

October 20, 2011

New HUD “Moving to Opportunity” results spur calls for reform

The first results from the final “Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration” (MTO) show significant reductions in obesity and diabetes for women who are given the opportunity to move from high poverty to low poverty neighborhoods. MTO was a HUD-funded five-city experimental study that spanned 10-15 years.

The new MTO study results, released this morning in an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, support the position of civil rights advocates, who have urged HUD for years to reform its largest low income housing program, the Section 8 voucher program.

“This study should be a wake-up call for HUD and other federal and state agencies – we need to do more to help low income families move to healthier neighborhoods,” said Philip Tegeler, Executive Director of the DC-based Poverty & Race Research Action Council. “We also need to work to make poor neighborhoods healthier, but the primary lesson from this research is the need to expand choices for families.”

[“MTO needs to be more than an ‘experiment’ – it should be built into the federal Section 8 program so that families have the information they need, assistance in finding apartments in healthier neighborhoods, and rent levels that do not limit their choices to the poorest communities.”](#)

Section 8 is the largest federal housing program, serving more than 2 million families nationwide. In the past, critics have charged that the program’s payment levels and other program features steer families into high poverty, less healthy neighborhoods. HUD is now working to improve the program, with proposed changes in voucher rent standards and “portability” rules that have sometimes made it hard for families to move across city and town lines. Programs like the successful Baltimore Housing Mobility Program have shown that it is possible to help families make voluntary moves to healthier, lower poverty communities on a larger scale.

Additional study results are expected soon on health outcomes for asthma, mental health, and exposure to violence.

Link to the NEJM article: <http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMsa1103216>

Contacts for more information

Philip Tegeler, Executive Director, Poverty & Race Research Action Council,
ptegeler@prrac.org, 202-360-3906

Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, Northeastern University School of Public Health
d.acevedogarcia@neu.edu
(617) 373-2022

Dr. Brian Smedley, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington, DC,
202-789-3516
bsmedley@jointcenter.org

Stefanie DeLuca, Johns Hopkins University, sdeluca@jhu.edu, (410) 516-7629

David Williams, Harvard School of Public Health, dwilliam@hsph.harvard.edu
(617) 432-6807

Ingrid Gould Ellen, New York University, ingrid.ellen@nyu.edu
(212) 998 - 7533

Margery Austin Turner, The Urban Institute, Washington, DC, maturner@ui.urban.org
(202) 261-5543

Resources on housing mobility and health

Prescription for a New Neighborhood? Housing Vouchers as a Public Health Intervention (Policy Brief, Poverty & Race Research Action Council, 2010)
http://www.prrac.org/pdf/prescription_for_a_new_neighborhood.pdf

David Williams, Michelle Sternthal & Rosalind Wright, *Social Determinants: Taking the Social Context of Asthma Seriously*, 123 PEDIATRICS (2009)

Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle & Williams, *Toward A Policy-Relevant Analysis Of Geographic And Racial/Ethnic Disparities In Child Health*, 27 HEALTH AFFAIRS 321 (2008)

Resources on housing mobility generally

New Homes, New Neighborhoods, New Schools: A Progress Report on the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (PRRAC and the Baltimore Regional Housing Campaign, October 2009), <http://www.prrac.org/pdf/BaltimoreMobilityReport.pdf>

Connecting Families to Opportunity: a Resource Guide for Housing Choice Voucher Program Administrators (PRRAC, July 2009),
<http://www.prrac.org/pdf/connectingfamilies.pdf>

Keeping the Promise: Preserving and Enhancing Housing Mobility in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program (Poverty & Race Research Action Council 2005),
http://www.prrac.org/full_text.php?text_id=1048&item_id=9646&newsletter_id=0&header=Current%20Projects