



HEALTHY HOUSING

FIVE YEAR WORKPLAN

Prepared by the RI Department of Health's
Healthy Housing Steering Committee

December 2008



"Healthy housing' covers the provision of functional and adequate physical, social,
and mental conditions for health, safety, hygiene, comfort and privacy"

World Health Organization

Goal: To ensure that all homes in Rhode Island are dry, clean, pest-free, ventilated, without contaminants, and maintained.

Objective #1: Research, inventory and implement best practices related to healthy housing interventions and opportunities for linking health outcomes to unhealthy housing conditions.

- Identify places/areas where community assets are linked to community needs and develop ways to support those (e.g., find ESL classes that are working, evaluate the efforts and support those efforts that work best).
- Maintain research partnership with Brown University to identify opportunities to study the link between health outcomes and unhealthy housing conditions, school outcomes (special education, etc.) and other needed research questions.
 - **Current effort:** Three major projects are in progress: a) An evaluation of the decrease in BLLs in homes where a lead inspection was accepted, b) assessing if Medicaid children occupy homes with Certificates of Conformance, and c) Developing a report card for pediatric providers.
- Work with local colleges and universities to develop solid evaluation plans for all pilot programs designed to study the effectiveness and cost savings (short and long term) of healthy homes interventions.
 - **Current effort:** Brown University faculty member and student are analyzing Newport Housing Authority data to determine outcomes of the *Healthy Residents, Healthy Homes* project.
 - **Current effort:** Harvard School of Public Health and Brown University faculty are working closely with St. Joseph's Hospital on evaluation of the 'Asthma Center' model.
- Collaborate with the National Center for Healthy Housing in other research efforts related to healthy housing.
 - **Current effort:** Participating in a workgroup to develop a healthy housing indicator that will be released by RI KidsCount in 2009.
- Develop capacity within the Department of Health (DOH) to support Health Impact Assessments (HIA) and identify resources for doing the HIAs with other partners (e.g., Public Health Foundation, The Providence Plan, RI Housing, CDC, other research entities).
- Develop a strategy to get Community Action Programs (CAP agencies) and others (i.e., agencies that receive Community Development Block Grants, city planners, etc.) to implement the "Boston One Touch"¹ action steps when Weatherization and heating assistance is done in a home, for healthier and greener homes for families.

¹ http://www.ertassociates.com/images/pdf/Boston_One_Touch.pdf

Objective #2: Improve surveillance of health hazards inside the home by various public health professionals, such as case managers, inspectors, and others whose work involves entry into the home.

- Analyze relevant housing data from the Level I program in KIDSNET to determine high-risk neighborhoods in which to focus our efforts. .
- Work with a specific community in Rhode Island to assess the housing hazards and measure incidence of diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and asthma, that can help us define the relationship between housing hazards and health.

- Create a statewide housing database.
 - **Current effort: contract with The Providence Plan will begin in January 2008 to work on this.**
- Continue to leverage Family Outreach Program to collect information on housing quality.
 - **Current effort: Ongoing collection of data and adjusting the data collection tool.**
- Map addresses including utility shut offs, LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) recipients, and weatherization recipients to determine if these correlate with other environmental health issues (asthma, lead, injury, etc.).
- Identify opportunities to test for other measurable toxins such as pesticide residue levels, radon, and carbon monoxide, in units already being tested for lead. .
- Use grocery store evaluation data to identify areas in need of stores that sell healthier foods (identify "food deserts").
- Meet with Code Enforcement units of cities/towns to determine how data can be used to make referrals to the municipalities, to formulate policy, to provide technical assistance, etc.
 - **Current effort: The City of Providence indicated their current workload doesn't allow room for additional referrals; however, they are interested in referring families to us for lead inspections when necessary, e.g., at the request of a housing court judge. Other municipalities will be approached.**

Objective #3: Increase awareness of and knowledge about healthy housing issues and their impacts on health among the general public, legislators, and key agencies in the state.

- Disseminate the work that the state of RI is doing on Healthy Housing at a variety of forums, including the Prevention Block Grant Annual summit, to demonstrate ways to coordinate and integrate categorical and non-categorical programs that advance healthy housing initiatives.
 - **Current effort: Organizing the annual Healthy Housing Conference for May 2009; also preparing a DVD that will be released in early 2009 to educate children and families about healthy housing.**
- Issue a joint report between the Housing Resources Commission and the Department of Health on progress from the cities and towns toward compliance with the Low and Moderate Housing Act and the Plan to Eliminate Childhood Lead Poisoning. Include data on housing quality, code violations, affordability and others.
 - **Current effort: Issued the healthy housing databook in 2008 and will issue a revised and updated edition in 2010.**
- Work with research/advocacy agencies to develop an issue brief highlighting the need for improved investments in healthy housing activities.

Objective #4: Support efforts to ensure that state and federal housing financial programs support healthy housing.

- Work with the Department of Health's Asthma Control Program to identify funds for and pilot the efficacy of environmental interventions for children with asthma through "asthma centers".
 - [Current effort: The external workgroup includes representation from the Healthy Homes and Environment Team.](#)
 - [Current effort: St. Joseph's Hospital is piloting the 'Asthma Center' model with ten RI Chronic Care Collaborative Center pediatric asthma patients with partial funding from HEALTH. Full implementation is pending funding.](#)
- Track and monitor federal healthy housing legislative efforts and identify any model tools or incentives that could be utilized in long-term legislative efforts in RI.
- Support additional funding for:
 - Landlords to safely rehabilitate rental units that will be maintained affordable.
 - Energy assistance for low-income households (LIHEAP).
 - The State Energy Office for piloting other health and safety improvements (IPM, window replacement, etc.) during Weatherization work.
 - The expansion of the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP).
 - The implementation of a home modification loan program for individuals with disabilities
 - Foreclosure properties
- Replicate the Newport Housing Authority, *Healthy Residents, Healthy Homes* model in at least three public housing authorities in Rhode Island. (RI Asthma State Plan)
 - [Current effort: The *Healthy Residents, Healthy Homes* project has been implemented since March 2007 and continues to be sustained.](#)

Objective #5: Assist cities and towns in the development and rehabilitation of "healthier" housing.

- Develop basic specifications for a "healthy housing unit" that can be disseminated and used by groups creating and rehabilitating housing units in the state.
- Promote radon resistant construction in high risk areas
 - [Current effort: Radon program working on promoting this in Exeter and Richmond.](#)
- Provide cities/towns ways to measure the impact of their efforts in projects that they approve, such as building zoning, etc.
- Develop a mechanism to equip communities (i.e., Fire Departments) to conduct mercury exchanges in their communities on an ongoing basis
 - [Current effort: Developing a RFP to provide funding and guidance to Fire Departments to conduct this on their own.](#)
- Implement policies restricting indoor smoking on multi-unit residential properties.

Objective #6: Form a statewide healthy housing network of providers (inspectors, case managers, home visitors, head start teachers, etc.) to promote healthy housing practices in their respective programs.

- Coordinate training for groups including, but not limited to Head Start teachers and family workers, the Public Housing Authorities, and the state's minimum housing code and building code officials.
- Conduct training with family workers and teaching staff from Head Start Agencies on healthy housing and visual assessments in homes.
- Provide training for the Providence Housing Authority and other Public Housing Authorities in the state on mold identification and remediation and other healthy housing topics.
- Identify additional key agencies and officials in need of training on healthy housing and in-home visual assessments.
- Train the state's minimum housing code and building code officials on actions to take to improve the quality of Rhode Islanders' home environments
- Include a "healthy housing" component in the inspections that are conducted for a variety of purposes, including the lead inspections, weatherization inspections, case management visits for different programs, etc.
 - **Current effort: Development of a healthy housing checklist is in progress and will be piloted with the lead inspectors and others in early 2009.**
- Implement policies restricting indoor smoking on multi-unit residential properties.
 - **Current effort: HEALTH will provide funding to expand the Newport Housing Authority's Healthy Residents, Healthy Homes project to include smoke-free housing.**
- Identify ways to incorporate healthy housing practices in the trainings that are already offered by a variety of agencies such as Childhood Lead Action Project (CLAP), RI Housing, Coalition for the Homeless, etc.