

St. James Town is a neighbourhood in downtown Toronto.  
64% of St. James Town residents are recent immigrants.  
With 64,636 people per square kilometer, SJT is one of the most culturally diverse and densely populated neighbourhoods in North America.

“Regardless of our age, gender, socio-economic or ethnic background, we consider our health to be our most basic and essential asset.”  
*United Nations, Fact Sheet #31*

“I remember it like it was yesterday; gun shots would be heard more often, crack heads would enter the building so frequently you'd think they lived there, and the community's frustration was at an all time high fearing for their own safety.”  
*St. James Town Resident*

“Residents are afraid to complain of poor maintenance of the facilities to the management because of their innermost fear of eviction.”  
*St. James Town Resident*

“The daily conditions in which people live have a strong influence on health equity. Access to quality housing and shelter and sanitation are human rights and basic needs for healthy living.”  
*World Health Organization, SDOH, 2008*

“SJT residents can relate to one another. That is because many residents are immigrants. From there, only great things can happen. I think that the next step for the community is just building on what we already have. Let's use our strength as a building block or a stepping stone. Improvement is bound to happen.”  
*St. James Town Resident*

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ST. JAMES TOWN INITIATIVE

# HEALTH IN NEGLECTED URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

A Case Study from St. James Town, Toronto

ST. JAMES TOWN INITIATIVE  
A Signature Project of Wellesley Institute



# Neglected urban neighbourhoods impact our health

An average of 240,000 newcomers arrive in Canada each year. 80% choose to live in big cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. To better address health needs, it is important to understand how neighbourhood conditions impact health and wellbeing in marginalized populations.

## Financial Disparity



*"The tiny tunnel at the centre leads to a pedestrian bridge connecting one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada to one of the most affluent. Financial stability leads to calmness and peace of mind. Most people in St. James Town do not have money to buy dental or an eye care plan."*

## Overcrowding



*"I think there are just too many people living in such a small area. The population is growing larger and larger, and more people are moving into a neighbourhood that is already overpopulated."*

## Poor Housing



*"When people cook food, it creates gases like carbon monoxide. If these gases do not get outlet to go out, remain in the room causing bad effect to our health."*

Health is a basic human right.

- Poor Canadians are twice as likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis than the richest 20% of the population. The lack of control of resources, money, employment and high costs of living predisposes immigrant populations to mental health problems.
- Unhealthy living conditions compromise the growth of young children, their nutritional status, their psychomotor and cognitive abilities, and their performance at school. These conditions affect their future productivity and earnings while raising their susceptibility to chronic diseases at all ages.
- Well maintained green, open spaces are crucial for all age groups. Children need spaces to play. Seniors need places to socialize, and adults need space to exercise. Lack of such spaces in cramped neighbourhoods contributes to increased rates of obesity, diabetes, and social isolation.
- For newcomers to this country, affordable and culturally appropriate healthcare services are essential for physical and mental wellbeing.
- Poor ventilation of apartments promotes the growth of moulds and dust mites, exposing residents to skin infections and respiratory illnesses such as asthma.
- Cramped, overcrowded conditions in poor urban neighbourhoods can facilitate the rapid spread of communicable diseases such as flu viruses like H1N1, and tuberculosis.

## Green Space



*"For those people unable to go too far outside the city because of transportation impediments, parks provide a place to go with family and friends to relax and enjoy some time together or just to unwind after a busy day."*

## Health Services



*"I don't see any doctors or specialists in the community."*

*"My doctor speaks Chinese. I describe the pain in my language. I must speak Chinese to my doctor. It is not good otherwise. I need to be able to communicate how I feel."*

## Poor Hygiene



*"Cockroaches in the building. Infestation. At night when I get up they are everywhere, in the kitchen, in the toilet. They spray but it is not enough. The lack of management is bad."*

Health inequalities arising from unequal distribution of resources are unjust, unfair, and unavoidable.