



# The Impact of the Ronald McDonald House® Program

The Charity's Vital Role in the Healthcare Experience for Children and their Families through its Flagship Ronald McDonald House Program

## About RMHC® & Its Ronald McDonald House Program

As partners in enabling family-centered care for more than 40 years, Ronald McDonald House Charities® strives to be part of the solution in improving the lives of children and their families by providing programs that strengthen families during difficult times. The Charity supports the critical needs of children through three core programs: Ronald McDonald House®, Ronald McDonald Family Room® and Ronald McDonald Care Mobile®.

When children must travel long distances to access top medical care, accommodations for families can be expensive or not readily available. The Charity's cornerstone program, Ronald McDonald House, helps families stay close to their ill or injured children, increasing the caregivers' ability to spend more time with their child, to interact with their clinical care team and to participate in critical medical care decisions.

The first Ronald McDonald House was inspired by a family's struggle to stay together while fighting their child's devastating illness. Today, the program has grown to more than **345 Houses** and helps families stay close to their children when they are receiving treatment at a nearby hospital. Through the Ronald McDonald House program, RMHC is the world's leading NGO supporting the accommodation needs of families with children while receiving hospital care and at least one RMHC core program is associated with **89 percent** of the top children's hospitals worldwide.

## Ronald McDonald House Impact Snapshot

- Accommodation needs are a significant stressor for families of critically-ill children, particularly when they are traveling far distances. RMHC and the Ronald McDonald House program help alleviate some of this stress.
- Families attribute their ability to stay together to the Ronald McDonald House program and believe it significantly affects psychological well-being and their child's recovery.
- Caregivers who stay at a Ronald McDonald House report significantly higher levels of involvement in their child's care and more positive hospital experiences.
- Accommodations provided by the Ronald McDonald House program enhance pediatric patients' quality of life.
- Parents who sleep at a Ronald McDonald House enjoy greater sleep quality than those who stay at the pediatric bedside.
- RMHC helps improve family coping and resiliency during pediatric hospitalization.



*Children, whose families stay at Ronald McDonald Houses, tend to be the sickest, have traveled the furthest distances for care and spend the longest time in the hospital.*

## RMHC Impact Research

Since the program's inception, parents have shared with RMHC in their own words how the Ronald McDonald House program has impacted their lives. Now, published research underscores the role the Charity plays in keeping families together during times of medical crises.

A global team of researchers drawn from leading universities, including the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), George Washington University, the University of Chicago, as well as from top medical centers in Hong Kong; Sydney, Australia; the United Kingdom; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Cincinnati, U.S.; and Toronto, Canada, have collaborated with RMHC to evaluate the impact of the Ronald McDonald House program.

To date, the research has produced eleven published studies, presentations at professional meetings and advanced important new areas of understanding about the role of the Ronald McDonald House and the availability of accommodations in enabling family-centered care. Researchers are continuing to examine the role of the Ronald McDonald House program in improving clinical and psychosocial outcomes, as well as the hospital experience.

### Ronald McDonald House Program Impact

The House program affords families opportunities to interact more meaningfully with their child's care team. The organization supports family-centered care by:

- Bridging access to top medical care for seriously-ill children who must travel long distances;
- Providing families with emotional and physical comfort and support;
- Enhancing the child's and family's hospital experience;
- Improving the family's coping and cohesion, and the child's recovery and outcomes.

## Findings from Impact Studies

The following summaries provide a snapshot of findings from each of the key Ronald McDonald House Impact Studies.

- **Ronald McDonald Houses Provide Accommodation to Families to Help Reduce Stress and Financial Burden** – A study conducted with RMHC Australia reported that a large percentage of families with seriously-ill children traveled long distances for treatment and emphasized that accommodations and travel is a clear source of stress. The study found that parents need greater access to accommodation and financial assistance to be close by their sick children and their treatment center, which the Houses can provide.

Daniel et al., *Rural and Remote Health* (2013)

- **Proximity to the Hospital Provides Important Psychosocial Benefits** – A study published in *Families, Systems, & Health* analyzed responses from over 2,000 family members and concluded that close proximity to the hospital, facilitated by accommodations such as Ronald McDonald Houses, provides important benefits for the family experience, psychological well-being and perceptions of child recovery.

Franck et al., *Families, Systems, & Health* (2013)

- **Ronald McDonald Houses Help Improve Children's and Caregivers' Quality of Life** – In a study conducted by RMHC Argentina, 250 families were surveyed about their perceived quality of life. The researchers found that children and their parents, who stayed at a Ronald McDonald House, had a better perceived quality of life than expected for children with chronic diseases.

Sanchez et al., *Archivos Argentinos de Pediatría* (2014)

- **Ronald McDonald Houses Help Strengthen Coping Abilities** – A study published by researchers at the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center interviewed caregivers staying at a Ronald McDonald House and found that familial support and support from other families during their child's hospitalization strengthened their coping abilities. The study also demonstrates that staying at a Ronald McDonald House surrounds parents with an atmosphere

of mutual support that encourages sharing between families who are going through the same experience.

Nabors et al., *Families, Systems, & Health* (2013)

- **Parents of Hospitalized Children Experience High Levels of Stress and Anxiety** – The StayClose study, conducted in the UK, found that almost two-thirds of parents, whose children were hospitalized for at least three days, had borderline/clinical levels of anxiety and 38 percent of those experienced a similar level of anxiety three months after their child’s discharge. While hospitals provide medical care, the Ronald McDonald Houses provide a “home-away-from-home”, which may help alleviate stress and anxiety, thereby improving their ability to participate in the care of their child receiving medical treatment.

Wray et al., *Journal of Child Health Care* (2011)

- **Parents Experience Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms after Child’s Discharge** – A follow-up to the StayClose study found that more than 25 percent of parents of children hospitalized on pediatric wards experienced significant post-traumatic stress symptoms three months after their child’s discharge. Parent anxiety, uncertainty and negative coping style during child hospitalization are associated with post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Franck et al., *International Journal of Nursing Studies* (2014)

- **Parents Get Better Sleep at Ronald McDonald Houses** – A study published in *Behavioral Sleep Medicine* found parents who slept at a Ronald McDonald House had better sleep quality than parents sleeping at their child’s bedside, which is likely to help parents participate more thoroughly in their child’s care as they are better-rested.

Franck et al., *Behavioral Sleep Medicine* (2013)

- **Critically-Ill Children and their Siblings Cope with Medical Trauma Through Play** – Researchers from the University of Cincinnati found that medical play among children with medical illnesses and their siblings was a mechanism for coping and working through stress related to medical experiences. All Houses have play areas, which help children cope by connecting with others in similar challenging situations.

Nabors et al., *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing* (2013)

- **Ronald McDonald House is a Safe and Cost-Effective Alternative to Hospitalization** – Lengthy hospital stays for high-risk pregnant women who are otherwise stable is a common, but expensive practice to ensure they remain close to a specialty hospital. The study found that the Ronald McDonald House could serve as a safe and cost-effective alternative to hospital admission for high-risk pregnant women in stable condition, providing these patients necessary access to a specialty hospital in a comforting environment. Ronald McDonald Houses are close to many of the leading hospitals for high-risk pregnancies and critically-ill newborns. More than 40 percent of families served had children in the neonatal intensive care unit. This study demonstrates that Ronald McDonald Houses can serve as an alternative to hospitalization in cases where active daily medical care is not required but proximity to the hospital is necessary.

Dexter et al., *Journal of Perinatology* (2004)

- **Ronald McDonald Houses Lead to More Positive Hospital Experience for Parents** – The study published in *Medical Care Research and Review* surveyed more than 5,400 families with a child admitted to standardized inpatient pediatric and neonatal intensive care (NICU) at 10 U.S. hospitals. Families that stayed at a Ronald McDonald House reported a more positive overall hospital experience than those who stayed elsewhere. It was the first-of-its-kind study aimed to determine the accommodation types used by families, and compared characteristics across accommodation types and explored the influence of where families stayed on overall hospital experience outcomes.

Franck et al., *Medical Care Research and Review* (2015)

- **Ronald McDonald Houses Play a Significant Role in Family-centered Care** – A strong majority of hospital administrators worldwide agreed that Ronald McDonald Houses play a significant and important role for families. Over 90% agreed that Ronald McDonald Houses reduced stress and costs to families. The study was based on a survey of 530 administrators from 16 countries. This survey was the first to study the impact of Ronald McDonald Houses on seriously ill children and their families from the perspective of hospital administrators.

Lantz et al., *Journal of Health Organization and Management* (2015)