Chapter 6: SPECIAL HOUSING ISSUES

Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes

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Administering Agency: HUD's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes (OLHCHH)

Year Started: Lead Hazard Control, 1992; Healthy Homes Initiative, 1999

Population Targeted: Low-income and very low-income families who reside in worst-quality private housing where children under six years of age reside or are likely to reside

FY21 Funding: $360 million, including $60 million for the Healthy Homes Initiative

FY22 Funding: $415 million, $55 million more than the FY 2021 enacted level.

Children spend as much as 90% of their time indoors, and toxic substances can reach more concentrated levels indoors than they do outside. Older, dilapidated housing with lead-based paint, and the settled interior dust and exterior bare soil it generates, are the biggest sources of lead exposure for children (lead in drinking water and other sources can also be a problem). Often these units have a combination of health dangers that include dust mites, mold (fungi), and pests that can trigger asthma; carcinogens, such as asbestos, radon, and pesticides; and other deadly toxins such as carbon monoxide.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill as signed into law included $15 billion for removal of lead drinking water service lines. The November 2021 House Build Back Better Bill included $5 billion for addressing lead paint hazards and other healthy homes issues to be funded through OLHCHH, as well as an additional $9 billion for lead in water (through EPA) and $970 million for lead service line removal in rural areas through USDA.

On October 28, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its blood lead reference value (BLRV) from 5 µg/dL to 3.5 µg/dL, which will increase the number of children deemed to have an elevated blood lead level. BLRV is used by public health agencies and healthcare providers to help guide interventions for children following blood lead tests and prioritize primary prevention efforts in communities. Read more here: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7043a4.htm?s_cid=mm7043a4_w.

On January 15, 2021, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) promulgated a final version of their updated drinking water lead and copper rule. The effective date of the rule has been extended to December 16, 2021, and water utilities will have until October 16, 2024 to achieve compliance. Read more here: https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/proposed-revisions-lead-and-copper-rule.

The Biden Administration is considering an executive order: "Ensuring Healthy Homes: Eliminating Lead and Other Housing Hazards." The urgent need for homes that support good health has never been clearer: the COVID-19 pandemic has meant more time in our residences, bringing healthy housing to the fore as a national priority. This Executive Order establishes a cabinet-level Presidential Task Force on Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Housing to coordinate the nation's response to lead paint and other housing-related diseases and injuries under the Biden Administration. Led by the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, this Task Force will recommend new strategies, regulations, incentives, and other actions that promise to conquer these avoidable problems. With strategic leadership and concerted action, the Task Force can eliminate childhood lead poisoning as a major public health problem and ensure that all American families have healthy homes.

The draft executive order was written by the National Center for Healthy Housing and is available here: https://twitter.com/Day1Project/status/1338593971069734913?s=20.

The National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition tracks appropriations for these two programs and regularly circulates sign-on letters. See: www.nchh.org and: http://www.nchh.org/Policy/National-Policy/Federal-Appropriations.aspx. In addition, healthy housing fact sheets are now available for all 50 states and five major territories (https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/fact-sheets/state-hh-fact-sheets/) and agency fact sheets summarizing the activities, funding, and impact of key federal programs related to healthy housing (https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/fact-sheets/agency-fact-sheets/).

The World Health Organization released new International Housing and Health Guidelines in December 2018. See: http://www.who.int/sustainable-development/publications/housing-health-guidelines/en/.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Lead Hazard Control

The "Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Act," or Title X of the "Housing and Community Development Act of 1992," was enacted to focus the nation on making housing safe for children by preventing exposure to lead-based paint hazards (the statute defines this as deteriorated lead-based paint, lead contaminated settled house dust, and lead contaminated bare soil). The law authorized the HUD Lead Hazard Control Grant Program and related programs at the EPA and CDC to provide grants to local jurisdictions to identify and control lead-based paint hazards in privately owned, low-income, owner-occupied, and rental housing and conduct training and public health surveillance and other duties.

Healthy Homes Initiative

The Healthy Homes Initiative was established by Congress in 1999 to protect children and their families from residential health and safety hazards. The goal of this program is a comprehensive, integrated approach to housing hazards through grants that create and demonstrate effective, low-cost methods of addressing mold, lead, allergens, asthma, carbon monoxide, home safety, pesticides, radon and other housing-related health and safety hazards. These grant programs are housed in HUD's OLHCHH.

The beneficiaries of both the lead and healthy homes programs are low-income households and the broader public through education campaigns. Assisted rental units served must be affirmatively marketed for at least three years for families with children under age six. Ninety percent of owner-occupied units served must house or be regularly visited by a child under age six. Because the funds do not cover all housing eligible under federal policy, each grantee develops its local plan and is permitted to target investment of grant funds based on factors such as the presence of a lead-poisoned child and location in a high-risk neighborhood. The programs' funds are awarded via competitive Notices of Fund Availability.

ISSUE SUMMARY

Recent research confirms that housing policy has a profound impact on public health, and for any public health agenda to be effective, it must include a housing component. The statistics and key findings regarding the long-term effects of housing-related health hazards are alarming. At least 500,000 children aged one to five in the US have elevated blood lead levels above the current CDC reference value of 3.5 micrograms per deciliter. Childhood exposure to lead can have lifelong consequences including decreased cognitive function, developmental delays, behavior problems, and, at very high levels can cause seizures, coma, and even death. Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions among children in the U.S.; over 25 million people in the U.S. have asthma, including 7% of children under 18.

The burden of housing-related health hazards falls disproportionately on the most vulnerable

children and communities, contributing greatly to U.S. health disparities. African American children are twice as likely to have asthma and are six times more likely to die from it than white children. Households with annual incomes less than $30,000 and children of low-income families are much more likely to be lead-poisoned than those of higher-income families. Children poisoned by lead are seven times more likely to drop out of school, and six times more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system.

There are even bigger consequences when dealing with the cumulative effects of multiple hazards. Inadequate ventilation increases the concentration of indoor air pollutants, such as radon and carbon monoxide, and exacerbates moisture and humidity problems. Moisture causes paint deterioration, which puts children at risk of exposure to leaded dust and paint chips. Moisture also encourages the growth of mold, mildew, dust mites, and microbes that contribute to asthma and other respiratory diseases and structural rot, which is related to injuries. Asthma is exacerbated by allergic reaction to certain triggers such as dust, mold, pests (such as cockroaches, rats, and mice), cold air, and dry heat. Use of common pesticides to control infestations can contaminate homes. Thus, a 'whole-house' approach is critical, including thorough inspections, air tests, and remediation activities.

Additionally, solutions and opportunities may arise through existing weatherization, rehabilitation, maintenance, and home repair work. Because improperly disturbing lead-based paint may cause lead poisoning, it is necessary to use lead-safe work practices and comply with the EPA's renovation, repair, and painting rule (and for federally assisted housing, HUD's Lead Safe Housing rule). Many weatherization treatments have healthy homes benefits. For example, window replacement can help with lead poisoning prevention, and roof repair and insulation may help reduce moisture intrusion and prevent mold. Improving ventilation to ameliorate the ill effects of tightening a building can help ensure no harm from energy-efficiency measures. Healthy Homes and weatherization/building performance are described in a report from the Department of Energy and the National Center for Healthy Housing: https://www.energystar.gov/campaign/improvements/professionals/resources_library/health_and_home_performance.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Healthy Homes Initiative

The Healthy Homes Demonstration Grant Program develops, demonstrates, and promotes cost-effective, preventive measures for identifying and correcting residential health and safety hazards. HUD awards Healthy Homes Demonstration grants to nonprofits, for-profit firms located in the U.S., state and local governments, federally recognized Indian Tribes, and colleges and universities.

HUD also often awards Healthy Homes Supplemental funding to grantees when distributing lead hazard control and lead hazard reduction demonstration grants to allow grantees to address other healthy homes issues when conducting their lead programs.

Lead Hazard Control Grants

The typical Lead Hazard Control award addresses hazards in several hundred homes and provides needed outreach and capacity-building services. Grants are awarded to states, counties, and cities for lead hazard control in privately-owned, low-income housing. At least 65% of the grant must be used for direct activities such as abatement, interim control, clearance, and risk assessment (and to a limited extent other healthy housing issues). Grantees are required to partner with community groups, typically by awarding sub-grants, and to provide a match of 10% to 25% from local or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. More than $1 billion has been awarded since the program started in 1992.

Lead Hazard Reduction Demonstration Grants

The Lead Hazard Reduction Demonstration grant program targets funds for lead hazard control to the nation's highest-risk cities as defined by the

prevalence of lead poisoning and the number of pre-1940 rental housing units. Grants may be as high as $3 million, but 80% of the funds must be spent on direct activities, and HUD requires a 25% local match from local or CDBG funds. High-risk cities can receive demonstration grants in addition to basic lead hazard control grants. HUD now allows a portion of the lead grants to be used for other healthy homes issues.

Healthy Homes and Lead Technical Studies Grants

Healthy Homes and Lead Technical Studies grants develop and improve cost-effective methods for evaluating and controlling residential health and safety hazards through a separate competition open to academic and nonprofit institutions, state and local governments, tribes, and for-profit and non-profit research organizations.

OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES

Programs at CDC's National Center for Environmental Health and EPA provide complementary programs to HUD's OLHCHH. The EPA provides training and licensing programs and laboratory quality control programs; CDC-funded programs provide surveillance data, education, laboratory quality control for blood lead testing, and outreach on housing related diseases and injuries; and HUD-funded programs remediate homes to remove the health hazards.

For more information on healthy homes work at these and other federal agencies, see https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/fact-sheets/agency-fact-sheets/.

CDC Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

CDC's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program provides funding to state and local health departments to determine the extent of childhood lead poisoning by screening children for elevated blood lead levels, helping to ensure that lead-poisoned infants and children receive medical and environmental follow-up, and developing neighborhood-based efforts to prevent childhood lead poisoning. Due to consistently increased funds, this program was able to issue grants to 48 states and 10 cities in 2021. This program also funds the Flint Lead Exposure Registry.

CDC National Asthma Control Program

CDC's National Asthma Control Program funds states, localities, and others to improve asthma surveillance, build coalitions that implement interventions, translate asthma guidelines into public health practice, collect and analyze data not available elsewhere, and increase asthma awareness. This program typically funds about 30 states.

CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program

CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program hosts an online database and visualization tool (the Environmental Public Health Tracking Network) that provides 23 datasets, 124 indicators, and 449 health measures on public health topics like air quality, water, asthma, carbon monoxide, and birth defects. The program also funds 25 states and one city to run their own tracking programs.

EPA Lead Programs

EPA's Lead Risk Reduction Program updates and supports implementation of lead hazard standards, requires lead-safe work practices, ensures treatment of residential drinking water, and ensures disclosure of known lead during rent or sale of a home. EPA's Lead Categorical Grants fund states that have adopted EPA regulations around lead paint hazard abatement and renovation.

EPA Indoor Air Quality Programs

EPA's Reduce Risk from Indoor Air program educates and equips individuals and organizations to reduce health risks from poor indoor air quality, including radon, secondhand smoke, carbon monoxide exposure, and asthma triggers like mold, pests, and dust. EPA's Indoor Air: Radon program and Radon Categorical Grants promote actions to reduce health risks from radon, including radon-reducing features

in new buildings and testing and fixing radon in existing homes, and administer the National Radon Action Plan.

EPA Children and Other Sensitive Populations

EPA's Children and Other Sensitive Populations: Agency Coordination program ensures that EPA programs protect children's environmental health by developing regulations, improving policy, implementing community-level programs, and collecting and interpreting data.

FUNDING

FY22 proposed budgets:

- HUD Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes: $415 million passed by Congress.
- CDC Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program: $50 million (House), $46 million (Senate).
- CDC National Asthma Control Program: $34 million (House), $32 million (Senate).
- CDC National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network: $34 million.
- EPA Lead Categorical Grants: $21 million (House), $14.6 million (Senate).
- EPA Radon Categorical Grants: $11 million (House), $8.9 million (Senate).

FORECAST FOR 2022

The FY22 appropriation passed at $415 million. This funding level is below the National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition's proposal of $606 million but is a welcome increase ($55 million more than FY21) and continues to build on the increases seen in the past few years. Please see this link for updates https://nchh.org/information-and-evidence/healthy-housing-policy/national/current-nchh-work/federal-appropriations/.

TIPS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS

Many communities have improved the quality of their housing stock through the development of better codes, such as the National Healthy Housing Standard, and proactive code enforcement programs, instead of a complaint-driven process. For example, many housing codes prohibit peeling paint, standing water, chronic moisture, roof and plumbing leaks, and pest infestation. The International Residential Code requires carbon monoxide detectors in new homes with fuel-burning appliances or attached garages. Efforts are underway to require carbon monoxide detectors in existing housing and radon-resistant new construction and to prohibit lead hazards and excessive moisture that leads to mold. Increasing public awareness and concern about other housing-related hazards is fueling new attention to state and local regulation of healthy homes issues. Many communities have also urged strong collaboration between departments of housing, health, and environment; effective utilization of CDC surveillance data to guide HUD programs to families and areas of greatest need; enforcement of EPA requirements; and state Medicaid reimbursement for environmental health services in the homes of lead-exposed children and people with asthma.

Resources:

- Technical Assistance tools on local codes, RRP certification, and lead-safe demolition: https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/nchh-tools-for-technical-assistance/lead-legal-strategies-partnership-technical-assistance-tool-series/.
- How to make proactive rental inspection effective: https://nchh.org/resource-library/how-to-make-proactive-rental-inspection-effective.pdf.
- Creating effective and efficient primary prevention programs: https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/nchh-tools-for-technical-assistance/creating-effective-and-efficient-primary-prevention-programs/.
- Healthcare financing of healthy homes: https://nchh.org/tools-and-data/financing-and-funding/healthcare-financing/.

WHAT TO SAY TO LEGISLATORS

Advocates should contact their Members of Congress, ask to speak to the person who deals with housing, health or environmental policy, and deliver the message that funding is needed to correct health and safety hazards and lead hazards in homes. Healthy homes interventions prevent injury, neurological and respiratory diseases, cancer, and even death from toxins such as carbon monoxide and radon. Addressing these hazards provides economic benefits, too; for example:

- Removing leaded drinking water service lines from the homes of children born in 2018 alone would protect more than 350,000 children and yield $2.7 billion in future benefits, or about $1.33 per dollar invested.
- Eradicating lead paint hazards from older homes of children from low-income families would provide at least $3.5 billion in future benefits, or approximately $1.39 per dollar invested, and protect more than 311,000 children born in 2018 alone.
- For every $1 spent on home-based asthma control, there is a return on investment of $2.03.

Advocates should use the Healthy Housing Fact Sheets for each state and five major territories at: https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/fact-sheets/state-hh-fact-sheets/ and the Healthy Housing Agency Fact Sheets at https://nchh.org/who-we-are/nchh-publications/fact-sheets/agency-fact-sheets/.

Advocates should also inform legislators of the following ways through which they can lend support for reducing housing-related health problems:

- Fully fund HUD's Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes Program through which communities can fix homes with health hazards, including lead-based paint problems. This also requires full funding for allied HUD programs, such as the Community Development Block Grants, Public and Indian Housing, Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, and others.
- Include lead paint funding in infrastructure-focused efforts.
- Fully fund healthy homes programs within CDC's National Center for Environmental Health, including the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, the National Asthma Control Program, and the Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.
- Fully fund lead and healthy homes activities at EPA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Center for Healthy Housing, 410-992-0712, http://www.nchh.org/.

National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition, www.nshhcoalition.org.

HUD's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes, https://www.hud.gov/lead.

CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/.