



Take Stock of Housing

LOCAL ACTION CHALLENGE FOR LEAD SAFE AND HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

Assess and Strengthen Current Housing Code Enforcement Efforts

The recognition that indoor environments, particularly in residential housing, can either help prevent public health crises or create health hazards is not new to cities. Municipalities have used the creation and enforcement of housing codes as a tool to promote public health and combat health threats for more than 100 years. Unfortunately, with the passage of time and the dissipation of threats like typhoid and dysentery, the critical links between housing conditions and health outcomes have not remained at the forefront of the minds of many city leaders. Today, however, a growing number of municipal officials are tackling housing hazards and their impact on the health of children and families by improving the quality of housing and neighborhoods through effective code enforcement strategies.

What does this look like in action?

Assessing current efforts begins with understanding existing code enforcement policies and practices, and then exploring ways to broaden the goals and resources dedicated to unsafe and unhealthy housing. Municipal officials can take an inventory of current enforcement efforts to determine whether the city's model of code enforcement is one of deterrence or of strategic enforcement and see where improvements can be made to strengthen health outcomes. The deterrence model, used most broadly, primarily involves responding to complaints and known

violations. Strategic code enforcement, of which there are many variations, refers to the prioritization of resources and the use of proactive actions and policies to address serious health care concerns and substandard housing conditions.

A comprehensive healthy housing code enforcement approach involves strong relationships with the broad range of stakeholders involved in housing and environmental hazards. Cities can use those relationships to inform policies and practices. It is essential that all stakeholders, inside and outside of municipal government, work collaboratively on a set of strategies to improve the safety, affordability and quality of housing.

Action Steps

- 1 Thoroughly review existing code enforcement procedures and practices to ensure that existing rules are sufficient and properly enforced without high error rates.
- 2 Target code enforcement actions to areas/ neighborhoods with the greatest need, rather than uniformly across your city.
- 3 Increase collaboration between city code enforcement and city or county environmental health officials to prioritize enforcement of housing violations that have strong associations with serious health problems.
- 4 Open and sustain constructive dialogues with housing groups and landlord advocacy groups.

5 Invest in expanded code enforcement and in solutions that expand property owners' and landlords' ability to repair health-related violations in homes.

6 Adopt and implement the recommendations made in the National Healthy Housing Standard, developed by the American Public Health Association and the National Center for Healthy Housing.

For more information and resources

- [A Review of Three Models for Enforcing Housing Codes; Angus Corbett](#)
- [The National Healthy Housing Standard; produced jointly by the American Public Health Association and the National Center for Healthy Housing.](#)
- [Strategic Housing Code Enforcement and Public Health: A Health Impact Assessment in Memphis, TN; Christina Stacy, Joseph Schilling, & Steve Barlow October 2018.](#)
- [STRATEGIC CODE ENFORCEMENT A New Model for Reclaiming Vacant Properties and Stabilizing Neighborhoods; Vacant Properties Research Network's Research & Policy Brief No. SIX](#)

Action Challenges

1 **INFORM AND ENGAGE ALL RESIDENTS**
Empower residents to tackle housing quality issues. Launch a public awareness campaign on healthy housing and/or host a town hall to learn about residents' priorities, and serve as a convener for landlords, tenants, health care providers, social workers and teachers to support community organizing around health hazards.

2 **TAKE STOCK OF HOUSING**
Review housing codes and enforcement policies. Produce an internal policy document on housing code enforcement policies, noting areas that can better support healthy and equitable housing polices. Catalogue and explore potential funding sources.

3 **COME TOGETHER ON HOUSING HAZARDS**
Convene stakeholders to create a housing hazards task force. Engage city departments and external partners, with an emphasis on data-driven decision making, to identify and address lead and asthma challenges in housing for all population groups.

4 **STRENGTHEN HEALTHY HOMES POLICIES AND PRACTICES**
Create resources and build commitment across stakeholders. Establish a registration system and database of rentals and associated violations that is available to tenants and use these tools to promote property standards and improve enforcement.

For More Information

Please visit
nlc.org/healthy-housing-mayors-challenge

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