National Municipal Convening on Housing, Hazards, and Health

Executive Summary

The National League of Cities’ (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes, hosted a National Municipal Convening on Housing, Hazards and Health on October 13 & 14, 2016. City leaders gathered together representing over 20 cities of diverse population sizes, demographics, and regional locations, to share promising practices, lessons learned and explore ways to advance their respective efforts with the support of diverse faculty and subject matter experts.

In order to ensure that all children and families live in healthy and hazard-free homes, a primary objective included identifying the role of city leadership in advancing housing, hazards, and health related policies, programs, and practices. Ultimately the goal is to better scale various models and inform future efforts. The convening was built around a several key themes including:

- **Policy**: Examining various approaches with a focus on inspections, lead poisoning prevention, code enforcement and asthma trigger remediation;
- **Partnerships**: Exploring new opportunities to partner across city agencies as well as with community based partners, philanthropy and with the health system through the implementation of health care reform;
- **Data**: Understanding innovative uses of data to further inform, target and evaluate efforts;
- **Financing**: Sharing a range of options from municipal bonds to community benefit and reimbursement from Medicaid;
- **Civic Engagement**: Identifying the role of residents and advocates, as well as communications, to inform and guide healthy homes efforts;
- **Equity**: Lifting strategies to ensure efforts are targeted to vulnerable populations and those most in need;
- **Sustainability**: Exploring how all themes work in coordination to advance successful efforts that have staying power.

As a result of the convening, several key findings emerged related to municipal efforts to design city policies and programs that support healthy housing, including:

- Significant efforts are underway in several cities across the country. City leaders are eager to learn more about the underlying causes of unhealthy housing and the impact of interventions on housing as well as other sectors such as education, community development, and employment.
- Although cities have been engaged in this work for several years, new opportunities exist to further augment efforts including facilitating stronger connections to the health care system, using data to coordinate and target interventions and continuing to leverage the strong evidence-base that has existed on lead while better utilizing the established evidence-base on Asthma.
NLC is committed to building upon the lessons learned from the convening to support mayors and city leaders in developing effective strategies to ensure that all children and families live in healthy homes and healthy communities.

**Findings from the Field**

The insights that follow identify important implications for future city-led efforts to address hazards within the home, as well as factors within neighborhoods that further impact health risks and outcomes.

**Effective Partnerships to Improve Health in Housing:**

Partnerships are critical to successfully improving health in housing, however, building effective partnerships is hard and requires time, commitment, and trust from all parties. Throughout the convening, several types of partnerships and partners emerged as critical.

- Strengthening effective communications, data sharing and collaboration between public health and code enforcement officials is critical to overcome challenges including language barriers, training requirements and differing oversight and accountability systems. Cities such as Kansas City, MO are partnering with healthcare professionals to identify lead exposure to notify code enforcement inspectors of potential hazards in homes.
- As state laws can hamper the ability of local governments to align efforts between local departments, further strategies are needed to overcome pre-emption and allow for local approaches.
- Significant opportunities exist to encourage collaboration between housing, health and workforce development to create healthier residents, housing and communities. For example, the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance in Omaha, Nebraska partners with the Midwest Training Institute and Metropolitan Community College to train over 1,000 men and women in a variety of disciplines within the field of construction.
- Some of the most promising healthy homes efforts have strong multi-sector coalitions with representation from the public health, housing, and community and economic development sectors as well as community based organizations and residents. The City of Oakland has created an interdisciplinary and cross-agency response to code violations that includes city and county agencies and community based organizations such as Vector Control, Legal Aid, Just Cause, Public Health, Environmental Health Services, Community and Economic Development, Code Enforcement among others.

**Healthy Homes Financing: The Changing Landscape:**

Many financing options exist including leveraging health care dollars and partnerships to support healthy housing efforts.

- As health systems incentives continue to shift from fee-for-service to value-based payments and hospitals seek to mitigate emergency room visits and other health-related costs, this shift paves the way for further investment in preventive efforts including remediating for health hazards like lead, mold, pests, etc. from homes.
- As part of non-profit, tax-exempt hospitals requirement under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to conduct a community health needs assessment (CHNA), an opportunity exists for municipal leaders and housing advocates to better engage in CHNA planning and implementation efforts.
• Municipal leaders, especially public health and housing authority directors, need strategies that better direct cost savings achieved through successful healthy homes interventions to further spread evidenced based approaches to all residents in need of assistance.

• As the strong evidence-base for remediating asthma triggers in homes has solidified, cities are working with key stakeholders including children’s hospitals, Medicaid agencies, homeless coalitions, etc. to advocate for Medicaid reimbursement for home-based asthma services. The District of Columbia’s Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF) convened a multi-year Chronic Condition Collaborative (Collaborative) for all Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) operating in the city. As a result, all MCOs in the City have pledged to finance in-home asthma management services provided by community organizations.

• Municipal leaders should partner with community-based organizations to leverage philanthropic dollars to further support healthy homes efforts including data collection, community engagement, and staff.

Advancing Healthy Homes through Innovative Uses of Data:

Successfully advancing healthy homes efforts can be augmented through innovative uses of data.

• Cities have a range of existing data collection systems such as EMS response on asthma related calls that can be leveraged to further identify healthy housing needs and better target interventions to the most vulnerable populations.

• Maps are a powerful tool to convey the magnitude of unhealthy housing in the community as well as the connection of unhealthy housing to other social issues such as academic achievement, crime and violence, among others. For example, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital uses data maps to hot-spot to better tailor and target healthy homes interventions. Efforts also include key collaborations like their work with the medical-legal, partnership to better intervene in cases where it’s been difficult to get voluntary changes to remediate lead, mold and other hazards.

• Data sharing can help healthy homes stakeholders, including physicians, identify high need communities and target interventions. For example, the City of Boston’s Breathe Easy At Home program is a web-based referral system, allowing doctors, nurses or other health professionals to refer their Boston patients with asthma for a home inspection, conducted by the Boston Inspectional Services Department.

• Data sharing promotes transparency and partnerships with media and other communications strategies can help ensure greater visibility and awareness of needs/gaps., it can also present challenges. Unintended consequences associated with public reporting on lead poisoned homes may stigmatize residents who are disproportionately affected by this issue.

• Consider augmenting existing data sources by adding questions to national surveys at the local level e.g. adding housing-related question to BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Survey) survey.

The 3 E’s of Healthy Homes Efforts: Equity, Engagement and Enforcement:

• It critical for city leaders to consider how other housing related issues such as affordability, gentrification, and displacement impact the ability of children and families to live in healthy, hazard-free housing.

• An intentional focus and commitment to addressing disparities (e.g. in life expectancy by zip codes) can support city leaders as they consider the health implications of their work and to establish goals
and metrics to ensure that the communities most impacted by disparities can benefit from new policies and investments.

- Efforts to improve healthy housing are most effective when there is an intentional focus on addressing the root causes of unsafe and unhealthy housing conditions. Better inform leaders and decisions makers about areas that are considered hot-spots (high need areas that result in emergency room use, chronic absenteeism, etc.) that result in significant health issues to find the root causes of unhealthy housing and address efforts more holistically. (e.g. Rochester lead levels and impact on student engagement/success)

- Effective enforcement efforts leverage data sharing and collaboration between those entities who have data on hazards, those who enforce code violations, and those who prosecute cases. In the City of Memphis, strong partnership between government agencies, nonprofit housing advocate, code enforcement, public health, and legal services organizations has strengthened the city’s commitment to enforcement of housing standards through a specialty housing court with broad equitable jurisdiction.

Ensuring City Programs, Policies and Practices to Improve Healthy Housing Resources:

- A sustainable lead poisoning prevention and/or healthy homes program has most, if not all, of the following characteristics: diverse funding sources, community partnerships, and a commitment to learning and improvement. Many cities are on their way to having sustainable, comprehensive programs while many others are along the continuum of advancements.

Sustainability:

- It is important to note that each of the insights listed above are interconnected. The most effective municipal efforts to advance healthy housing have found ways to adopt an integrated approach that harnesses data, multi-sector partnerships, community leadership and enforcement strategies and have an intentional sustainability plan.

Looking Ahead:

City leaders have a unique opportunity to leverage the changing landscape to better partner with the health system and key stakeholders to adopt an integrated approach to healthy housing efforts that is driven by data and guided by equity. As Jon Gant, the Director of HUD’s Office for Healthy and Lead Hazard Control, stated “you can fail more times than you succeed and still make the hall of fame” and encouraged city officials ‘to keep swinging’ until all residents live in healthy, hazard-free housing.

With generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, NLC is launching a multi-year initiative to help mayors and other city leaders create a Culture of Health in their communities by addressing the factors that influence health where residents live, learn, work and play. The National Municipal Convening on Housing, Hazards and Health is the first in a series of Mayors’ Institutes to assist city leaders in building a local Culture of Health. As part of the MI, NLC will incorporate technical assistance efforts, some of which will be broadly targeted to convening participants. Efforts will include a web forum, CitiesSpeak blog, among other efforts in 2017.

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