

Community Assessment and Intervention Paper

Disparities with Senior Citizen residing in New York City Housing Authority

Dainty Broughton, Danyelle McPherson and Zakiya Mitchell

Master's in Social Work, Alliance University

SWK456/556: Generalist Practice II with Groups, Organizations and Communities

Dr. Patrice Barnes-Tracey, LMSW

April 18, 2023

History of New York City Housing Authority

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) was created due to pressure from housing reformers and the housing crisis caused by the Great Depression. For years, public health and social-welfare advocates in New York had pushed for better living choices and conditions to replace acres of crumbling tenements. Several families often shared one toilet, and many did not have heat or hot water. The apartments were dangerously overcrowded making them a perfect incubator for diseases such as tuberculosis. (<https://www.nyc.gov>)

Eventually, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia opened the first public housing development called First Houses in 1935. First Houses was located at the corner of Avenue A and East Third Street in the Lower Eastside of Manhattan. Although First Houses was the first public housing development, it was created from existing apartment buildings which were renovated. NYCHA's first two developments that were built from scratch were Harlem River in 1937 and

Williamsburg in 1938. These developments were segregated; Harlem River was for blacks and Williamsburg was for the whites. The bulk of NYCHA's real estate was built over the next 30 years.

The New York City Housing Authority is the largest public housing authority in North America. It was created to provide a decent, affordable housing for low to moderate income New Yorkers. NYCHA is home to 1 in 16 New Yorkers. Individuals who reside in NYCHA are employed as teachers, police officers, nurses and other individuals who provide services that are essential to the city of New York. Well known individuals who resides in NYCHA are Howard Schultz, the former CEO of Starbucks; Lloyd Blankfein, the former Chair and CEO of Goldman

Sachs; Whoopi Goldberg; NASA aerospace engineer Aprille Ericsson; journalist Errol Louis; and Dr. Mary Bassett, former New York City Health Commissioner.

NYCHA 2022 Fact Sheet stated that New York City Housing Authority provides affordable housing to 535,686 authorized residents in over 177,569 apartments within 335 developments through public housing, Section 8, and PACT/ RAD programs. According to NYCHA 2022 Fact Sheet, NYCHA public housing residents and Section 8 voucher holders combine occupy 11.6 percent of the city's rental apartments and comprise 6.1 percent of New York City's population. NYCHA serves 339,900 authorized residents in 162,143 apartments within 277 housing developments across the 5 boroughs (Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island) (NYCHA 2022 Fact Sheet). NYCHA also serves 29,789 authorized residents in 15,426 units within 58 developments that have been converted under PACT and RAD programs. One can say NYCHA is a city within a city.

In the Bronx there are 75 NYCHA developments which have 41,931 apartments and 90,067 residents. Brooklyn has 79 developments with 49,427 apartments and 105,993 residents. In Manhattan there are 82 developments with 50,778 apartments and 103,271 occupants. Queens has 21 developments with 15,348 apartments and 31,247 residents and Staten Island has 10 developments with 4,510 apartments and 9,322 residents living there.

Senior Citizen in NYCHA

The first senior development that was exclusively geared to residents aged 62 and older is the Gaylord White Houses in Manhattan which was completed in 1964. Since then, the number of senior developments has grown to 42. In total, there are 10,000 apartments in NYCHA's public housing which are reserved for older adults. The amount of seniors age 62 and older that reside in NYCHA in Brooklyn are 23,936, Manhattan are 27,978, Queens are 7,233, Staten Island are 1,927 and Bronx are Bronx 18,320 (Resident-Data-Book-Summary-2021).

Senior citizen residents are the fastest growing age group among NYCHA's population. Research has shown that between 2000 and mid-2010, the population of residents aged 65 and older increased from 53,722 to 61,546. Older residents make up 6% of all older New York City residents and 15% of all NYCHA residents. It is estimated by 2030, one in five, which is appropriately 20% of NYCHA residents will be aged 65 or older.

According to New York City Housing Authority 2022 fact sheet, as of March 2022, 23 percent of the NYCHA population is age 62 or older which calculates to 78,215 authorized senior citizens residing in NYCHA. The fact sheet also stated that as of February 2022, there are 38 seniors only NYCHA developments with 56 buildings.

The majority of the older NYCHA residents are Black and Hispanic women in which about half live alone. In line with NYCHA's mission to provide affordable housing, nearly half of NYCHA senior adults live with income below the federal poverty line (<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/senior-report-nycha.pdf>).

It is reported by Health of Older Adults in New York City Public Housing that almost 89% of older adults who reside in NYCHA do not have a personal doctor and 11% reported routinely using the emergency room as a source of care. The article also mentioned that almost 31% of NYCHA senior population reported using a senior center to be linked to other community services, such as facilitated transportation and meal delivery.

Health of Older Adults in New York City Public Housing stated that 19% of seniors who reside in NYCHA is diagnosed with depression or 16% currently at risk of depression. The article also stated that 30% of seniors residing in NYCHA stated they did not have help available to them. Appropriately 30% reported they did not have help available to them and 9% do not leave their house once a week.

NYCHA is trying to implement certain initiatives to assist seniors who reside in NYCHA. Initiatives such as senior centers, senior resident advisor program, in service

coordinator program in naturally occurring retirement community (NORC) program and senior benefit & entitlement fair.

NYCHA is funded by federal and state funding; however, research has shown that federal funding has decreased over the years. When NYCHA was created, the idea was that the rent that was collected by the tenant would upkeep the properties. However, over the years tenants have not paid the rent hence the reason for the poor upkeep of NYCHA today.

New York City Housing Authority has been for a long time and is currently underfunded, which leaves not only the property itself in poor conditions but leaves its residents at a disadvantage. As recent as August 2022, it was reported that the U.S. Senate passed the Inflation Reduction Act, a major spending bill that invest billions in climate action and clean energy, cut health care cost and raise taxes, reducing the overall federal deficit, However, this bill failed to include public housing, although proposed by President Biden in his Build Back proposal (Khurshid, 2022). When over \$40 billion is needed to do repairs alone. Although some funds have been given to NYCHA, it is not anything near what is needed to do repairs, let alone pour into much needed services for its neglected senior population, who's suffering will only grow as they age. Also in 2018, Them President Trump proposed cutting federal funding from NYCHA's budget upwards of \$466 million (Manskar, 2018).

NYCHA has also experienced being cut out of policies that are created to help seniors as the age. It was reported that Age-friendly policies and practices were adopted by the City of New York to ensure that seniors have sustainable housing options, supportive community features and services and mobility options geared toward personal independence and engagement of residents in civil and social life. Having this policy in place makes New York one of the top 5 most livable cities according to AARP (*Policy brief: Aging in place at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)*).

Cutting funding and excluding NYCHA from policies and practices that are desperately needed only leaves its residents at a disadvantage, especially their seniors, that most New Yorkers do not experience. Because seniors ages 62 and older make up 23% (78,215) of NYCHA's residents, more resources are needed. NYCHA's senior residents suffer many disparities among them on all micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Due to socioeconomic, geographic, medical, political, and institutional issues we previously noted, and these disparities are seen in other areas as well such as health, incomes, and their lack of food.

Poor Health

According to a report published by NYCHA, although senior residents' health conditions are that of the rates of other older adult population in the city, 76% are diagnosed with 2 or more chronic conditions. This includes diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, arthritis, and osteoporosis. They also report that compared to older adults in other cities and nationwide NYCHA residents have higher rates of poor health and struggle with basic living activities which are at 29%, 37% have a diabetes diagnosis, and 15% are smokers. They also reported that many seniors not only have chronic conditions, but these conditions impede upon their ability to perform basic task of day to day living and causes problems when doing these tasks, which are identified as Activities of Daily Living (ADL). 29% of seniors struggle with ADL, showering, bathing, getting out of bed, or up from a chair. 31% have at least one instrumental ADL. 24% have difficulties shopping for themselves, 19% have trouble preparing their own meals, and 16% have difficulties managing money. These health disparities are higher than older adults over all in NYC, which is currently at 40% and nationally at 26% (Health of Older Adults in New York City Public Housing).

Income Disparities

Over 20% of New York City's elderly are poor because of lower incomes. They struggle to pay for basic needs including rent, medication, transportation, and caregiving expenses and are left with very little extra. As life expectancies rise so does poverty among seniors. The poverty rate is expected to rise from 13% to 20% by 2040 in New York alone, Nationally the numbers are projected to rise to 40.7% from 1 million in 2010 to 1.4 million (*Policy brief: Aging in place at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)*). The average income of a NYCHA family is \$24,454 annually. 42% are on a fixed income which includes social security, SSI, pension, Veterans benefits, survivors' insurance and other government programs not including welfare (Cohen, 2017). The lack of income also creates other issues such as food insecurity. Food insecurities are one's inability to provide a meal for themselves and this also is occurring at a high rate among NYCHA seniors. A 2009 survey showed that 1 out of 5 seniors (20%) were food insecure. 56% did not report receiving food stamps. 55% of those who also have money related food insufficiencies reported not receiving food stamps at all (Cohen, 2017).

All these disparities, budget cuts, policies, poor health, low incomes, and food insecurities affect one another. If we can come up with measures that will ensure that seniors can age comfortably in their homes, they can have an advantage over these quickly rising issues.

Interventions

The interventions we suggested aimed to improve NYCHA's current services and resources. The first program, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC), aims to offer comprehensive social and medical assistance as well as recreational and cultural opportunities to residents 60 years of age and over who are aging in place. It is one of four different senior program interventions that are currently being used. The United Hospital Fund, the NYS Office for the Aging, and the NYC Department for the Aging are partners in this program. Using this program as a component of the intervention provides the chance to educate

seniors about the programs that are currently available, but also involves working with the seniors to determine how they qualify, and if the program is a great resource for them.

The Elderly Safety at Home Program (ESHAH) aims to offer seniors and other physically disabled residents assistance with social services and crime prevention. To further assist in ensuring the senior population's safety, this program will be put into place as an intervention. The program is also partnered with the victims' service and law enforcement personnel. Which is thought to be a significant benefit for the senior population, as it is well recognized that the elderly population is one of the fastest growing and most subjected to crime.

The Senior Resident Advisor (SRA) and Service Coordinator Program serves seniors through on-site services at NYCHA developments citywide. This program helps vulnerable seniors living in public housing avoid victimization and social isolation. However, SRAs organize and appoint seniors in their housing development to volunteer as floor captains to establish daily connections with the other seniors and prevent crises among the sick and elderly. However, SRAs can only be supported and performed under the supervision of certified social workers, which is a major contributing factor for many reasons for the desired intervention.

Furthermore, the Corporation for National Service funds the Senior Companion Program, which uses the Henry Street Settlement to assign companions to make friendly home visits to frail and socially isolated residents in the designated boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. However, it can be suggested that this program be implemented for all seniors in every NYCHA developments to use it as an intervention for all seniors.

In addition to the previously mentioned programs, there is one more program that is available that can be used as an intervention. A program called Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) enables NYCHA to access funds for extensive renovations to its housing developments. Through PACT, developments managed by NYCHA will be enrolled in the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), which has been upgraded to the project-based

section 8 program, a more reliable federal funding source. This program guarantees that housing is permanently affordable and that senior citizens enjoy the same fundamental rights as other participants in public housing programs. Residents' voices will be heard due to the assistance of this program, which is an essential part of PACT since the information it has will influence the investments that are made at each development. There are many needs across the NYCHA that are considered for all families but targeted toward the senior population; with the aid of PACT, the needs at the top can be considered. such as the requirement for renovations and repairs, including the necessity for new boilers, building lights, and elevators, to mention a few. These factors give seniors an appropriate living environment with the proper use of elevators to get them to and from their floors, better building lighting to prevent accidents due to hazardous lighting, and new boilers to assure the necessity of heat and hot water.

Community building and partnerships were another potential intervention to be used. With the help of this intervention, town hall meetings, outreach, and social groups will be set up to serve the needs of seniors. By holding town hall meetings once per month seniors are given the opportunity to speak out for themselves. Also, connecting with nearby churches in the community that host food and clothing drives as outreach. To implement social circles and partnerships, local schools and community colleges will work with NYCHA developments to have students volunteer to help and support seniors with ADL services, daily routines, and activities.

Social Worker Engagement in Community

The unique opportunities that come with the work that social workers do in the elderly care field include the chance to form close relationships with their patients and their families, to change unfavorable social structures on both a personal and a societal level, and to know that their efforts directly benefit those in need. There are many elements that were examined from

different perspectives in this community assessment on "Disparities with Senior Citizen Residents in New York City Housing Authority". Social workers can involve this community in the implementation of the interventions by following up with senior residents of NYCHA to find out whether they found the community building and partnerships beneficial. This will help to ensure the success of the interventions. Additionally, social worker may put forth a proposal to allocate for social worker to be assigned to each NYCHA development that are signed strictly for seniors. With a social worker assigned to each NYCHA complex in all five boroughs, the social worker will be able to follow up with the different programs included in the interventions to ensure the services are being provided safely and effectively.

References

- All programs - New York city. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/Resident-Data-Book-Summary-2021.pdf>
- Cohen, N. (2017, January 1). *Nourishing NYCHA: Food policy as a tool for improving the wellbeing of New York City's public housing residents*. Academia.edu. Retrieved April 22, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/67076622/Nourishing_NYCHA_Food_Policy_as_a_Tool_for_Improving_the_Well_Being_of_New_York_City_s_Public_Housing_Residents
- Health of Older Adults in New York City Public Housing. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/senior-report-nycha.pdf>
- <https://www.nyc.gov>
- https://furmancenter.org/files/NYCHA_Diversity_Brief_Final_4-30-2019.pdf#:~:text=New%20York%20City%20Housing%20Authority%20Development
- NYCHA 2022 Fact Sheet - New York City. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2023, from https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/NYCHA_Fact_Sheet_2022.pdf
- Khurshid, S. (2022, August 9). *Despite tens of billions proposed, NYCHA again left out of major federal funding packages*. Despite Tens of Billions Proposed, NYCHA Again Left Out of Major Federal Funding Packages. Retrieved April 22, 2023, <https://www.gothamgazette.com/city/11511-despite-tens-of-billions-proposed-nycha-again-left-out-of-major-federal-funding-packages>
- Manskar, N. (2018, February 13). *Trump budget cuts millions from NYC's public housing*. New York City, NY Patch. Retrieved April 22, 2023, <https://patch.com/new-york/new-york-city/trump-budget-slashes-funds-nycs-cash-strapped-public-housing>
- Policy brief: Aging in place at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://a860gpp.nyc.gov/downloads/1n79h484r?locale=en>