



Planning Health Evaluations of

HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOOD INTERVENTIONS

Lessons from Latin American Cities

Housing and neighborhood interventions can have important health impacts but there is still limited evidence of their effects. Evaluations can provide important information on how interventions can be designed to maximize health benefits and minimize unintended consequences.

This policy brief shares lessons and recommendations from the Salud Urbana en América Latina (SALURBAL) project for planning strong evaluations.

Key points

- **Housing and neighborhood interventions are important strategies to improve health in cities and reduce urban health inequities**
- **Evaluations of the health effects of housing and neighborhood interventions can provide valuable evidence to guide future policy decisions**
- **Partnerships between policymakers, researchers and communities can help to design and implement effective evaluations and facilitate learning across domains of practice and across cities**

National and local policymakers should plan for and support health evaluations to generate evidence that can guide policy decisions

Potential Health Benefits of Housing and Neighborhood Interventions¹⁻⁶

Components of Housing and Neighborhood Interventions

Housing Improvements

- Renovations or expansions
- improvements to floors, windows, walls, roofs
- Insulation, temperature and noise control
- Reduction of hazards such as molds or lead
- Vector and pest control

Civic Participation

- Creation of community advocacy organizations or forums
- Participation in decision-making

Housing Security

- Legalization of tenure
- Prefabricated homes
- Social Housing
- Subsidies
- Financing
- Rental vouchers

Provision of Services

- Social assistance
- Job training
- Access to health care
- Schools, libraries and educational programs
- Recreation facilities
- Microenterprise and income generation
- Access to healthy foods such as community gardens, markets

Neighborhood Improvements

- Access to electricity
- Connections to water or sanitation
- Improvements to streets, sidewalks and lighting
- Violence Prevention
- Traffic mitigation
- Improved access to and enhanced public transportation
- Creation and upgrading of public spaces and parks
- Removal of environmental hazards such as flood or waste management

Housing and neighborhood interventions can improve health in the short-term and in the long-term^{2,3,7-14}

Housing Improvements	Housing Security	Neighborhood Improvements	Provision of Services	Civic Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Infectious & water-borne diseases ↓ Respiratory problems & allergies ↓ Anxiety, depression & stress ↓ Household injuries ↓ Infant & child mortality ↓ Early mortality & disability in adults ↓ Chronic diseases ↑ General health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Respiratory problems & allergies ↓ Household injuries ↓ Anxiety, depression & stress ↓ Infant & child mortality ↓ Early mortality & disability in adults ↓ Chronic diseases ↑ General health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Infectious & water-borne diseases ↓ Violence & injuries ↑ Walkability & physical activity ↓ Respiratory problems ↓ Anxiety, depression & stress ↓ Infant & child mortality ↓ Early mortality & disability in adults ↓ Chronic diseases ↓ Violence & injuries ↑ General health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ Healthy behaviors ↑ Nutrition ↑ Vaccination coverage ↑ Access to preventative health care ↑ Food security & healthy food access ↓ Obesity & overweight ↓ Infant & child mortality ↓ Chronic diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ Social support ↑ Improved neighborhood environments & associated health benefits ↑ General health
<p> ↓ Long-term Effects ↓ Short-term Effects </p>				

Recommendations

With careful planning, evaluations of the health effects of housing and neighborhood interventions can be designed to improve the strength of the evidence they generate.

Think Ahead



- Plan for evaluations when designing interventions so that data can be collected before the intervention begins and so that the implementation of the intervention can be well documented
- Use evaluations as a tool to improve policymaking and receive feedback about what is working and what isn't, including unintended negative effects

Build Partnerships



- Create partnerships with multisectoral stakeholders, community organizations and civil society groups to involve them in the design, implementation and interpretation of the evaluation
- Identify research partners that can support the development of a strong evaluation design
- Maintain dialogue with communities surrounding the intervention's history and potential benefits of evaluation activities

Identify Questions to Answer



- Make specific predictions about how health is likely to be affected by the intervention and how long it might take for a change to be noticeable

Tailor to the Type of Intervention



- Select an evaluation design appropriate for the type of intervention and with data at the appropriate level (individual, household or neighborhood)
- Consider conducting the evaluation in stages, measuring different expected outcomes at each stage, to account for the need to observe effects of the intervention in the short-term and long-term

Make Use of Existing Data When Possible



- Identify sources of existing data like household surveys, death certificates and hospital records and determine how they could be used for an evaluation of the intervention
- Assess quality of the data and if it can accurately measure and describe health outcomes and other characteristics of households and neighborhoods
- Plan for surveys, observations, and other data collection if needed

Be Flexible



- Reevaluate and modify evaluation designs and timeline to account for new interventions, outside changes that arise, or other influences

SALURBAL Project | Evaluating the health impact of housing and neighborhood interventions

Salud Urbana en América Latina (SALURBAL), Urban Health in Latin America, is a multi-country project that studies how urban environments and urban policies affect the health of city residents throughout Latin America¹⁵. SALURBAL is conducting evaluations of housing and neighborhood interventions in Brazil, Chile, and Colombia.

Urban Transformations and Health: The Case of TransMiCable || Bogotá, Colombia

TransMiCable is Latin America's newest cable car and was implemented in Ciudad Bolívar, in Bogotá, Colombia in December 2018. Ciudad Bolívar is a peripheral locality with high rates of poverty, violence, informal housing, and informal transportation services. TransMiCable is one part of a larger integrated urban development project.

Program Components:

- cable car system
- facilities for recreation and cultural activities
- community centers
- markets
- a tourism office
- a citizen services office
- a project focused on housing improvements
- a project for reduction of environmental hazards (landslides and/or flooding)



SALURBAL researchers at the Universidad de los Andes are studying the effects of TransMiCable's implementation on health (health-related quality of life, respiratory diseases, homicides) and health behaviors (physical activity). Researchers are also studying its effects on environmental and social factors likely to be connected to health (pollution, transportation accessibility, neighborhood features, employment, social capital, leisure time).

2,062 residents of Ciudad Bolívar, served by TransMiCable, and a comparison nearby locality (San Cristóbal) were surveyed before the implementation of TransMiCable.



Researchers used questionnaires, devices to measure physical activity (accelerometers), and mobile apps to collect data. Similar data will be collected approximately one year later. Researchers will compare changes in health and behaviors of residents in the two areas.



To learn more about SALURBAL's policy evaluation studies and preliminary results, visit:

www.lacurbanhealth.org

SALURBAL Project | Evaluating the health impact of housing and neighborhood interventions

Measuring the Effects of Housing and Neighborhood Improvements on Well-being and Health

|| Santiago and Valparaíso, Chile

Since 2018, the Programa de Regeneración de Conjuntos Habitacionales has delivered improvements to social housing communities. Components include the renovation of existing complexes, construction of new units, and neighborhood improvements. The program is implemented by the Chilean Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MINVU).¹⁷

Program Components:

- renovation of existing complexes
- construction of new units
- neighborhood improvements



SALURBAL researchers at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile are studying the effects of these interventions on general health status, respiratory conditions and mental health.

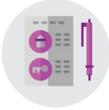


1,000 households in two neighborhoods are being surveyed before, during, and after the completion of the intervention, over a three year-period from 2018-2021. Researchers are surveying household residents about their wellbeing and health, and will observe and document the conditions of homes and public spaces. Researchers will compare changes observed in homes receiving the intervention to any changes observed in similar homes that did not receive the intervention during the same time period.

Health Evaluation of Vila Viva || Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Beginning in 2005, the Vila Viva program has delivered interventions to informal settlements in Belo Horizonte.

Program Components:

- Housing improvements 
- Housing security like legalization of tenure 
- Neighborhood improvements like new streets, street connections, water, sanitation, and flood control 
- Services like health education, recreational and other community facilities, job and income-generation 

SALURBAL researchers from Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais are studying the effects of Vila Viva interventions on the number and causes of deaths and hospitalizations for health conditions such as

asthma

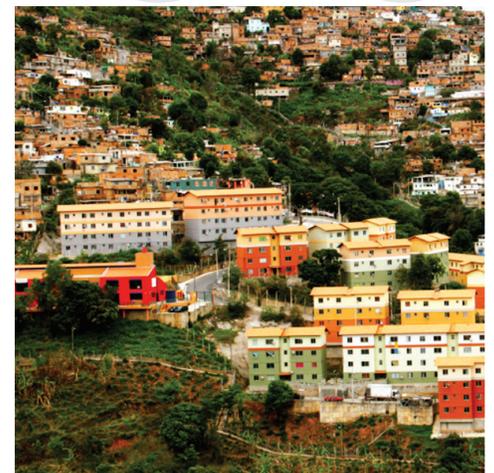
violence & injuries

dengue

tuberculosis



Researchers are using data from death and hospitalization records along with data from Vila Viva household surveys. Death and hospitalization data are linked to the neighborhood in which they occurred, which allows for comparisons between Vila Viva neighborhoods and neighborhoods that did not experience any intervention.



Vila Viva is implemented by the Urbanization Company of Belo Horizonte (URBEL).¹⁶

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LAC-URBAN HEALTH

Urban Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean



The Urban Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC-Urban Health) seeks to promote regional and multisectoral collaboration in order to generate evidence on the drivers of urban health and health equity and translate this evidence into policies to improve health across cities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Salud Urbana en América Latina (SALURBAL), Urban Health in Latin America, is a five-year project that studies how urban environments and urban policies impact the health of city residents throughout Latin America. SALURBAL's findings inform policies and interventions to create healthier, more equitable, and more sustainable cities worldwide. SALURBAL is funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Learn more about LAC-Urban Health and SALURBAL

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