Improving the Health of SRO Hotel Residents

All San Franciscans should have access to safe and healthy living environments. Single room occupancy (SRO) hotels make up the largest supply of low-cost housing for our most vulnerable neighbors—seniors, adults with disabilities and children. While living environments vary widely between SROs, many of the 18,000 low-income San Franciscans living in the city’s 500 SROs live with structural, habitability and sanitation problems. The typical SRO is not equipped with kitchen appliances and lacks proper infrastructure to support cooking or storing food. Many SRO residents have pre-existing conditions that can be exacerbated when living in unsafe housing. Some health practitioners regard safe and healthy housing much like a vaccine in protecting a person’s health and well-being.

In September 2013, the San Francisco Health Commission passed a resolution to improve the health of SRO residents. The resolution requested that the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) carry out a health impact assessment (HIA) to evaluate conditions to improve the health of residents in SROs. HIA can be a powerful tool to systematically analyze data, predict potential health outcomes of proposed policies and call for evidence-based action. This HIA is an opportunity to build on existing policy research, learn from diverse stakeholders and elevate collective problem-solving efforts to improve the health of SRO residents. SFDPH will draw on over a decade of HIA practice to examine healthy policy solutions.

Real policy solutions exist. SRO stakeholders best understand the issues affecting the health of SRO residents. As stakeholder engagement is a vital component of HIA, we will convene a public-private, multi-agency working group to identify key issues and support health-oriented planning and policy that possibly could include:

- **safety and habitability**: ensure housing and habitability code compliance
- **food security**: increase access to nutritious food including increasing resources for healthy food and facilities to store, prepare, and reheat food
- **social cohesion**: create or design communal space to support social interaction and reduce isolation
- **social support**: increase access to supportive services and case management
- **disaster preparedness**: ensure building resilience and integrate residents into disaster plans.

---

**Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel**
*A dwelling unit or group housing room consisting of no more than one occupied room with a maximum gross floor area of 350 square feet and meeting the Housing Code’s minimum floor area standards. The unit may have a bathroom in addition to the occupied room...A single room occupancy building (or “SRO” building) is one that contains one or more SRO units and no non-accessory living space.*

(SF Planning)

**Health Impact Assessment (HIA)**
*As defined by the World Health Organization, an HIA is “a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population.”*

---

**HIA Core Values**
- democracy
- equity
- sustainable development
- ethical use of evidence
- comprehensive approach to health