

Aligning Housing Quality with Diverse Community Interests

THIS IS THE SECOND in a series of briefs about building stakeholder engagement in healthy housing efforts. This series is intended to share lessons learned from municipal-level healthy housing efforts. The first brief discusses partnerships with health system stakeholders (Gaining Community Health Allies for Healthy Homes Programs). This second brief explores ways to engage with other community interests including education, housing, and other aspects of community development and discusses how partnering at the regional or state levels can complement local efforts. The third brief (Building Governmental Support for Healthy Housing) focuses on ways to engage policy makers and key staff in relevant agencies to support innovative housing quality practices. It concludes with strategies for promoting collaboration with other agencies and levels of government in support of these efforts.

Overview

THIS BRIEF DISCUSSES:

How to identify diverse community stakeholder groups whose interests align with the health benefits of improving housing quality.

Framing housing quality as one of “four pathways” connecting housing with health to connect with a broader range of interests.

Identifying children’s particular vulnerabilities to housing hazards as part of efforts to engage educators and children’s advocates.

The diversity of interests within the housing sector –including landlords, affordable housing advocates, and others – and how to partner with these different groups.

Strategies for engaging the local philanthropic community in healthy housing.

When and how partnering with regional, state, and national groups can support local efforts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- 1. Align diverse stakeholder priorities with housing quality:** Many community groups' goals are affected by housing quality in indirect ways they may not be aware of. Using data, research findings, or examples from other cities to identify the "ripple effects" of housing hazards is a key first step. Identifying outcomes like children's development, affordable housing, and community well-being can help engage a broader range of stakeholders.
- 2. Engaging housing providers is essential:** Landlords, developers, and other housing interests often oppose stronger housing quality policies for fear that new regulations will negatively impact their current business models. Even when community and political support is strong enough to overcome housing providers' opposition, identifying, communicating about, and addressing these concerns helps design programs that can be successfully implemented.
- 3. Equity-based arguments can be especially persuasive:** Housing hazards are more common in older, low-value housing, particularly private rentals. Therefore, poor housing quality has a disproportionate effect on the health of lower income residents. Additionally, the legacy of race-based housing discrimination means that residents of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be exposed to housing hazards. Highlighting inequities can add a moral imperative to improving housing quality and energize support for policy change. Understanding disparities can also help target limited resources efficiently to have the greatest impact.

Introduction

Affordable, stable, healthy and safe housing is essential for well-being. Because people with lower incomes often struggle to find decent and affordable housing, housing hazards can be a significant contributor to health inequities. Health inequities impose burdens on the entire community in terms of increased health care costs, children's educational needs, individuals' productivity, and economic development potential. As described in Gaining Community Health Allies for Healthy Homes Programs, partnering with health stakeholders to clarify health impacts and garner their support for healthy housing efforts can be very effective.

In addition to health interests, there are many other stakeholders whose businesses, clients, and long-term goals are affected by housing quality in the community. For example, deferred maintenance impacts the value of nearby housing and reduces the city's tax



base. Helping diverse groups recognize how housing hazards and associated health problems affect their core interests can build wider support for healthy homes policies and programs. Many communities have found that partnering with those interested in children's health, neighborhood development, affordable housing, and other aspects of community well-being can make it easier to adopt, implement, and sustain new housing quality policies, practices and programs. A starting point for engaging these broader interests is to consider how they currently interact with the local housing market. Some cities are experiencing rapidly rising housing costs and have strong concerns about gentrification and displacement, while others face ongoing disinvestment, low housing values, and declining populations. Lower-income neighborhoods in many cities are dominated by rental housing, whereas other cities have significant numbers of low-income owner-occupants. These factors affect how local groups think about housing quality improvement efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated housing equity, affordability, and quality issues many cities were already experiencing.

Because rental housing is at the core of many housing initiatives, it is important to understand who owns and operates rental housing. In most places, the landlord community has a wide array of business models. For example, some cities have many landlords who live locally and own just a few properties each. In other places, the housing market is dominated by larger landlords and/or investor-owners who live elsewhere. Property managers may play a key role. The proportion of renters who have private landlords, have Section 8 vouchers, receive other types of housing assistance, and/or live in public housing can also affect efforts to improve housing conditions. These characteristics of the rental housing market may vary from one neighborhood to another.



There are diverse perspectives on housing quality and affordability in cities throughout the country. It is important to understand how this variability affects the perception, viability, and effectiveness of different approaches to addressing home hazards. Partnering with diverse interests is essential to successful healthy housing efforts. This brief provides examples of cities' approaches to spur greater collaboration with key stakeholders to improve housing quality.

Identifying Partners in Healthy Housing: Follow the “Ripple Effects”

The health impacts of housing have significant indirect or “ripple” effects on broader interests like children’s well-being and community development. For example, because housing hazards have such significant impacts on children’s health and development, educators and other children’s advocates can be powerful supporters. Likewise, reframing housing hazards as an issue of family self-sufficiency and resilience can build bridges to proponents of community development, who recognize that a healthy population is essential to the city’s future economy. Several groups have developed materials to help communicate these connections to diverse audiences.^{1,2,3} Below we examine how clarifying the “ripple effects” of healthy housing can lead to strong stakeholder engagement among educators and children’s advocates, community development groups, housing interests, and local philanthropy.

EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN’S ADVOCATES

Housing quality can impact children’s development and educational outcomes in many ways. Therefore, groups that advocate for children’s well-being, including early childhood and K-12 educators, have clear interests in reducing housing hazards. For example, even low levels of lead exposure can affect children’s ability to learn and can have irreversible effects on their lifelong health. Lead in paint, dust, and soil around older homes is the most common source of children’s lead exposure.^{4,5} Similarly, up to 30% of asthma cases are attributed to home-based sources such as mold, dust mites, pests, or pet dander.^{6,7} Asthma is one of the most common causes of missed school days, and, as a result, parents’ absences from work. Educators who understand these connections may provide impactful data or stories about how such problems affect children in the local community.

CITY CASE STUDY: ROCHESTER, NY

“An Elementary School Principal Instigates Housing Policy Change in Rochester, NY”

In 1999, Rochester Elementary School #17 Principal Ralph Spezio overheard school nurses say that all of their students who required special education services that year had a history of lead poisoning. Working with the local health department, he found that 41% of the incoming students had a history of elevated blood lead levels. After doing some research, he connected this high prevalence of lead poisoning with his students' widespread behavior and learning challenges. Spezio reached out to people in many local organizations – including lawyers, health care professionals, community organizers, and city and county officials - to address the problem.

The resulting Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning (CPLP) quickly realized that childhood lead poisoning could only be prevented by reducing lead hazards in housing – particularly older, lower value, private market rental units. Throughout this process, Spezio and the CPLP kept the focus on children's wellbeing and educational attainment. This theme resonated with community wide concerns about poor educational outcomes, special education costs, and high rates of criminal behavior and contributed to the successful passage of Rochester's lead law in 2005.

Children's advocates can be powerful allies. Teachers, administrators, and other educators are often respected local figures who speak for society's overall interests in children's educational success. They can point to the excess educational costs (special education, etc.) associated with children who are lead poisoned or who frequently miss school due to asthma. Educators can also authoritatively address the impacts of housing hazards on children's educational attainment, whether due to direct impacts on neurodevelopment (e.g. lead) or indirect effects on attendance and readiness to learn (e.g. missed school days due to asthma or other health problems).

Poor educational attainment is linked to many negative outcomes including criminal behavior and reduced long-term earning potential.^{8,9} In fact, as discussed in *Gaining Community Health Allies for Healthy Homes Programs*, lost future earning potential is by far the largest contributor to the overall social costs of childhood lead poisoning. Engaging educational interests can help community leaders appreciate the long-term socioeconomic effects of housing hazards. In addition to educators, organizations focused on learning disabilities, child care, pediatric asthma, injury prevention, poisoning, or fire safety may be particularly concerned about connections between housing and children's well-being. Faith communities are also often strongly interested in social justice efforts to protect children.

Child care and early childhood education groups can be particularly impactful partners. For example, Head Start programs require incoming children to be tested for lead exposure, offering a unique opportunity to connect with families about potential hazards in their homes. Nurses and pre-K educators may be the first to interact with families of children who have asthma or atopic dermatitis that could be associated with home-based triggers. It is also important to work with childcare facilities and schools about maintaining environmentally healthy spaces. For example, the Children's Environmental Health Network's "Eco-Friendly Childcare" certification can raise childcare providers' and family members' awareness about home environmental hazards (See examples on the next page.).¹⁰ Many communities have childcare agencies that work with in-home child care providers. These organizations can be an effective vehicle to provide information, resources, and referrals to providers and ensure that their houses are safe for the children they care for.

Linking housing quality efforts with children's advocacy organizations is a two-way street. In some cases, children's interest groups may themselves identify housing quality as key to achieving their goals. For example, the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning (CPLP) in Rochester formed in response to an elementary school principal's discovery that 41% of his incoming students had elevated blood lead levels (See **An Elementary School Principal Instigates Housing Policy Change in Rochester, NY**). More commonly, proponents of housing quality improvements need to proactively engage children's advocacy groups by informing them about the impacts of housing hazards on children in their community. State and national groups have developed materials directed at these audiences that can help "make the case" for housing interventions that benefit children.

Making the Case: Tools for Engaging Education and Children's Advocates

Several cities and states have produced tools, models, and documentation of home hazards on child health outcomes related to educational success, including:

- Rhode Island's school lead burden calculations: The Rhode Island Department of Health provided school administrators with data specific to their school on the percent of incoming students with a history of elevated blood lead levels, as well as maps of lead and asthma risk by census tract.¹¹
- The State of Michigan issued a report on estimated costs of lead poisoning totaling over \$270 million per year, including costs for attributable ADHD treatment, special education, and juvenile justice.¹²
- Alameda County's Healthy Homes program worked with researchers to estimate the number of school days missed due to asthma associated with home hazards.¹³
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports number of school days missed due to asthma by state; state health departments or Environmental Public Health Tracking Systems may report more recent data at a finer geographic scale.^{14 15}

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS

Most cities have a wide range of groups, organizations, and agencies working to promote the preservation or improvement of neighborhoods. These groups may focus on different aspects of community well-being including:

- **Physical environment:** property maintenance, public facilities, parks, among others.
- **Community building:** social events, block clubs, farmers markets, youth programs, etc.
- **Economic development:** e.g. business revitalization grants.
- **Individual and family well-being:** financial education, workforce development, training, and links to social services.
- **Crime and safety:** neighborhood watch, police relations, lighting and environmental design, etc.

Many groups integrate work on multiple issues but may focus on a specific geographic area or population (ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, language, disabilities, etc.). Most groups recognize that deferred maintenance and housing hazards lead to long-term neighborhood decline, even if housing is not within their primary scope or priorities. Their interests in housing may vary based on the balance between renters and owner-occupants, perceptions of gentrification, disinvestment, etc. Here we focus here on organizations representing or serving low-income communities or BIPOC residents likely to be affected by housing hazards.



Four Pathways Connecting Housing and Health

A 2018 policy brief published by Health Affairs summarized the evidence for housing's impacts on health through four distinct but related pathways.¹⁶

Stability: Studies show that providing people experiencing housing insecurity with safe and affordable housing can significantly improve their health.

Safety and quality: There is well-established research on the cost effectiveness of interventions to reduce lead hazards, asthma triggers, and other health hazards in housing.

Affordability: Low-income individuals who spend a large portion of their income on housing are less able to afford medical care, nutritious food, and other health-supportive resources. The federal government classifies families who spend more than 30% of their income on housing as “rent burdened.”¹⁷

Neighborhoods: Physical (air quality, green spaces, etc.) and social (crime, social cohesion, etc.) factors have been shown to have significant impacts on residents' health.

For Note: Other frameworks for understanding the connections between housing and health describe various “pathways” differently: Different versions of this rubric may be more effective with different audiences, but these frameworks all make the same point: housing quality initiatives are just one ‘piece of the puzzle’ of housing’s holistic impacts on health equity.¹⁸

Although most groups recognize that quality housing is a key foundation for community well-being, they may not see a role for their organization in healthy housing efforts. Conversely, they may worry that increasing housing quality standards could increase housing costs and undercut low-income owner occupants' ability to pay taxes and keep their homes. At the same time, other concerns range from preventing renters from being able to stay in their neighborhood, creating challenges for first time buyers to purchase their own homes, and/or contributing to higher rates of vacancy. Using the "four pathways" conceptual framework for the relationship between housing, health, and community well-being may help connect with these groups (See Four Pathways Connecting Housing and Health).

Community groups may have ongoing programs into which healthy homes topics can be integrated. For example:

- A community group that ran summer camps developed interactive activities on healthy homes and sent relevant information home with the kids.
- Health department staff attended a community fair to provide on-site lead testing to children and pregnant women.
- Several community groups partnered with a local university to develop a hands-on healthy home museum.
- A community action agency integrated healthy housekeeping, lead safety, and fire prevention information into their family resiliency training programs.
- A workforce development program provided free lead safe work practices through their programs for construction, remodeling, and other trades.

Thus, a wide range of neighborhood and community groups may be valuable partners in building support for stronger healthy housing policies (See Building Governmental Support for Healthy Housing). These groups also may help municipal leaders understand localized housing quality concerns and inform more effective strategies to address inequities.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVOCATES

Advocates for low-income residents generally support policies and programs that promote both safe and affordable housing. However, some housing advocates may worry that efforts to increase housing quality will cause housing abandonment or rent hikes, decreasing availability and affordability. Historically, building codes, covenants, and zoning have been used to exclude low-income individuals and racial minorities, especially Black residents, from certain neighborhoods in many cities. Because of this legacy, some advocates may be distrustful of strong housing quality policies.

One effective strategy to address affordability concerns is to estimate the cost burdens of improving housing quality on different segments of the housing market. For example, prior to passage of Cleveland's lead law in 2019, proponents of lead inspections estimated the funding needed for property owners in different neighborhoods to comply (See **Analyzing Housing Markets to Inform Healthy Housing Policies Cleveland, OH**).¹⁹

CITY CASE STUDY: CLEVELAND, OH

Analyzing Housing Markets to Inform Healthy Housing Policies in Cleveland, OH:

When advocates in Cleveland started promoting the idea of lead inspections for rental properties, there was no systematic proactive rental inspection system. Thus, any inspection process would be totally new to local landlords. As one Lead Safe Cleveland coalition member said, this would be a seismic shift that “required more than a leap of faith, it also needed data.” The Lead Safe Cleveland coalition partnered with researchers at Case Western Reserve University, who studied the quality of housing and typology of landlords’ business models. This gave the coalition a strong sense of which landlords owned high-risk properties, what assets they could bring to bear, and costs to address lead hazards. This data enabled the researchers to model total repair costs.

The coalition then explored how a “Lead Safe Home Fund” could be created with private and public commitments to prevent undesirable impacts on the rental housing market. As they got closer to passing the lead law, opponents commissioned a study that reported it would cost \$128 million to make needed repairs. The modeling done by the researchers had estimated total costs of around \$108 million. Having this model on hand allowed the coalition to anticipate the landlords’ concerns and proactively come up with a fundraising plan to address them.

At the same time, it is important to call attention to the societal benefits of healthier residents, more stable neighborhoods and better-preserved housing. This is another area where it may be helpful to use the “four pathways” framework for communicating the connections between housing and health (See **Four Pathways Connecting Housing and Health** on page 10). Most interest groups focus disproportionately on just one of these pathways. Helping diverse groups recognize these multiple pathways and how they work together may support formation of partnerships to pursue multiple kinds of housing improvements (e.g. neighborhood quality investments, affordable housing efforts, safety and quality improvement programs), rather than pitting one interest against another.

HOUSING PROVIDERS, LANDLORDS AND SERVICES

Owners of rental housing – particularly private landlords – may be skeptical about or even strongly opposed to new regulations on housing quality. Property owners’ concerns are often expressed as dire predictions about disruptions to the rental housing market. They may point out that the costs of making repairs must be passed along to tenants through higher rents and/or that landlords who are unable to cover increased costs may abandon their properties. Because property owners are often politically influential, understanding and addressing their concerns can be a vital step in advancing new initiatives. (See **Addressing Landlord Opposition to Healthy Housing Initiatives**).

CITY CASE STUDY:

Addressing Landlord Opposition to Healthy Housing Initiatives

Landlords frequently oppose healthy housing initiatives, which they often perceive as burdening their businesses with costly or unfeasible requirements. Cities have used multiple approaches to address these concerns, including:

Minneapolis, MN: The City uses a performance-based inspection system in which each property is classified into one of three Tiers depending on condition, with the emphasis on greater scrutiny of poorly performing properties. Routine inspections are conducted every year (Tier 3), 5 years (Tier 2) or 8 years (Tier 1), with higher Tier properties paying higher fees. The criteria for classification, inspection system, current tier for each rental property, and appeals process are publicly available on the city's web site. This three-tiered system was established in 2012; the fee structure was adjusted in 2015. According to city staff, landlords are generally supportive of the current system, and many pride themselves for having "Tier 1" properties.²⁰

Alameda County, CA: Larry Brooks, Director of Alameda County Healthy Homes, proactively reached out to landlord groups throughout the county by writing articles for their newsletter, inviting them to meetings on policy options, and hosting talks with landlords in other parts of the state that had adopted healthy housing policies. Mr. Brooks believes that "building these relationships is an essential part of the policy making process because typically the elected leaders will not consider supporting any healthy housing initiatives until you can at least say you engaged the industry (landlords) you wish to regulate and that you have engaged their customers (tenants/voters). That does not mean everyone reaching agreement on everything but at least trying to agree on some things."

Cleveland, OH: When the Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition proposed a new lead law for rental properties, landlords complained that they did not create the lead problem, so should not be expected to pay to address it. Lead Safe Cleveland's response was: "if you own a restaurant, we want to make sure that your product meets a public standard. You may not have made the ingredients, but we need to make sure what you are selling the public is safe. The same goes for rental properties."

Rochester, NY: Landlords participated in the Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning's housing committee during the early stages of writing the lead law. However, landlords stopped participating in the Coalition when policy solutions were advanced and supported a different policy approach that targeted all homes occupied by children under 6. After a lead law passed that required lead inspections of all rental units, the city inspection department conducted extensive education and training to familiarize landlords with the new law and provided funding for re-tests for lead during the first year of implementation to help landlords learn how to make units lead safe.

Even where property owners' support is not needed to pass a new policy, developing housing quality innovations without addressing landlords' concern runs the risk of creating programs that have undesirable unintended consequences (e.g. housing abandonment or rent hikes), face continued opposition, or are difficult to implement. Working with housing interests to understand and address landlords' concerns can lead to more effective policy solutions. Cities that have successfully adopted healthy housing policies have used a variety of strategies to engage with landlords:

Reaching out to landlords as partners: Cities have developed varied approaches to communicating with landlords, including rental registries, relationships with landlord business associations, town hall meetings, and partnerships with housing organizations. Those that do not have strong existing systems for engaging landlords may need to develop new approaches to enable two-way communication with rental property owners about how to improve maintenance practices and reduce hazards. For example, Alameda County healthy housing staff made connections with landlord groups in several cities by writing articles for their newsletters, inviting them to meetings, and speaking at their events and producing press releases in order to increase reach of their reports.²¹

Designing strategies that work for diverse landlords: Because landlords have varied business models, multiple strategies are necessary. For example, owners of higher-rent properties may welcome housing quality initiatives that "level the playing field," such as performance-based rental licensing which tiers penalties for poorer performing properties.²² In other cases, landlords who own small numbers of lower-value properties may lack access to capital to make the needed repairs. Recognizing this reality, a number of cities support maintenance of rental properties through small loans, grants, or making repairs and adding the cost to the tax bill. For example, the city of Philadelphia is piloting a rental housing repair loan program for small landlords with fewer than 10 units. Landlords can borrow up to \$24,999 to repair the units of tenants who meet income guidelines (one third of loan dollars must be used to improve units leased to tenants at or below 50% of AMI).²³ It is important to reach out to a wide range of landlords to understand the range of concerns. Opening lines of communication with diverse property owners can identify alternate policy proposals, education and training needs, and what resources will be needed to support compliance.

Analyzing potential impacts on rental housing markets: It may not be possible to address landlords' concerns with data or examples from other cities because there are few in-depth, prospective studies of the impacts of healthy housing programs on rental housing markets. As well, each city has different housing dynamics, so there are limits to transferring "lessons learned" from one place to another. Nonetheless, efforts to analyze the potential impacts of healthy housing programs on the rental housing market early in the process can identify key uncertainties and help inform more effective policies, implementation, and funding plans. As noted above, advocates in Cleveland conducted extensive analyses that played a key role in garnering support for its 2020 lead law.

Education and phased implementation: Innovative housing policies require changing landlords' behavior. Housing quality initiatives should include time and resources to educate landlords about the new expectations. Pilot programs, targeted implementation, grants and incentives for early adopters can help housing providers adapt their business models and maintenance practices.

Designing policies for evaluation and adaptation: Even with the best research, analysis, and policy design, there are significant uncertainties involved in implementing new housing quality initiatives. Piloting and phased implementation may help overcome the steep learning curve for both property owners and city staff. It is also important to plan for long-term evaluation of impacts and create opportunities to change course based on new information. For example, Cleveland's 2019 lead law requires quarterly public reporting on unintended consequences including eviction, vacancy, abandonment, and displacement. The law also mandates a third-party Lead Ordinance Auditor to review these data and make them public to ensure transparency and credibility. Approaches to facilitating adaptation include:

- Creating, funding and sustaining plans for tracking, assessing, and publicly reporting key indicators.
- Supporting external evaluations of progress by academics, community groups, or the private sector.
- Incorporating "sunset" provisions that trigger a review of the initial approach.
- Establishing a staff position with duties to undertake evaluation, coordination, and communication of results.
- Establishing an advisory committee or community coalition to coordinate with external initiatives, programs, and changes in the political, economic, or legal environment.

At the end of the day, it is rare for rental housing providers to unanimously support housing quality improvement initiatives. However, by carefully listening to the concerns of diverse housing providers and working with housing interests, many cities have designed more effective policies, mitigated active opposition and even garnered support from housing providers.

Engaging Philanthropy

Many cities have local foundations or other philanthropic organizations that may be valuable partners in healthy housing work. However, housing quality is seldom a core priority for local funders. Even funders that historically invest in housing rarely focus on housing quality. City leaders can help these foundations understand how healthy housing relates to their funding priorities and advocacy interests – or vice versa. Local foundations often focus on core social issues like child welfare, education, crime reduction, environment, or workforce development. The “four pathways” framework may help make connections between housing quality and these foundations’ broader interests (See **Four Pathways Connecting Housing and Health** on page 10). Emphasizing the inequitable impacts of poor housing quality on health often resonates with these interests and should be a key theme when reaching out to local philanthropies.

Some of the approaches to engaging diverse community interests described above may also be useful in helping foundations link investments in housing quality to their core interests. For example, Cleveland’s philanthropic community had recently made major investments in education when Lead Safe Cleveland approached them with evidence that lead is a root cause of learning problems. Advocates made the case that “if you care about education, then you care about lead and should invest in that too.” Several of these local foundations responded by contributing to the Lead Safe Home Fund to support lead hazard reduction efforts.²⁴

Many cities have health foundations that formed as the result of hospitals converting from non-profit to for-profit or mergers.²⁵ These foundations are mission-driven to support community health improvement. Their definition of “community health” varies significantly, however, with some focusing narrowly on clinical or disease prevention efforts, and others considering broader health determinants like housing, transportation, and food access. An important first step is to reach out to local foundations to understand their current funding priorities, how they view the relevance of healthy homes, and how to frame housing quality efforts in a way that matches their goals.

In addition to supporting projects directly, local funders can contribute to healthy housing efforts by publicly endorsing them, providing technical support, or contributing logistical resources (space, communications support, etc.). Foundations can explicitly talk about how healthy housing contributes to other community goals, such as improving health, educational outcomes, employment opportunities, or neighborhood stability. Local foundations are usually highly respected voices in the community, so their support can make a big impact.

Many local foundations are expanding their roles as community conveners and promoting policy change as a way to have impact beyond direct funding. For example, the United Way of Greater Rochester adopted childhood lead poisoning prevention as their community policy focus in 2004.²⁶ They also provided some funding for staff and space for the growing Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning to meet. The combination of the United Way's public endorsement, funding, and logistical support greatly enhanced the lead efforts in Rochester. More recently in Cleveland, the Mt. Sinai Foundation played a key role in convening supporters, eliciting strategic advice from knowledgeable advocates, providing small grants to enable community groups' participation in the policy process, and securing commitments from other organizations to support implementation of the lead law that was passed in 2019.²⁷

An increasing number of state and national foundations fund community efforts – including policy change – related to housing quality. Many of these foundations provide access to technical resources, networks to facilitate learning from other cities, and opportunities to highlight local efforts on a broader stage. When cities, academic or community partners get funding for healthy homes efforts from national organizations, they can often leverage the prestige of being recognized for being a national model into additional local media, financial support, and credibility.

Reaching Out: Resources, Policies, and Partnerships Outside the Local Area

Identifying and partnering with local interests to advance housing and health programs is critical to advancing healthy homes efforts. However, regional, state, and national organizations may also be important partners. For example:

- Similarly situated cities in the region or beyond may have models, data, or materials that can be adapted to local conditions.
- Supporting external evaluations to benchmark progress through the engagement of academics, community groups or the private sector.
- Many interest groups are organized at the state or regional level and may be interested in supporting efforts in cities that do not have local chapters.
- Researchers and students at universities in other cities may have capacity to conduct analyses that are not locally available or may conduct comparative research.



For example, municipal leaders and community groups in Syracuse worked closely with their counterparts in Rochester, New York, for over ten years prior to the passage of their lead law in July 2020. As Stephanie Pasquale, the former Commissioner of Neighborhood and Business development said, “When we had questions, being able to have those questions answered quickly – knowing who the right person to call was and being able to get an answer that day was so helpful in real time.” At different times during this process, stakeholders from both cities advocated with their state elected officials to promote improvements in statewide lead laws.

Thus, regional or national partnerships can be valuable in informing local housing policy changes. The National League of Cities recently launched a [peer learning lab](#) to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and resources. Developing these partnerships may also be helpful when trying to build support for implementing local policy change. Strategies for developing support are discussed further in the third brief of this series, Building Governmental Support for Healthy Housing.

Conclusions

In addition to the health-related stakeholders identified in Gaining Community Health Allies for Healthy Homes Programs, along with many other local interests including educators and children’s advocates, community development, and housing groups can be powerful partners in promoting healthy housing initiatives. However, many of these groups lack the technical expertise, established infrastructure, staffing or scope to include housing quality among their core priorities. City leaders can work with these groups by providing data, examples from elsewhere, and pilot projects to reframe healthy housing efforts in terms of their organizational goals. Engaging with housing providers to understand their concerns, constraints, and incentives is essential to designing policies that can be effectively implemented. Local philanthropic organizations that support goals such as improved child welfare, education, neighborhood safety, and economic development can also be important partners.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT: With generous support from The JPB Foundation, the National League of Cities (NLC) is working to advance city-level approaches and practices surrounding the health impacts of poor housing quality. The goal of this project is to support city leaders to implement effective policies, practices and programs and to engage local partners to ensure access to safe, stable housing for all residents.

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