

**Healthy Housing Briefing Recommendations
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004**

**Sponsors: DC Asthma Coalition and Academy of Pediatrics, DC
Chapter**

December 7, 2017 10:00AM – Room 104

OVERVIEW: Housing can adversely affect health and poor housing conditions like deteriorated paint, rodent infestations, unrepaired leaks and poor ventilation contribute to chronic conditions like lead poisoning and asthma. Asthma is a serious public health concern and the most common chronic disease among children. Asthma is among the leading causes of school absenteeism, childhood hospitalizations, and pediatric emergency room visits in the United States. The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) recommends that asthma management be paired with reductions of environmental triggers such as those occurring in home environments. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recommend preventive approaches to reduce exposure to lead. The DC Asthma Coalition has been working with clinicians, community and health advocates, to develop the following policy recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Improve interagency coordination through Memorandums of Understanding and/or an Interagency Working Group on Healthy Housing (Purpose: To improve the ability of families to get prompt attention to housing code violations related to their health; To create sustainable public facing mechanisms to access resources, programs and services offered by these agencies to correct housing conditions associated with health)**
 - Agencies including the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA), Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE), Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Department of Health, Public Housing Authority (DCPHA), Office of Attorney General (OAG), and Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA) and advocates and community stakeholders from the private sector would make up the Interagency Work Group. All contribute towards healthy housing efforts but have no clear mechanisms for coordinating their efforts to effectively address resident concerns about adverse housing conditions such as persistent rodent infestations, or unrepaired leaks. We recommend the Interagency Working group review problematic conditions for renters or low income home owners,

identify and assign roles and responsibilities to appropriate agencies, and create transparent protocols that could form the basis for standard workflows between agencies and improved mechanisms for District residents to access these services. The recent Lead and Healthy Housing Conference sponsored by DOEE is a good first step towards creating a network of agencies and organizations committing to improving the responsiveness of DC to healthy housing problems faced by District residents. We are asking that this cooperation be staffed with a resource person with reporting relationships to more than one agency and the ability to be a liaison to low income property owners and tenants

- **Create public private financing models to create a sustainable resource base for evidence based asthma programs (Purpose: To identify resources to supplement existing federal funding so that programs can expand their services, and address existing gaps such as low income homeowners; To create a workforce health care workers can refer families to for housing interventions to create a healthier home environment)**

- Through public and private funding mechanisms the District of Columbia should support the sustainability of effective healthy housing interventions such as those recommended for effective asthma management and lead poisoning prevention from the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adequate support is needed to, sustain, and grow current programs that work at the intersection of pediatric asthma and healthy housing such as home visits to assess housing conditions and assist with the repair of those conditions associated with diseases like asthma and lead poisoning. The District of Columbia should also adequately support agencies responsible for assessment of housing code violations and enforcement of housing code violations so that the capacity can meet the demand.

- **Create better and more effective mechanisms for tenants to become aware of problems in housing prior to rental or purchase and to access services when problems arise after occupancy (Purpose: To alert tenants to housing hazards prior to rental or purchase; To assist families when conditions arise during their occupancy that pose an immediate health risk).**

Prospective tenants often are unaware of issues related to housing they are considering. Code violations or the presence of hazardous substances such as lead are often not disclosed to potential renters or purchasers. It would be helpful if prospective tenants especially those with young children had a way to access information about previous code violations or the presence or remediation of lead hazards. One task of the Interagency Working Group could be to explore the use of technology to better link agencies and track problem

housing conditions such as data collection and reporting, registry of housing code violations. Building owners should be encouraged to disclose and be transparent with prospective tenants about previous code violations and these violations should be publicly available. When a family with young children who have been diagnosed with a condition such as asthma are living in a property with environmental triggers or hazards that violate District law, there should be an expedited mechanism for them to obtain relief.

- **Explore cost effective models for addressing small hazards in housing including the development of a trained, affordable workforce that could be accessed by low income residents in rental or owner occupied housing (Purpose: To create affordable and effective mechanisms for maintaining and repairing low income rental housing and low income owner occupied housing to prevent lead poisoning and asthma exacerbations; To develop building wide and preventive approaches rather than waiting for residents to exhibit housing related health conditions like asthma and lead poisoning).**

Some jurisdictions have developed mechanisms to more effectively and proactively address hazards in housing. Effective evidence based interventions include as sealing cracks and crevices to prevent rodents from entering properties from the outside or moving from unit to unit, and repairing small leaks to prevent mold and the deterioration of leaded paint. Current approaches in DC rely on the good will and diligence of property owners. When an adverse housing condition develops we act only when there is a complaint from an individual family when a child is identified with an elevated blood lead level or an asthma attack occurs that is related to a housing condition. We recommend that operations and maintenance personnel who work for property managers of low income housing be trained to ensure that routine maintenance is performed in accordance with standards and protocols developed by federal agencies including the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Environmental Protection Agency. These protocols were intended to set standards and disseminate best practices that protect the health of residents. One example is integrated pest management which takes a building wide approach to pests such as cockroaches and avoids the use of sprays which are known to aggravate residents with respiratory conditions. We also recommend that when there is a child on the premises with a diagnosed conditions such as asthma or lead poisoning, that there be a clear and timely mechanism for addressing housing conditions that have the potential to make the health conditions worse. These conditions could be addressed by a designated healthy housing workforce that could be housed in a public or a private agency and

is available to owners of low income housing including owner occupied housing.