

POPULATION HEALTH FORUMS

Rx for a Better Home: Philadelphia's Healthy Rowhouse Program

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It may seem peculiar to feature an architect for a Population Health Forum, yet it's really aligned with national efforts for a [Health in All Policies](#) approach. The relationship between housing, the built environment, and social determinants of health relate directly to the overall health of the population.

Kiki Bolender is principal at Bolender Architects, where current projects include renovation to a City of Philadelphia Health Care Center in the Northeast. Bolender's Forum presentation focused specifically on the [Healthy Rowhouse Project](#), an initiative aimed at: creating a robust housing policy that includes repair and preservation of existing rowhouses; improving residents' health (with an emphasis on removing asthma triggers); and providing good quality affordable housing.

Bolender first gave a historical overview and description of Philadelphia's rowhomes. For example, 70% of all housing units are rowhouses; of those, 75% are over 50 years old; 40% of all renters live in single-family homes. In the past, rowhomes were built near factories to keep residents close. Though there was a strong social fabric, working conditions weren't always safe. Today, Philadelphia generally lacks affordable housing in good condition, in safe areas.

Funded by the [Oak Foundation](#), the Healthy Rowhouse Project plans to repair 5,000 privately owned homes by very low income renters, homeowners and landlords each year. Repairing 10-20 homes on one block instead of random interventions is ideal.

The Healthy Rowhouse Project is really focused on two themes: making the inside of the home more conducive to health and reviving the healthy cityscape. One way to achieve this is through repairs that reduce dampness, therefore decreasing chances of

poor health and in particular asthma. 40% of asthma cases are associated with triggers in the home. Repairs such as plumbing, dry wall, and roofing have wide-ranging positive consequences, explains Bolender. Helping long term home owners is ideal. "We like to talk about wealth and equality rather than income," states Bolender, meaning that housing for a homeowner is related to wealth. Investment and giving people choices is an important step and helps to guard against gentrification. As for renters, the project strives to work with landlords to improve housing without raising rent.

Bolender discussed potential financial sources for home repair which include banks, new National Housing Trust Fund, HUD Healthy Homes Funding, social impact investing and municipal bonds.

Bolender closed the Forum session by outlining future goals of the project which emphasize the use of data and increased funding to enhance the project.

