The quality of housing has major implications for people’s health. Characteristics such as living space (crowding), low or high indoor temperatures, injury hazards in the home, water quality, air quality, neighbourhood noise, asbestos, lead, tobacco smoke, radon and accessibility of housing for people with functional impairments are all of relevance. Preventive measures related to housing construction, renovation, use and maintenance can promote better overall health.
PRIORITY SETTINGS FOR ACTION

THE PROBLEM:

828 M
828 million people are living in slums.

The World’s population will double by 2050 and will require adequate housing solutions. Poor housing conditions create multiple health risks.

Households are an entry point for a multifactorial approach to improve many housing conditions as part of the drive to create a healthier living environment.

HOUSING CAN IMPROVE WELL-BEING THROUGH ACTING ON:

Energy use  Toxic materials  Water, sanitation and hygiene  Accessibility

Indoor air pollution  Dampness and mould control

Overcrowding  Home injury hazards  Noise  Insulation
WHAT ARE KEY ACTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT?

Key actions on housing include the following:

1. Health criteria
   Incorporate health criteria in housing and construction policies.

2. Cooperation
   Facilitate cooperation between the health sector and other relevant sectors to foster implementation of those policies.

3. Intersectoral planning
   Facilitate intersectoral planning and collaboration at all levels, and allocate sufficient resources.

4. Capacities
   Develop the capacities of health professionals to better identify and prevent environmental exposure due to substandard housing conditions.

5. Knowledge and evidence
   Fill the gaps in knowledge and evidence on housing risks for health, and estimate the disease burden from housing.

6. Slum upgrading
   Promote health-based slum upgrading strategies.
MAIN WHO ACTIONS
Possible WHO actions on housing include the following:

Norms and guidance
Provide norms and guidance to address housing and health through the development of WHO housing and health guidelines.

Implementation
Provide support for the implementation of the guidelines through the development of tools for addressing housing and health and disseminate good practices.

Awareness and communication
Raise awareness and develop communication materials on key housing recommendations for health and reach out to various stakeholders, from policymakers to users.

Housing upgrading
Synthesize evidence on major risks in slums and propose key housing upgrading interventions with documented health benefits.

Capacities
Build capacities of health workers to understand the mental and physical health impacts of housing.

Prioritized action
Advocate prioritized action on the health impacts of housing policies with other key United Nations agencies, for example UN-Habitat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

SECTORAL POLICIES INTERACTING WITH HEALTH IN HOUSEHOLDS
(in addition to health authorities)
Cooperation with the following sectors may be required to sustainably reduce risks to health:

Energy

Land use planning

Water and sanitation

Industry (incl. construction)

Further information: