

BUILDING HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH HOUSING IN MISSISSIPPI:

Common Barriers to Healthier Housing

Lead coordinating organizations were asked to review assessment findings, including data analysis, analysis of existing policies, and results of focus group sessions, to identify the most challenging barriers to improving health conditions of housing and priority actions to address those barriers in their communities.

The five most common barriers identified among all communities that participated in this project are:

1 **The extent of the health impacts of substandard housing in Mississippi is not fully known by the public or policymakers.**

Researchers, including housing assessors, environmental agencies, and public health surveillance agencies need resources to study the prevalence of health hazards common in housing, expand public awareness of environmental health hazards, and increase access to public health information about the extent of health impacts of housing. Specific issues in need of further study include:

- ▶ *Locations of housing units with confirmed or likely lead based paint hazards, lead service lines, and lead plumbing fixtures, and elevated risks of lead poisoning for households with young children and pregnant women.*
- ▶ *Prevalence of housing-based asthma triggers and correlation of environmental asthma trigger exposure with asthma exacerbation that leads to emergency medical care and hospitalizations.*
- ▶ *Prevalence of injuries and accidents experienced by older adults due to falls at home caused by structural conditions, and resource needs to enable safe Aging in Place for older adults.*
- ▶ *Health impacts of housing and energy cost burdens, including prevalence of families with low-incomes forgoing medical treatments, medications, and healthier foods due to high utility costs.*



More research needed to understand the true health impact of substandard housing



Limited public and private resources for property maintenance.



Difficulty sustaining work around healthy housing issues



Too few credentialed workers to implement programs



Increased instances of flooding and other extreme weather

2 Public and private resources for property maintenance are limited in most communities statewide.

- ▶ *Across current state and local housing finance programs for low and moderate income housing, funding for repairs of existing and occupied housing is limited in availability, addresses smaller scopes of work than needed, and is fractured across multiple service providers. Many government jurisdictions are currently not applying for competitive federal grants to address community housing repair needs, or not prioritizing housing repair programs for discretionary spending.*
- ▶ *Private sector financing resources for housing repairs and modification are also limited in many areas of the state, especially for low and moderate income households, due to limited availability of affordable bank financing for housing work.*

3 Many community-based organizations want to coordinate efforts to respond to healthy housing issues but find it challenging to sustain work in this public policy sector.

- ▶ *Residents and community organizations are often not sure what policy and funding solutions are available to address needs for environmental health of housing, and do not know how to engage property owners and policymakers because of the fractured nature of housing program implementation.*
- ▶ *When residents are experiencing a healthy housing crisis, such as a severe mold issue that is contributing to respiratory illness, first response agencies (landlords, healthcare providers, code enforcement officers, etc.) often do not have adequate resources or have limited capacity to intervene and coordinate across agencies to solve the health and housing issues.*
- ▶ *Most jurisdictions in Mississippi do not have enough property maintenance code enforcement resources to ensure occupied housing is meeting health and safety standards, and many small towns and rural areas do not have codes adopted to use as an enforcement mechanism. Renters are particularly vulnerable to living in unsafe conditions and can be threatened with eviction if they inform property owners of repair needs.*

4 The State of Mississippi does not have enough credentialed workers to implement healthy housing programs.

- ▶ *Mississippi needs to develop incentives to increase the number of housing repair and healthy housing service providers to implement programs to address lead hazard control, asthma control, and Aging in Place needs in current and future housing stock.*
- ▶ *Additionally, the State of Mississippi does not have enabling policies adopted to fund community health workers or other healthcare professionals to complete housing assessments and home-based education services for residents to manage home health and safety.*

5 Many Mississippi communities are experiencing increasing instances of flooding and other extreme weather.

- ▶ *Residents who are frequently impacted by storm damage are experiencing health and financial burdens because of housing maintenance needs.*
- ▶ *Many households directly impacted by storms have gaps in insurance coverage that make recovery from disasters difficult.*
- ▶ *Communities are facing an increasingly urgent needs to coordinate plans to manage stormwater and improve resilience of existing housing through targeted interventions.*

