

Affordable Housing in Macomb County: A MAPP Action Plan

HLAD 3005: Community Health

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Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) is a framework for community health assessment and is used to design an actionable plan to address community health problems (Community Tool Box, n.a). The access to safe, affordable, and equitable housing in Macomb County, Michigan is an issue around 50% of renters in this community struggle with. Macomb County posted their Community Health Assessment which outlines key priority areas and the goals that align with the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) and decreasing the percentage of renters spending more than 30% or more of their income is a goal set to accomplish by 2028 (macombgov.org, 2024). In this paper, we will be using the six phases of the MAPP framework to develop a specific plan for action that improves the health and quality of life relating to affordable housing for this community.

Nearly 48.2% of renters in Macomb County are cost-burdened, spending >30% of their income on housing (Macomb.gov, 2024). To fully understand the nature of the problem in Macomb County, we can look at some of the determinants of health, such as socioeconomic indicators, mental health, educational outcomes, neighborhood safety and demographics of the area. In 2021, the population of Macomb County was 876,792 people, with the total housing units adding up to 368,224 (Health and Community Services, 2021). Additionally, 693,313 of these people are over 18 years of age, with an average household size of 2.5 people (Health and Community Services, 2021). Looking at these numbers alone, it's clear that the housing supply is barely meeting demand and when vacancies are low, rent prices rise and affordable housing becomes scarce.

37% of households are living below the ALICE threshold, with 12% of the population being food scarce for the last 3 years (Health and Community Services, 2021). 22.7% have been diagnosed with depression (Health and Community Services, 2021). The educational outcomes vary, with 26.1% holding bachelor's degrees, and 24.1% attended some college, but never obtained a degree (Health and Community Services, 2021). Macomb County has set a goal to decrease the percentage of renters spending 30% or more of their income on housing from 48.2% to 45 percent by 2028. However, the county has yet to take much action toward establishing this goal (Macomb.gov, 2024). We will begin utilizing the principles of the MAPP model to explore the long-standing problems of Macomb County.

Phase 1: Organizing for Success / Partnership Development

- **Goal:** Establish a coalition to lead the initiative on affordable housing in Macomb County.
- **Stakeholders:**
 - Local government: Macomb County Housing Department, Planning & Economic Development, Social Services
 - Nonprofits: Habitat for Humanity, local food banks, housing advocacy groups

- Healthcare organizations: Macomb County Health Department, local hospitals
- Educational institutions: Macomb Community College, K-12 school districts
- Private sector: Property developers, real estate agents, landlords' associations
- Community members: Low-income renters, neighborhood associations, ALICE households
- **Organization strategy:**
 - Form a Housing Action Coalition (HAC) with clear roles, responsibilities, and subcommittees (policy, outreach, data, evaluation)
 - Use regular meetings, shared online platforms, and joint decision-making to ensure collaboration
 - Establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between partners to formalize commitments
- **Resources needed:**
 - Funding: grants, county budget allocations, private donations
 - Technical support: data analysts, GIS mapping tools, housing consultants
 - Outreach: community engagement coordinators, multilingual communications, public forums
- **Vision/Values:**
 - Safe, affordable, and equitable housing is a basic human right
 - Solutions must be sustainable, inclusive, and community-driven

Phase 2: Visioning

- **Community vision:**
 - “A Macomb County where all residents have access to safe, affordable, and stable housing that supports health, well-being, and economic opportunity.”
- **Core values:**
 - Equity and inclusion
 - Affordability and accessibility
 - Community engagement and empowerment
 - Sustainability and long-term impact
- **Expected outcomes:**
 - Decrease the percentage of renters spending >30% of income on housing from 48.2% to 45% by 2028
 - Improved health outcomes related to mental and physical well-being
 - Strengthened community stability and economic opportunity

Phase 3: Conducting a Community Health Assessment

- **Nature of the problem:**
 - Nearly 50% of renters in Macomb County are cost-burdened, creating financial instability, stress, and barriers to basic needs
- **Causative factors:**
 - Economic: stagnant wages, high rental costs, limited affordable housing supply
 - Social: limited access to affordable childcare, transportation, healthcare
 - Structural: zoning laws, insufficient housing development incentives, lack of rental assistance programs
- **Size and scope using data:**
 - 48.2% of renters spend >30% of income on housing
 - 37% of households below ALICE threshold; 12% food-insecure
 - 22.7% diagnosed with depression
 - Population: 876,792; housing units: 368,224; adults: 693,313; average household size: 2.5
- **Link to systems beyond healthcare:**
 - Housing affordability affects education, employment, neighborhood safety, and social services utilization

Phase 4: Identifying Strategic Issues

- **Strengths of the community:**
 - Existing county goals (reduce cost-burden to 45% by 2028)
 - Active nonprofits and government departments
 - Community engagement potential via neighborhood associations and resident groups
- **Needs / gaps:**
 - Lack of actionable implementation plan for 2028 goal
 - Insufficient affordable housing stock
 - Weak cross-sector collaboration
 - Data integration gaps for ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- **Consequences of not acting:**
 - Continued high cost-burden and housing instability

- Worsening mental and physical health outcomes
- Economic stagnation and social inequity
- Strain on social services and healthcare systems

Phase 5: Formulating Goals and Strategies

- **Goals:**
 - Increase affordable housing supply through policy and incentives
 - Improve rental assistance and financial literacy programs
 - Enhance equitable housing access for vulnerable populations
- **Strategies (systems-based):**
 - **Policy:** Zoning reforms, tax incentives, expedited permitting for affordable housing
 - **Partnerships:** Engage banks, developers, and nonprofits for low-income housing projects
 - **Community programs:** Expand rental assistance, first-time homebuyer programs, eviction prevention programs
 - **Data-driven decision-making:** Use GIS mapping and cost-burden data to target interventions and track progress
- **Barriers:**
 - Resistance from developers and landlords
 - Limited funding or budget constraints
 - Political or bureaucratic delays
 - Community opposition to housing projects

Phase 6: Action Cycle (Implementation and Evaluation)

- **Action Plan (Implementation steps):**
 - **Coalition launch:** Form HAC and subcommittees (Months 1–2)
 - **Data integration and assessment:** Collect current housing and economic data (Months 2–4)
 - **Policy proposals:** Draft zoning and financial incentive policies (Months 4–6)
 - **Community engagement:** Conduct forums, surveys, and stakeholder meetings (Months 4–6)

- **Program rollout:** Expand rental assistance and housing initiatives (Months 6–12)
- **Monitoring and feedback:** Use quarterly reports, dashboards, and community surveys (ongoing)
- **Evaluation Plan:**
 - **Process evaluation:** Track coalition activities, policy adoption, and community engagement metrics
 - **Outcome evaluation:** Measure changes in housing cost-burden percentage, housing supply, and resident satisfaction
 - **Impact evaluation:** Assess long-term improvements in health, well-being, and economic stability
 - **Feedback loop:** Continuous data review for adjustments and course correction
- **Why this can achieve lasting change:**
 - Multi-sector collaboration addresses root causes
 - Evidence-informed policies and programs create sustainable improvements
 - Continuous monitoring ensures accountability and adaptation
 - Focus on systems-based solutions promotes equity, stability, and community resilience

Access to safe, affordable, and equitable housing in Macomb County represents a critical public health issue with wide-ranging implications for the economic stability, mental and physical health, and overall well-being of residents. Nearly half of the county’s renters are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing, and this financial strain intersects with other social determinants of health, including food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and educational disparities. Left unaddressed, the consequences of housing instability are profound, contributing to increased rates of depression, chronic stress, family instability, and long-term economic inequities, which in turn place significant strain on social services and the healthcare system.

Applying the MAPP framework to this issue provides a structured, evidence-based, and systems-oriented approach to developing actionable solutions. By organizing a multi-sector coalition, including government agencies, nonprofits, healthcare organizations, educational institutions, the private sector, and community members, the initiative leverages diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources. The vision and values established through the coalition emphasize equity, inclusion, sustainability, and community engagement, ensuring that proposed solutions are both ethical and responsive to the needs of those most affected by housing inequities.

The assessment of community strengths and needs highlights the potential for collaboration, the presence of motivated stakeholders, and existing policy goals, while also identifying significant gaps such as insufficient housing stock, limited implementation planning, and barriers to cross-sector coordination. The resulting goals and strategies, which include policy reforms, partnership development, programmatic interventions, and data-driven decision-making, reflect a systems-based approach that addresses the root causes of housing inequity rather than merely mitigating symptoms.

Implementation through a phased action plan, combined with a robust evaluation framework encompassing process, outcome, and impact measures, ensures continuous monitoring, accountability, and adaptive management. By integrating evaluation throughout the project cycle, the coalition can adjust strategies as needed, prioritize interventions based on data, and ensure that progress toward reducing the percentage of cost-burdened renters is measurable and sustainable.

Ultimately, this process has the potential to achieve lasting change in Macomb County's housing system because it simultaneously addresses economic, social, and structural determinants of health. By fostering collaboration across multiple sectors, promoting equitable access to resources, and grounding interventions in both evidence and community priorities, the initiative not only improves housing outcomes but also strengthens the broader health, well-being, and resilience of the community. Through the MAPP-guided approach, Macomb County can create a sustainable, inclusive, and effective model for addressing housing inequities that may serve as a template for similar communities facing comparable challenges.

References

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