Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes

By Sarah Goodwin, Policy and Advocacy Manager, National Center for Healthy Housing and David Jacobs, PhD, CIH, Chief Scientist, National Center for Healthy Housing

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. CDC estimates that 500,000 children have blood lead levels higher than the Blood Lead Reference Value of 3.5 µg/dL: https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/about/index.html.

Estimated FY25 Funding: The House bill includes $335 million (including $130 million for healthy homes), and the Senate bill includes $345 million (including $142 million for healthy homes).

Both the House and Senate bills remove funding for radon mitigation and coordination between weatherization and healthy homes. The House bill also removes funding for home repairs for older adults, and the Senate bill decreases funding for technical studies.

The House bill adds one new element, providing funding for a financing pilot program called the National Lead Safe and Healthy Homes Fund, which would support the investment and creation of grant and loan funds, supported by both public and private funds, in local communities through a national mezzanine program.

The Senate bill also makes some minor administrative changes, most notably exempting the aging in place home repair program from environmental review.

The House bill rescinds $553.6 million in previous funding.

Children spend as much as 90% of their time indoors where toxic substances can reach higher levels than 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

On October 23 2024, EPA finalized their new rule regulating lead-dust hazards: https://bit.ly/3SbqBKR. Under this rule change, the dust-lead reportable level (previously known as the dust-lead hazard standard) went from 10 µg/ft2 for floors and 100 µd/ft2 for windowsills to any reportable level analyzed by a recognized laboratory, and the dust-lead action level (previously known as the dust-lead clearance level) is now set at 5 µg/ft2 for floors, 40 µg/ft2 for sills, and 100 µg/ft2 for window troughs. What this now means is that EPA will recommend abatement at or above these new dust-lead action levels.

The rule goes into effect 60 days after publication. The compliance dates for the new levels, and the new abatement report language also provided in the rule, are one year after the effective date. States that operate their lead programs through delegated authority from EPA will get an additional year.

On October 8 2024, EPA released their final Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI) rule change. The LCRI requires drinking water

systems to replace all of their lead service lines within 10 years. This is the first time the federal government has required lead service line replacement at this scale. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill as signed into law included $15 billion for removal of lead drinking water service lines.

In their FY25 budget, HUD's OLHCHH proposed shifting 80% of their lead grants from competitive to formula funding. While neither the House nor the Senate adopted this request in the FY25 committee bills, the Senate report language encouraged HUD to continue exploring the idea. In fall 2024, HUD released a Request for Information to collect feedback on the proposal. The RFI closed on November 15 and submitted comments from national, state, and local groups can be viewed here: https://bit.ly/4iyBLEi.

In October 2023, EPA released an endangerment finding: https://bit.ly/4itPg8g on lead emissions from small aircraft, which still use leaded gasoline.

On October 28, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 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. The BLRV is used by public health agencies and healthcare providers and others 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. Some states have adjusted their programs and protocols to follow the new reference value. An overview of state-level policies and programs is here: https://bit.ly/3GB7Vlc.

The Department of the Treasury specifically mentioned lead hazard remediation and replacement of lead service lines as eligible uses of "American Rescue Plan Act" dollars. Some states and communities have already taken advantage of this opportunity; for example, Pittsburgh: https://nchh.org/2022/04/arpa-innovators_city-of-pittsburgh/ allocated $17.5 million for replacement of lead service lines and $2 million to support implementation of the city's new lead safety law, Utica: https://nchh.org/2022/04/arpa-innovators_city-of-utica/ allocated $970,000 to supplement their HUD-funded lead hazard control program, and North Carolina: https://nchh.org/2022/04/arpa-innovators_north-carolina-division-of-public-health/ allocated $32 million to identify and fix lead in water in schools, and another $112 million to identify and fix lead paint and asbestos in schools and child care facilities. You can read more about these and other examples here: https://bit.ly/4ixOs2i and here: https://bit.ly/42YSU5v.

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. Also, 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/).

History and Purpose

LEAD HAZARD CONTROL

The history of lead paint poisoning prevention and healthy homes over the past 50 years has been described in a new book. It shows that there have been 3 phases: a largely failed medical approach from 1971-1992; a housing-focused prevention (but small-scale) approach from 1992-2016; and in recent years an approach that takes proven solutions to the necessary scale (see: https://www.elsevier.com/books/fifty-years-of-peeling-away-the-lead-paint-problem/jacobs/978-0-443-18736-0).

The "Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Act," also known as 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 Environmental Protection Agency (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.

Because Title X is now more than 30 years old, certain reforms are required, which are detailed here: https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/Fulltext/9900/Childhood_Lead_Poisoning_1970_2022__Charting.79.aspx.

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 program takes 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. 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. Some have suggested the eligibility criteria for this program are too narrow and should be expanded.

ISSUE SUMMARY

Recent research confirms that housing policy has a profound impact on public health, education, economic and other domains. For any public health agenda to be effective, it must include housing improvement, preservation and affordability components. The statistics and key findings regarding the long-term effects of housing-related health hazards are alarming. At least 590,000 children aged one to five in the U.S. 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 and housing plays a key role in asthma exacerbation.

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.

The number of homes with deteriorated lead paint *increased* by 4.6 million homes from 1999 to 2019 as the housing stock continued to age. The percentage of homes in poverty (annual income less than $30,000 - $35,000) with lead paint declined from 40% to 33% between 2012 and 2019, but lower income households still were significantly more likely to have lead paint. In short, lead paint deterioration is worsening, and disparities remain pronounced. In the 1999 HUD American Healthy Housing Survey, 41% (±11%) of homes occupied by African American families had lead paint, compared to 40% (± 4%) of homes occupied by white families (the 1990 survey did not report its findings by race). The 2006 survey found a larger disparity in homes with lead paint (45% ± 4% of African American homes and 32% ± 3% of homes with whites), but the 2019 survey found 25% (± 7%) and 45% (± 10%) of homes had lead paint for African American and white households, respectively. In 2019, the housing surveys showed the arithmetic mean dust lead loading on floors nationwide improved by 73% (3.68 µg/ft^2 compared to 13.6 µg/ft^2 in 1999). On windowsills, mean dust lead levels improved by 72% (54 µg/ft^2 compared to 195 µg/ft^2 in 1999). The 2023 EPA and HUD lead dust standards for floors and windowsills were 10 and 100 µg/ft^2 respectively.

The cumulative effects of multiple hazards have greater consequences than individual exposures. 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 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

Overall, in 2024 (as of November), OLHCHH awarded 176 grants totaling over $529,000,000 to local governments, state governments, and nonprofit entities in 42 states, DC, and Puerto Rico.

HEALTHY HOMES INITIATIVE

The Healthy Homes Production Grant Program develops, demonstrates, and promotes cost-effective, preventive measures for identifying and correcting residential health and safety hazards. HUD awards Healthy Homes Production 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.

In 2024, HUD awarded Healthy Homes Production Grants to 25 entities across 17 states, grants for home repairs for low-income older adults to 25 entities in 10 states and one territory, and grants for coordination between weatherization and healthy homes programs to three entities in three states.

LEAD-BASED PAINT HAZARD CONTROL GRANTS

The typical 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% from local or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. More than $1 billion has been awarded since the program started in 1992.

In 2024, HUD awarded these grants to 14 entities across 11 states.

LEAD HAZARD REDUCTION DEMONSTRATION GRANTS

This 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. HUD requires a 10% 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.

In 2024, HUD awarded these grants to 59 entities across 25 states and DC.

LEAD HAZARD REDUCTION CAPACITY BUILDING GRANTS

This program, new in 2023, provides smaller-sized Lead Hazard Reduction awards to grantees that haven't previously had a lead hazard control grant and need a smaller award to build capacity to complete the work in their communities.

In 2024, HUD awarded these grants to 22 entities across 15 states.

HEALTHY HOMES AND LEAD TECHNICAL STUDIES GRANTS

These 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.

In 2024, HUD awarded 27 such grants to entities in 17 states, DC, and PR.

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 ten 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 at least 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 31 states, one city, and one county 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 and other activities. 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.

Forecast for 2025

The Covid-19 pandemic, wildfires, and disaster recovery have made the need for healthy homes clearer than ever. New efforts to decarbonize housing, e.g., replacement of gas stoves and other fossil-fuel combustion in housing have become more pronounced. HUD and other agencies will be launching new efforts to expand and preserve affordable, energy efficient, green healthy housing in coming years.

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 more funding is needed to correct health and safety hazards and lead hazards in homes before they cause needless harm, suffering and increased expense. The costs of remediation are far less than the financial benefits. 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/.