

BUILDING HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH HOUSING IN MISSISSIPPI:

State and Local Policy Development Opportunities

The Community Health Impact Assessments of housing policies yielded local strategies for addressing the most common barriers to implementing housing repair services that address priority health hazards identified at the local level, as well as recommendations for state policy makers and program administrators to consider.

The list of policies in this section, identified during final project focus group discussions, were recommended by project participants for their anticipated value in efforts to address policy related barriers to healthier and safer housing for Mississippi residents most vulnerable to living in hazardous conditions, and to support continuation of statewide efforts to building capacity for lead poisoning prevention and healthy housing programming.

- 1 ► **Establish a state level interagency work group to coordinate state and local support of planning to improve housing health, safety, efficiency and resilience.** This group would be responsible for completing an updated statewide housing assessment to determine needs for housing stock hazard remediation and disaster mitigation.

The work group would also develop guidance for state and local agencies to fund investments in affordable housing preservation and modifications and contractor workforce development, reduce healthcare costs through housing modifications, reduce energy waste and cost burdens associated with residential buildings, and mitigate risks of flooding and other natural disasters in residential areas.

- 2 ► **Develop an enforcement strategy for the State of Mississippi's Existing Building Code and increase adoption and enforcement of International Property Maintenance Codes most relevant to health and safety standards.** Identify funding resources for workforce training and development for code compliance officials, model implementation procedures, and public education materials for property owners. Partner with Mississippi Association of Code Enforcement, State Fire Marshal's office, and other related organizations to support ongoing statewide trainings and resource development. Development of plans to adopt and enforce these policies must include strategies to negate potential negative impacts for renters vulnerable to eviction, dislocation, or other results of enforcement.

- 3 ► **Review the Landlord Tenant Act to determine amendment needs related to health and safety.** Project partners support development of amendments to the current Mississippi Landlord Tenant Act to establish that all residential leases executed in the state have an implied warranty of habitability and that the conditions of rental units must be livable and without measurable health and safety hazards throughout the term of the lease.

The law should specify that all lease agreements must meet applicable disclosure requirements for lead and other environmental hazards regulated by the Toxic Substances Control Act.

- 4 ► **Revise Mississippi State Department of Health and Mississippi Division of Medicaid policies to align with CDC recommendations for lead poisoning prevention.** The Office of Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes and Mississippi Division of Medicaid can identify geographies locations (such as zip codes or counties) with high risk factors for elevated blood lead levels in children and require universal screening and testing in those areas for children at 12 and 24 months of age.

They can also lower the threshold of EBLL for mandatory lead risk assessments to 5 micrograms per deciliter. Project partners also recommend that the state develop a centralized web-based data resources for information on estimated prevalence of elevated blood lead levels, lead poisoning surveillance data, lead in housing risk estimates, lead safe housing registries and lead service line inventories.



- 5 ▶ **Support development of local ordinances in jurisdictions with high-risk areas for lead poisoning to mandate lead risk assessments of housing units when children are determined to have elevated blood lead levels.** Such ordinances would need to address protections for families in rental properties, such as an eviction moratorium while lead risk assessment and hazard control activities are in progress, requirements to complete lead hazard remediation needs identified by a certified lead risk assessor, and requirements to cover costs of temporary relocation.
- 6 ▶ **Support development of local and state policies to reduce cases of retaliatory evictions for renter health and safety complaints.** Policy development opportunities include requiring a justifiable cause for evictions (such as failure to pay rent), requiring landlords obtain certification of compliance with housing codes to advance eviction cases, development of eviction diversion programs, and development of rent escrow programs to manage withholdings during landlord and tenant disputes.
- 7 ▶ **Establish a State Mold Standard Committee to research and recommend mold inspection standards, licensing practices for mold remediation specialists, and mold disclosure requirements for real estate transactions.** The state legislature can act to establish this committee, adopt its recommendations, and determine strategies for state agencies to support enforcement through environmental, housing, and health programs.
- 8 ▶ **Adopt accreditation standards for Community Health Workers and support incorporation of their services in healthy housing programs.** Support approval of credentialing for CHWs by the Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure and work with state partners to develop guidance for CHW training and funding to provide services related to healthy housing programs, including coordinated case management, housing assessments, and resident education for healthy housing maintenance.
- 9 ▶ **Enable streamlined program eligibility for social service, housing repair, and energy efficiency programs based on income and related qualifications.** The State of Mississippi can improve administrative efficiency of programs that support housing health, safety and energy efficiency by streamlining eligibility criteria and application screening, developing shared case management systems, and supporting case managers who can coordinate alignment of resources for families. The State of Michigan program MI Bridges is an example of this type of streamlined service coordination.
- 10 ▶ **Create a citizens advisory group for the Mississippi Public Service Commission.** The work group would support development of opportunities to address energy cost burdens for low income households and coordinate input on policies for energy efficiency programs, including energy waste reduction targets and residential efficiency programs.

These efforts would support more equitable access to efficiency program benefits for Mississippi residents and coordination of efficiency and healthy housing programs and leverage existing programming that aligns lead hazard remediation and weatherization to increase impact.



Full report available at leadfreems.org.

