

# FUSE Summer Symposium

## Culturally Cognizant Housing Design & Policy



Event Guiding Question: How can Hennepin County meet the diverse needs of housing cost burdened residents via the intersection of design and policy?

On August 17th an expert panel on housing from the University of Minnesota and Hennepin County convened via Zoom to explore housing practices through a multicultural lens. The event aimed to generate new ideas on how to address this multifaceted issue, build relationships and share information, and lay the groundwork for collaborative projects. The **50 event participants** had the opportunity to hear from housing experts, ask questions, and engage in conversations during breakout sessions.



Left to right, panelists included Ryan Allen (Professor, Humphrey School of Public Affairs), Tasoulla Hadjiyanni (Northrup Professor, College of Design), Becky L. Yust (Professor, College of Design), David Hewitt (Director of the Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness), and Julia Welle Ayres (Hennepin County Housing Development and Finance Director).

Conversations between panelists and participants were summarized and analyzed, resulting in four major themes:

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<b><u>THEME #1</u></b>	<b><u>THEME #2</u></b>	<b><u>THEME #3</u></b>	<b><u>THEME #4</u></b>
<b>REFRAME</b>	<b>ENGAGE</b>	<b>FUND</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b>
<b>PERCEPTIONS</b>	<b>COMMUNITIES &amp;</b>	<b>ACTION-BASED</b>	<b>ACROSS</b>
<b>ABOUT HOUSING</b>	<b>DECISION-MAKERS</b>	<b>RESEARCH</b>	<b>DISCIPLINES</b>

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**These four themes are explored in greater detail on the following page.**

*FUSE is a joint effort by the Hennepin-University Partnership and Hennepin County's Center of Innovation & Excellence to support disparity reduction and the University's MPact 2025 by promoting innovative, research-informed collaborations that benefit our residents and our region.*

## A DEEPER LOOK AT THE FOUR MAJOR THEMES, DRAWN FROM BREAKOUT CONVERSATIONS



### REFRAME PERCEPTIONS ABOUT HOUSING

Homelessness and housing instability is not an individual failure, but a failure of societal systems. If we reframe our thinking, we can better address the societal failures that result in homelessness and housing instability. Reframing perceptions of housing also requires intentional word choice. Panelists and participants emphasized the need to reframe perspectives on housing and transitioning to seeing a house as a place that enriches an individual's life and reflects their values, needs, and aspirations. Word choice to think about included "community-first housing", "culturally-enriched housing", "affordable vs accessible", and "development vs infrastructure".



### ENGAGE COMMUNITIES & DECISION-MAKERS

The most important partner is the impacted community. To improve housing, we must learn from the community and plan housing with people, instead of for people. To do this, participants emphasized connecting to more individuals via unconventional partners with shared interests, such as libraries or small businesses. We also must learn from innovative partnerships from across the country and reconsider how existing incentive structures impede the development of sustainable accessible housing.



### FUND ACTION-BASED RESEARCH

Action-based research is needed to ensure culturally cognizant housing design and policy. Examples may include reassessing standards or rethinking status-quo housing design to ensure equity (e.g., occupancy restrictions or floor-plan layout), examining regional complexities and interconnectivity related to housing, and exploring the value of cross-cultural translations of housing and homeownership concepts. Participants stated the need to clearly define research needs, funnel research dollars into collaborations, and strategically distribute funding.



### COLLABORATE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Transformative change is needed to create culturally cognizant housing design and policy. Housing is interconnected with many other areas such as physical health, mental health, and safety. Participants proposed using systems thinking and working with other disciplines. Ideas such as ensuring apartments have access to community health resources, examining the strategic role of alternative housing models, and promoting policy tools such as tenant right of first refusal and eviction protection were discussed.

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**RESOURCES MENTIONED IN CONVERSATION:** Rainbow Health [Housing Information Newsletter](#), [Innovative Models In Health and Housing](#), and [Toward Culturally Sensitive Housing-Eliminating Health Disparities by Accounting for Health](#).

Find more at [z.umn.edu/FUSEhousing](https://z.umn.edu/FUSEhousing)