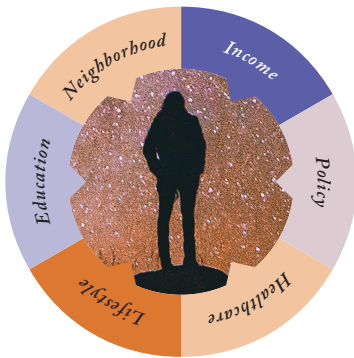
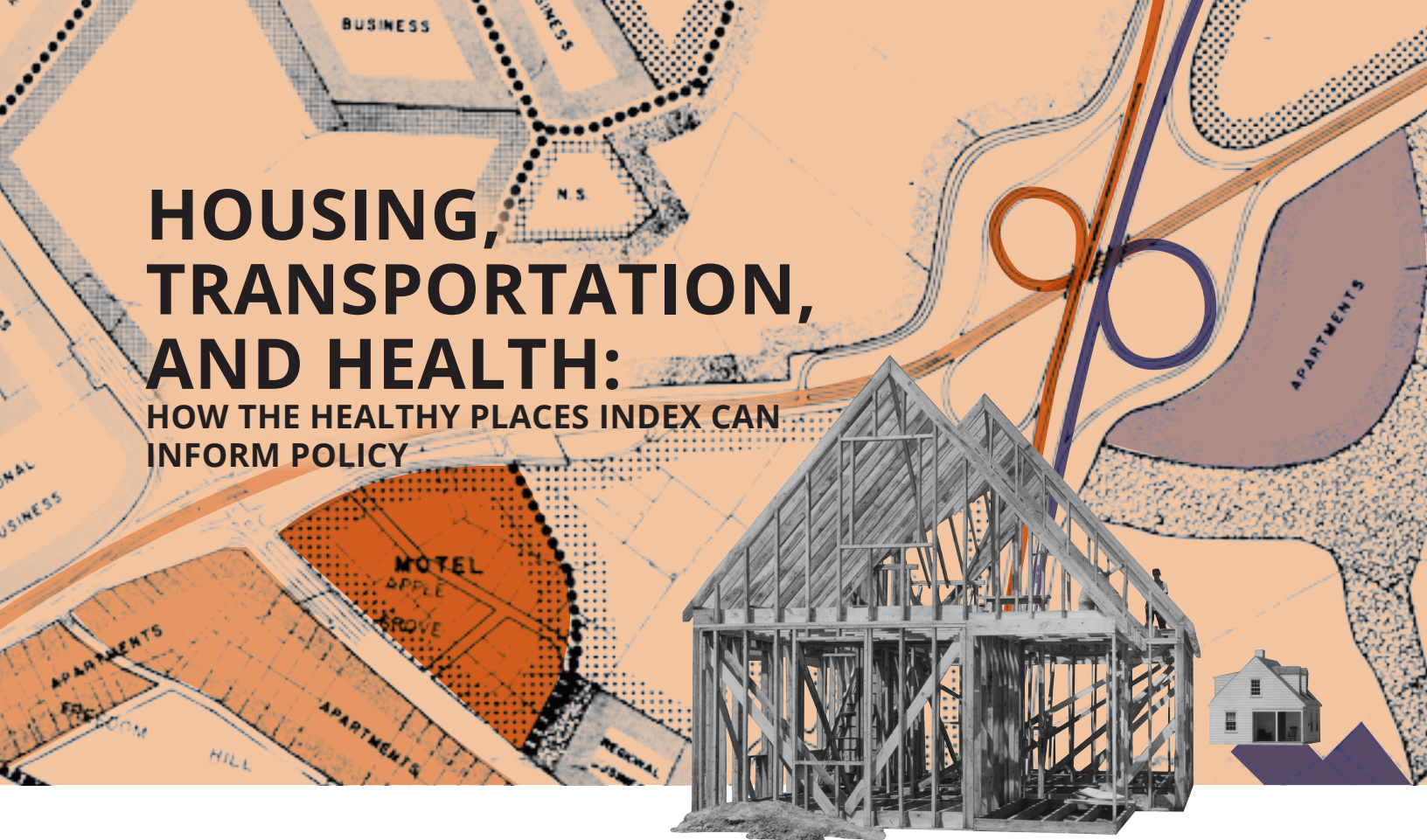


# HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND HEALTH: HOW THE HEALTHY PLACES INDEX CAN INFORM POLICY



*Health is about more than health care. It is shaped by an array of social and environmental factors, from the amount and quality of education we receive to our income, housing, and the physical and social conditions of our neighborhoods.*

EDUCATION	34%
ECONOMIC/OTHER HOUSEHOLD RESOURCES	26%
HOUSING	16%
TRANSPORTATION	10%
AIR QUALITY	9%
HEALTHCARE ACCESS	6%

Northern Virginia is a vibrant region. The economy is strong and residents enjoy a high quality of life. However, living conditions are uneven across the area. Some residents suffer from poor health and limited resources for economic opportunity. A 2017 report by the Northern Virginia Health Foundation identified 15 “islands of disadvantage”—neighborhoods (clusters of census tracts) across the region where residents face very difficult living conditions and poor health.<sup>1</sup>

Life expectancy varies by 19 years across the region. What explains such large differences? It’s not health care: doctors and hospitals account for less than 10% of this variation.<sup>2</sup> Health is shaped more by our living conditions—such as income, housing, and other aspects of the physical and social environment—and these vary greatly by neighborhood.

A healthy neighborhood infrastructure is vital to the public’s health. In particular, residents need access to stable housing and to living conditions that are uncrowded and free of health hazards such as allergens, mold, and lead. Housing must come at a cost that is affordable and leaves money for families to purchase healthy foods and obtain medical care. Good health also requires access to transportation—to visit the doctor but also to access jobs, child care, schools, and other social resources that improve health. Affordable public transit is important to serve low- and middle-income commuters.

To help compare housing, transportation, and the other conditions that exist across Northern Virginia’s census tracts, researchers at the Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University developed the Healthy Places Index (HPI)—a score that can be used to quickly size up the health of neighborhoods. The HPI rates census tracts on a scale of 0–100; high numbers represent the best conditions. In computing the index, the researchers

