

BUILDING COMMUNITY HEALTH THROUGH HOUSING INVESTMENTS

Better Buildings Challenge Multifamily partner [Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation](#) has received an \$800,000 grant from the Boston Medical Center (BMC) to rehabilitate 59 housing units to be both healthier and more energy-efficient. Codman's rehabilitation is one of nine properties receiving healthy housing investments from BMC, totaling \$6.5 million in upgrades for some of Boston's poorest neighborhoods. The initiative also includes \$1 million to help families fight evictions, \$1 million to create a housing stabilization program for people with complex medical issues, and \$1 million to support a new grocery store in the Roxbury neighborhood, according to WBUR, [Boston's NPR news station](#).^[1]



BMC is part of a growing trend for hospitals and health organizations around the country to invest in healthy housing. Roughly half of the hospitals in the U.S. are nongovernment non-profit community hospitals. To maintain their non-profit status, these hospitals must devote at least 5% of their expenditures to improving community health. Hospitals traditionally spend these funds, known as community benefit spending, on activities like charitable (free) healthcare services, financial contributions, and medical research. However, many hospitals have begun allocating community benefit spending to healthy housing upgrades, recognizing housing as a key social determinant of health.

WBUR interviewed Dr. Megan Sandel, one of the leaders of BMC's housing initiative, who said, "Only about 10 to 20 percent of health is actually determined by what type of health care you get. Much more [significant are] the social determinants of health -- where you live, what your environment is like. And so more and more we're starting to screen for people's social determinants." Sandel said there was little resistance among BMC officials to investing in housing, but it's an experiment that still needs to be proven. "I think where people need to be convinced is in the business model. Can we actually show that this is something that's going to reduce costs and improve health outcomes?" She added that it has to make sense for BMC's bottom line.

BMC is not the only hospital in Massachusetts looking to improve health by improving housing. Boston Children's Hospital recently set aside \$5 million, while Baystate Medical Center in Springfield is also dedicating funds to housing. In a statement, a spokesperson for Massachusetts General Hospital said MGH, Partners HealthCare, and Brigham Health are looking at possible investments to benefit local underserved communities.

When asked by WBUR about the rehabilitation project, Codman's Executive Director stated, "I want it to look just as handsome on the inside as it looks on the outside. I want the residents to feel like they have an ownership stake in the property... I want the residents to actually be healthier as a result."

^[1] *Why Boston Medical Center is Investing in Housing, Simón Rios, WBUR Radio, June 27, 2018*