the U. S. Public Health Service.

4. To promote the use of the technique, internationally, with suitable modification, by rendering consulting service as desired by foreign agencies (a forthcoming Spanish publication of a study at Panama is expected to create demand in Latin America).

5. To encourage inclusion in the 1950 U. S. Housing Census of improved schedule items or tabulation practices developed for this technique, by resumption of coöperative arrangement with the Bureau of the Census, with appropriate test studies of proposed Census material.

6. To adapt the procedures to rural or other special types of housing, by coöperative studies with agencies desiring such adaptation.

*B. Promotion of Acceptance of our Monographs on Standard Housing by:*

1. Complete and prompt publication of our scheduled reports on Occupancy, Construction and Equipment standards.

2. Furthering the acceptance of such standards by the building industry, the real estate groups, groups interested in the financing of housing and various public bodies with responsibilities for

housing supervision, through brief and popular summaries for their professional meetings and publications.

3. Promoting consumer demand for proper standards in housing, through non-technical articles in popular magazines of national circulation.

*C. Strengthening and Clarifying Regulatory Housing Procedures by:*

1. Publishing as a committee document the housing regulation subcommittee's findings and recommendations as to administrative provisions in housing control.

2. Publishing, in combination, or in series with the above, a statement of the essential substantive provisions of housing regulation—a statement which will carry to the point of quantitative specifications in so far as possible. The steady flow to committee headquarters of inquiries in this field indicates its growing importance to health departments, and suggests the urgency of committee publication. Release before the end of 1947 of both statements noted above—even though one or both may be provisional—should be considered most desirable.

3. Stimulating adoption of regulations embodying the principles developed, through joint efforts with the U. S. Public Health Service, state health departments, and other means to be explored.

4. Interpreting experience under such regulations, as a basis for future improvement thereof, through subcommittee contacts with adopting localities or states; and publishing from time to time such interpretation and suggested improvements as experience may warrant.

*D. General Relations with the Public Health and Allied Profession:*

If we are to attain the goals in view it seems important:

1. To stimulate the assumption by

American health departments of their full responsibility in broad housing programs, by creation of a subcommittee charged with exploration of this problem. Such a group would presumably consider means of channelling the technical output of the committee to health departments, but would be concerned with other matters also. For instance, what training should be offered in public health schools to provide personnel for the housing functions of health departments?

2. To promote the effective participation of health departments in the housing programs, by using available machinery of the American Public Health Association (Committee on Administrative Practice, Engineering and Health Officers Sectional organizations, *American Journal of Public Health*) as a channel for the procedures developed by the committee.

3. To stimulate the development of housing machinery within the World Health Organization, and through it the development of other national committees on the hygiene of housing; by calling attention to international interest of health agencies in the work and output of our committee, and by other means to be explored.

4. To strengthen interprofessional cooperation in the fields of housing, public health, city planning, and related academic disciplines; by systematic exchange of our publications with leading national and international bodies in these fields and by participation in their professional conferences.

#### V. Research

"Research" is a term not easy to define. Our reports, dating back to the *Basic Principles of Healthful Housing* have all been founded on research, and research not confined to the library but extending to important studies of air conditioning, illumination, and sound control in the field. Our appraisal pro-

cedure rests firmly on the basis of exhaustive field research.

It seems likely, however, that fundamental investigation must play a larger part in our future program. The preparation of the monographs on standards has revealed many serious gaps in knowledge which remain to be filled. Below is a list of certain specific topics which have been brought forcibly to our attention.

1. Determination of the most desirable levels of illumination for the performance of various household tasks, to resolve the present difference of opinion between psychologists and illuminating engineers in regard to this problem, presumably in cooperation with the Illuminating Engineering Society and other bodies.

2. A further definition of the noise levels compatible with human health and comfort (to perfect existing standards which have little substantial basis); and a study of the quality and effect of various outdoor noises and of the influence of site planning and natural barriers in reducing such noises.

3. A study of the influence of space allowances and space organization in the dwelling upon household operation, psychological reactions and emotional tensions, perhaps in cooperation with other organizations, including the National Institute of Mental Health.

4. A study of the influence of residential density upon the load on community facilities and the cost of such facilities, in cooperation with housing management and various specialized groups concerned.

5. A laboratory analysis of the basic factors in floor construction affecting safety and fatigue. This would involve the development of instruments for measuring both resistance and resiliency of flooring materials and psychological study of their effects upon the human organism.

6. Development of adequate techniques for the evaluation of the influence of good housing upon physical, emotional, and social health. A careful study of this problem is now being carried on by a special joint committee appointed by the American Public Health Association and the National Association of Housing Officials.

These are only a few of many suggestions which might be made. It seems desirable that the committee, in this field, should undertake:



1. To appoint a special subcommittee on housing research to formulate a series of the more important problems which call for solution, and to suggest the general lines along which such problems might be solved.

2. To foster needed further research in the field of housing standards, by systematic statement of those problems on which present knowledge is inadequate; with special reference to problems within the competence of the U. S. Public Health Service, American Public Health Association, state health departments, schools of public health or other health agencies.

3. To encourage a rational distribution of housing research effort, by exchange of information with other national bodies concerned with housing, public health, planning or other allied research (Social Science Research Council; U. S. Public Health Service; University of Wisconsin Conference on Housing Research; National Association of Housing Officials; technical divisions of National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, Federal Housing Administration; National Research Council; Bureau of Standards, etc.; also similar bodies abroad).

4. To prosecute such studies as may be appropriate to the abilities and scale of the committee, by assignment of subcommittees and staff to selected investigations.

It is fully realized that such a program as that outlined will seem Utopian. Yet "a man's reach should exceed his grasp"; and the present progress of the committee's work would have seemed Utopian when the committee was established ten years ago.

We have, first of all, to apply our limited resources to the completion of our two unfinished jobs, the preparation and publication of the standards monographs and the development of official recommendations with regard to the methodology and substantive content of regulatory legislation.

We cannot promote policies we have not clearly formulated and adopted. Yet the formulation of policies is of limited value unless they are applied. If the general lines of activity outlined above seem sound to the committee, additional available funds will automatically determine their practicability.

But funds are rarely available without a bold and far-reaching program.

#### PRINCIPAL COMMITTEE PUBLICATIONS

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5. Ives, James E. Lighting for Low-cost Housing. *Pub. Health Rep.*, June 3, 1938, pp. 805-901. Revised 1940.
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  - Housing Codes. Morton G. Lloyd.
  - Health Centers and Health Services in Housing Projects. John C. Leukhardt.
  - Heating, Lighting, and Noise Conditions in Recent Housing Projects. Allan A. Twichell.
  - Heating and Ventilation of the Home. C.-E. A. Winslow.
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12. Twichell, Allan A., and Solow, Anatole. A Technique for the Appraisal of Housing in Urban Problem Areas from the Viewpoint of Public Health. *Planners' J.*, July-Sept., 1942.
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15. A New Method for Measuring the Quality of Urban Housing. Report of the Committee on the Hygiene of Housing. C.-E. A. Winslow, Dr.P.H., *Chairman*. *A.J.P.H.*, 33, 6:729-740 (June), 1943.
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17. Standards for Healthful Housing.
  - The Neighborhood Environment of the Home. In preparation.
  - Planning the Home for Occupancy. In preparation.
  - Construction and Equipment of the Home. In preparation.

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