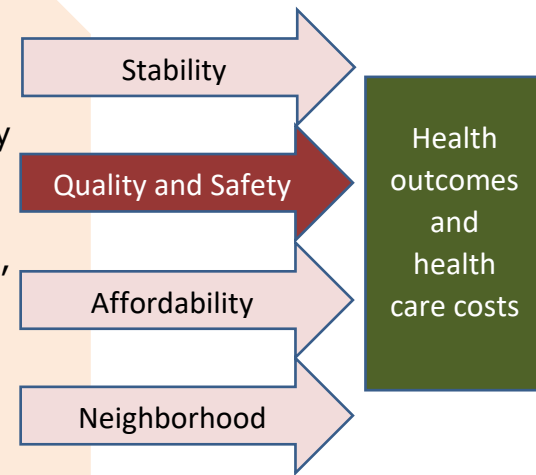# Housing as a Social Determinant of Health:
Quality and Safety

How is housing related to health?

This resource guide focuses on how housing quality and safety is related to health. Several environmental and housing factors connect with health outcomes including lead, water leaks, poor ventilation, dirty carpets, extreme temperatures, pest infestation, and more. Evidence also shows that improving safety and quality in homes can improve health, such as removing asthma triggers, implementing smoking bans, providing financial assistance for home heating and cooling, and modifying homes for accessibility.

Review more at: HEART Learning Community – Housing and Housing And Health | Health Affairs

Stability

Quality and Safety

Affordability

Neighborhood

Health outcomes and health care costs

Housing Code Enforcements and Equity

In most U.S. jurisdictions, local governments use code regulations to enforce safe and healthy housing conditions. This is mainly done through reports and inspections to ensure landlords are complying with these codes. This includes looking at water leaks, heating and cooling, pest or rodent infestations, mold, and lead which are factors that can trigger unhealthy conditions such as asthma. However, these reports and inspections are often overlooked in marginalized communities, due to fear of retaliation from landlords and law enforcement or insufficient reporting methods. This study shows how these inefficient regulatory practices contribute to disparities in healthy housing.

Read more at: Unequal Housing Conditions And Code Enforcement Contribute To Asthma Disparities | Health Affairs

Watch a video at: Equitable Implementation of Housing Codes | ChangeLab Solutions

Health Impact Assessment

This resource displays a health impact assessment which was used to analyze and strategize for better housing code enforcement and improving health. This report from Memphis, Tennessee examines how housing code enforcement could more strategically prioritize public health as a key outcome of housing policies and programs and better coordinate with public health agencies, community health nonprofits, and the broader system of health care institutions.

Case study: Alameda County Habitability

Alameda County Public Health Department took a multifaceted approach to its housing work, with one of their focuses being on habitability. They did this through programs and policies such as:

- Asthma Start Program for identifying environmental triggers in home.
- Tenant protection ordinance.
- Collaboration with health inspections unit.
- Oakland's vacant property registration ordinance which requires banks to abate blight in foreclosed properties or pay a fine.

See the full description on why and how these were put into action.

Case study: Multnomah County
Addressing asthma at different levels

The Multnomah County Health Department developed strategies at different levels to address housing as a social determinant of health, and its linkage to asthma.

- **Policy Level**: Work with policymakers on initiatives that address the root causes of environmental health hazards, such as strengthening local codes to increase protection of renters' health.
- **Institutional Level**: Promote use of a web-based referral program among health professionals so they can easily refer pediatric asthma patients for home inspections with an environmental health specialist.
- **Community Level**: Conduct community outreach and education with landlords and tenants about principles of a healthy and affordable home.
- **Individual and Interpersonal Level**: Visit low-income homes to help children gain more control over their asthma, identify environmental home triggers, and find ways to reduce triggers through the Healthy Homes program.

View more context at: Multnomah Healthy Homes Toolkit

State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)
One of the SHIP priorities is healthy housing. It contains strategies with sample activities related to improving quality and safety of housing such as:

Strategies	Sample activities
Improve the quality of housing.	- Fund grant and no cost loan programs for weatherization, energy efficiency, and other home improvement projects. - Improve rental housing inspection policies and programs (for example, proactive inspections, inspection results reporting requirements).
Improve the safety of housing.	- Increase funding for lead abatement programs, including training and certification of lead abatement professionals. - Improve detection, abatement, and enforcement policies and programs for home hazards (for example, lead, radon, asbestos).

Find more at Wisconsin State Health Plan.

Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) resources

Healthy Homes Toolkit: Improve housing healthiness through this toolkit that includes how to incorporate health equity, engage local partners, communicate products, and follow eight key elements for healthy homes.

Prevention and Healthy Living: Read about different topics on prevention and healthy living including several factors related to environmental health and safety for housing.

Disabilities: Housing Assistance Programs: See an overview of public programs assisting with renovating and weatherizing existing housing, filling energy needs, and accessing public housing and rent assistance.

Wisconsin Asthma Program: Find information about this program, asthma triggers (dust mites, mold, etc.), the Asthma Safe Homes Program, and the Wisconsin Asthma Coalition.

Wisconsin Information Radon Centers: Contact your local area to receive test kits that analyze radon levels and help reduce lung cancer risk.

Lead Safe Wisconsin: View information on what lead poisoning is, certified lead contractors, and resources and services to investigate and lead-based paint hazards.

Asbestos Home Programs: Learn about the different types of regulated asbestos work and view a link to the public directory of certified asbestos companies. Report unsafe lead or asbestos work on this website.

Flood Toolkit: Use this toolkit for public health professionals to prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme flooding.

Extreme Heat Toolkit: Review this toolkit for guidance on extreme heat-related events, at-risk populations, and talking points.

Glossary of Chemical Names and Chemical Toolkit: Review the glossary for any unfamiliar chemical names and effects. Read this toolkit for public health professionals about cases of chemical release, who to contact, responses to emergency, and talking points.