

# Cities Confronting Housing Hazards to Improve Health

## RESULT FROM THE FIELD

A safe place to call home is the starting point for well-being. Starting with a partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on a national convening and a [Mayors' Institute on Housing, Hazards, and Health](#) in 2016, the National League of Cities (NLC) has worked in support of cities who are addressing health hazards in residential housing. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a safe, reliable, and affordable place to live. Launched in 2019 with support from The JPB Foundation, the Healthy Housing City Leaders' Forum is NLC's latest cohort-based work with six cities that have worked intentionally to advance healthy housing for their residents. Additionally, through the launch of our Healthy Housing Learning Lab, NLC has successfully cultivated on-going, peer-led conversations among local leaders representing more than 50 cities. The following brief provides key-takeaways and lessons learned from this effort.

# Advancing Equitable Policy & Systems Change in Cities to Improve Health and Well-Being

Housing and health are inextricably linked, as both are critical to one's quality and length of life. NLC's approach to health improvement is rooted in the [Cities of Opportunity \(CoO\) framework](#), which emphasizes the connections across issues and puts racial and health disparities at the center of city work. By intentionally supporting cities to address race and equity, our systems framework and approach supports alignment across city agencies towards sustainable progress, recognizing that no one person or entity can solve complex issues on their own. It also strives to meet cities 'where they are at,' recognizing that the journey for each city is based on their local and state context.



**The data fellowship program funded by NLC creates a new and meaningful connection between the city and our biggest local healthcare system, and will create a sustainable focus on health and housing.”**

**Warren Wooten**, Operations Manager,  
Housing & Neighborhood Services, City of Charlotte



## HEALTHY HOUSING LEADERS FORUM

# **Key Takeaways and Common Accomplishments Across the City Teams**

Over the course of two years, the six city teams engaged in the cohort each developed and executed an Action Roadmap and associated workplan that focused on their top priorities to support long-term healthy housing improvements. The six cities have each advanced their housing and health work by expanding their approaches through new federal grants and laying the groundwork for local program and practice change.

## Summary of City Accomplishments

CITY	HEALTHY HOUSING VISION	KEY MILESTONES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS	ON THE HORIZON
Baton Rouge	A community-centered approach to holistically address housing quality, accessibility and affordability	<p>Won the parish's first Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes grant from HUD</p> <p>Carried out the Housing Market Segmentation Report to map local housing market data and impacts on health disparities</p>	<p>Implementing a community-centered design process to formalize the Housing 1<sup>st</sup> Alliance</p> <p>Creating community-centered infrastructure to support the Lead Hazard Control Grant as the anchor of a broader Healthy Housing initiative</p> <p>Developing a housing plan by 2023 informed by the Housing Market Segmentation Study and anchored in authentic community engagement</p>
Bloomington	Improved health of no-, low-, and middle-income residents served by city housing programs	<p>Won the city's first Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes grant from HUD, towards early goals of increasing funding and capacity to make repairs</p> <p>Collaborated on regional rent relief and eviction prevention efforts</p>	<p>Implementation of the Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes grant</p> <p>Mapping local housing and health disparity data to inform collaborative program implementation and engage champions through data-driven storytelling</p>
Charlotte	Develop health and housing collaborative models to better serve low-income communities	<p>Launched the Healthy Housing Innovation Lab, a consortium of housing and health providers who pilot new interventions</p> <p>Established a data fellowship that uses health system data to assess the impact of housing programs</p>	<p>Institute qualitative and longitudinal surveying of housing program participants, and improve housing programs based on results</p>

CITY	HEALTHY HOUSING VISION	KEY MILESTONES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS	ON THE HORIZON
Detroit	Increase housing stability for low- and middle-income residents, with more residents accessing the services they need in network of community-based organizations with increased capacity to provide housing services	<p>Operationalized the Detroit Housing Network as a one-stop housing service provider, with \$5 million in ARPA appropriation funds for implementation and a \$750,000 grant for planning and program design</p> <p>Held a Lead Listening Tour to bring together a coalition of city departments and local stakeholders</p>	<p>Improve data collection integration to better target the city's housing strategy and services</p> <p>Expand the Detroit Housing Network with an integrated technology platform and sustainable funding</p>
Durham	Center racial equity and resident health across city policies, to improve access to safe and affordable housing for no-, low-, and middle-income Durham residents	<p>Implementation is underway for the city's \$3.2 million Lead and Healthy Homes grant, in partnership with several local organizations</p> <p>The Breathe Easy pilot program strengthened working partnerships and increased local capacity to provide asthma remediation services</p>	<p>Establish a structure for city agencies and partner organizations to maintain clear lines of communication and leverage resources, including to increase workforce capacity</p> <p>Establish mechanisms to measure and share health data to track to impact of housing programs</p>
Jersey City	Increase the number of residents who live in healthy homes, to see improved health of no-, low-, and middle-income residents served by city housing programs	<p>Won the Municipal Lead Abatement Grant to carry out lead abatement and train minority contractors</p> <p>Pursued robust enforcement of the municipal rental registration process to, including all non-owner occupied 1-4 unit dwellings and all dwellings with five or more units, provided digital online registration process, and tracked registrations; digitalized tenant petitions.</p>	<p>Continue to strengthen partnerships with Hudson County and the state on housing, health, and lead poisoning</p> <p>Build out the rental registration database</p> <p>The Department of Justice and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced an agreement with the Jersey City Municipal Utilities Authority to improve wastewater and drinking water infrastructure and replace all lead pipes in Jersey City.</p>



The majority of cities in this cohort leaned into expanding partnership and data strategies towards sustainable housing equity. Examples include:

- ◆ In **Baton Rouge**, the formalization of the Housing 1<sup>st</sup> Alliance and the execution of a Housing Market Segmentation Report were priorities from the beginning. The team worked with researchers at the University of North Carolina Greensboro to mine local data and map the local housing market and health disparities. The report, now completed, revealed deep racial disparities in mortgage approvals and other social determinants of health. The findings are being used to inform a community-centered approach to develop a new housing plan that will help guide the development of new affordable housing for East Baton Rouge Parish.
- ◆ The coalition of housing and healthcare organizations on the **Bloomington** team went in with the goal of aligned action and came out with the city's first Lead Based Paint Hazard Reduction Program and Healthy Homes grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The city and its partners are exploring a data mapping project.
- ◆ Driven by staff who met through this cohort, the City of **Charlotte**, the two largest local healthcare systems, and the University of North Carolina have launched the Healthy Housing Innovation Lab, a group of program staff with executive support who develop and do feasibility tests of health and housing interventions. A new data collaboration and associated graduate student fellowship have emerged through this collaboration.
- ◆ Staff at **Durham** city agencies and local service providers identified a need for shared, detailed information on housing and health needs. The team developed a workplan to map available data sources and identify a suitable data platform to use collaboratively.

- ◆ **Detroit** applied for and received funding from the locally-based Herb Foundation to hold a learning collaborative and listening tour, in which multiple city departments and other Detroit lead stakeholders came together to learn about effective local models for lead remediation in similar cities, from speakers recommended by NLC.
- ◆ The **Jersey City** team engaged multiple city departments across housing and public health to expand the municipal rental registration process. The registry requires all non-owner occupied 1-4 unit dwellings and all buildings with five or more units to be registered with the city. The registration process is now completely online enabling tracking of the registrations. Tenant petitions are also completely online. The city also received a Municipal Lead Abatement Grant from the state of New Jersey to expand contractor capacity and address the high cost of repairs, one of the priorities identified by the team, and worked with The College of New Jersey to inform a [municipal guide](#) on addressing lead poisoning.

At the same time, as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing housing needs, other cities in the cohort moved to ensure housing stability and resident services as centerpieces of their healthy housing strategy.

- ◆ The **Baton Rouge** housing coalition moved quickly to stand up emergency rental assistance intake programs using ARPA funds, setting aside up to \$29 million for the program. The collaborative project is strengthening partnerships and building towards long-term housing access.
- ◆ The wide-ranging set of organizations represented on the **Bloomington** team allowed the group to participate in a regional collaboration that blended federal and private funding streams for eviction prevention in response to the pandemic.
- ◆ The **Detroit** team's vision was an integrated, comprehensive service model that would bring together the resources available across organizations to address residents' home repair needs. With the increased urgency brought on by the pandemic, the team has convened the [Detroit Housing Network](#) to set up a platform for integrated service delivery, using CARES and ARPA funding and grants from local foundations to support the platform development, program design, training, and local housing market studies.

# NLC Supports to Cities

## Leaders' Forum Approach



**When looking at this roadmap, we see that we can move more into a health focus. We haven't previously termed it as such, but we see that for years we have used our rehab programs as a way to acknowledge health impacts of housing."**

**Dr. Michael Pullum**, Senior Project Manager, Community Development Manager (Neighborhood Stabilization), City of Durham

**True collaboration and trust-building is slow. We have to explain, over and over, that slow is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of deep listening. It's progress."**

**Katie Simpson**, City Planner, City of Bloomington



The Healthy Housing City Leaders' Forum launched with a landscape assessment and action planning process, with each city team developing an Action Roadmap and workplan detailing their goals, assets, and gaps going into the first convening. Four of the six cities applied for and received access to planning grants of \$25,000 to support the development of their workplan goals and objectives, including:

- ◆ **Baton Rouge** undertook a community-centered design process to establish MOUs and build shared knowledge among the local organizations affiliated with the Housing 1<sup>st</sup> Alliance, a local coalition that formed to spearhead comprehensive healthy and affordable housing programs in the city-parish.
- ◆ **Bloomington** is embarking on a data mapping project to identify, collate, and combine local datasets in order to visualize correlations between housing and health data and identify areas of highest need. The data mapping project will strengthen local partnerships and will inform program implementation, planning initiatives, and storytelling.
- ◆ **Charlotte** has established a data fellowship for two graduate students who are bridging the gap between the City of Charlotte's data on housing inspections and Atrium's health data on asthma and lead poisoning. The fellowship position is a lynchpin in Charlotte's deepened partnership with local health providers and the University of North Carolina, and is the first step in the city's strategy to improve holistic tracking of health and housing outcomes.
- ◆ **Durham** completed a pilot of the Breathe Easy project as part of the team's strategy to strengthen the working partnerships among the city, Duke Health, PEACH, Reinvestment Partners, and the Home Repair Collaborative. The demonstration project has successfully increased local capacity to provide asthma remediation services and positioned the collaborative to undertake larger projects.



**This model is self-sustaining because everyone has something to gain – it's in the best interest of the city staff to be able to get help with housing data, for Atrium to get help with health data, and for UNCC to have paid internship postings. With this program, the health and housing work will continue to move forward.”**

**Warren Wooten**, Operations Manager,  
Housing & Neighborhood Services, City of Charlotte



## Convenings

Cities learn best from each other. Participants spoke to the value of peer-to-peer connections during the launch, mid-point, and closing convenings, as well as during the group learning engagements held throughout the initiative.

- ◆ The city teams each completed a landscape assessment in preparation for the first convening and presented their objectives, challenges, and key questions to the assembled city teams and faculty for feedback.
- ◆ Following the initial technical assistance and implementation period, NLC and Consilience Group guided each city through the development of an Action Roadmap, and coached city teams through populating their associated workplan during the mid-point virtual convening.
- ◆ At the closing convening, city teams shared the arc of their work, starting from their original vision and goals in their application and going through their current plans and their vision for the future.



**We were able to have a follow-up conversation with Dan Cohen, and we needed that level-set of talking with a set of peer cities to get that 1000 foot view of how we tackle these issues. It's exciting to think beyond the day-to-day minutiae."**

**Adam Kokenakes**, Program Analyst IV, Policy & Implementation Division,  
Housing & Revitalization Department, City of Detroit



**The Durham team shared a sample workplan for the HUD Lead Hazard Control grant, which helped enormously. We updated our plan and submitted it in much, much better shape.”**

**Jennifer Toney**, Grants Coordinator, City of Bloomington

**At the NLC Learning Lab session on HUD Lead Hazard grant implementation, our team learned from the other city speakers that there is a great need to reach out to people in the community. As a result, we structured our program to subgrant a portion of the funds to build the capacity of local community organizations to do the necessary outreach and education.”**

**Alfredo Cruz**, Vice President of Programs and Special Initiatives,  
Foundation for Louisiana; Baton Rouge Team Lead

## Resources

To support the real-time work of cities, NLC developed new turn-key tools and resources. The progress of each city's workplan is supported by our new series of [stakeholder briefs](#) that provides strategies for cities to engage health and community-based organizations, and work across different levels of government. The strategies are actionable and accessible for cities at different stages in their healthy housing work, and are drawn from interviews and case studies of cities that have successfully advanced healthy housing policies, programs, and practices. At the same time, our new [message guide](#) serves as a communications toolkit that provides useful statistics and turn-key messages that will resonate with specific sectors. Taken together, these resources shed new light on proven and effective strategies that cities can use to advance housing quality and health.

## What's Next

Just like our city teams, NLC has come out of the Healthy Housing City Leaders' Forum with the groundwork and experience to improve our healthy housing impact going forward. The next phase of NLC's healthy housing work will continue our hands-on technical assistance work with a new Community of Practice with cities. We will also provide a new Action Framework structure to provide stronger support to our Healthy Housing Learning Lab, which will live under the Local Action Challenge.

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## About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

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