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A good neighbor: Nationwide Children's improves health by investing in quality housing for those in need

The Dispatch Editorial Board

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Health is determined not just by what happens inside the body.

The house and neighborhood that body lives in also play a big role.

This is part of the reason we were excited to learn that Nationwide Children's Hospital has expanded its Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families program to Linden and is now planning to invest in building new affordable homes there.

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The program is nothing new, but it is quite special.

Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families was launched on Columbus' South Side near the hospital in 2008 to reduce dangerous conditions inside homes to improve quality of life.

Since then, \$38 million has been invested in improving or building more than 400 properties, Nationwide Children's officials said.

“We know that health is about so much more than health care, and high-quality, affordable housing is crucial for the wellbeing of children and their families,” said Tim Robinson, CEO of Nationwide Children’s. “Nationwide Children’s has long worked through our Linden Primary Care Center, our Mobile Care Center and school-based health clinics at Linden-McKinley High School and KIPP Columbus to improve child health. The Linden Healthy Homes Fund deepens our commitment to Linden and will make a meaningful difference for its residents.”

Since its Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families initiative began in 2008, the hospital has helped improve more than 375 homes and served as an organizer and financial guarantor for

many community improvement projects. The Linden Healthy Homes Fund will be its first direct “impact investment” to construct or rehab housing.

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The program is a part of Nationwide Children's strategic plan, which now calls for \$3.3 billion in investments in programs, research and new buildings through 2026.

The hospital plans to invest \$2 million of a \$10 million donation from the Nationwide Foundation to Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families, which expanded into Linden in 2019 as an extension of that neighborhood's One Linden plan.

In partnership with Ohio Capital Finance Corporation, the city of Columbus, the Center for Community Investment, CareSource, and Partners For Kids, the program will invest another \$4.2 million to build 17 new affordable rental housing units and rehabilitating three others in South Linden.

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Those units will be rented for between \$725 for a two-bedroom and \$850 for a three-bedroom home.

The units will be located near the Linden Fresh Market on Cleveland Avenue in South Linden, which is expected to open soon.

The reality of race-related health disparities became a national issue during the coronavirus pandemic and following the murder of George Floyd by former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin.

Defined by Healthy People 2020 partly as “a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage,” a health disparity is influenced by factors that include access to high-quality education, nutritious food, decent and safe housing, affordable and reliable public transportation, culturally sensitive health-care providers, health insurance and clean water and non-polluted air.

Following Floyd’s murder and the protests that followed, Nationwide Children's officials evaluated what they were doing in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion and what could be done better.

They doubled down.

Community engagement and partnerships emerged as one of the seven pillars of the hospital's Stand Against Racism, Stand for Health Equity umbrella initiative.

"We recognize that a child's ZIP code, age, race, economic status and education should not determine their health outcome. We acknowledge that, as a health-care system, we do not exist in a bubble. We are part of a much larger community with some members having disparate experiences," a just released report on that initiative reads.

If the last 18 months have taught us anything, it is that none of us lives in a bubble.

Healthy Neighborhoods Healthy Families is an example of the good that can happen when a bubble is popped, and thoughtful neighbors work intentionally to improve the community.

We urge others to step out from within their own four walls and do the same.

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