

National Center for HEALTHY HOUSING



Stories from the Field: 2019 Health in All Policies (Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention) Mini-Grantee

Allegheny County Health Department and Women for a Healthy Environment

Introduction

From January to July 2019, the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH), in collaboration with the [National Environmental Health Association \(NEHA\)](#), the [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\)](#), and the [Association of State and Territorial Health Officials \(ASTHO\)](#), offered support to three local governmental agencies to implement a “[Health in All Policies](#)” strategy as part of their lead prevention implementation program and activities. Projects were chosen to build and support cross-sector relationships, integrate data systems, and incorporate health into a variety of existing decision-making processes.

The experience of these grant recipients has significantly expanded the range of models and best practices using

a [Health in All Policies](#) approach to reduce childhood lead exposure (“HiAP+Pb”) by strengthening linkages of lead-exposed children to recommended services and strengthening targeted, population-based interventions. We’ve profiled one grantee’s story below to spotlight a small sample of the many innovative efforts occurring around the country and provide others working toward similar goals with additional ideas and examples to explore.

Synopsis

In contract with Women for a Healthy Environment (WHE), the Allegheny County Health Department’s (ACHD) Health in All Policies project focused on combating the continuation of lead exposure and its impact on the families in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. More specifically, ACHD utilized this

project funding to create a cohesive countywide coalition (Lead Safe Allegheny) and ultimately implement several strategies to prevent childhood lead poisoning. These strategies included building upon existing coalition efforts and structures, working with community groups to identify ways to optimize work across sectors, and raising awareness about lead policies and programs. With the integration of Health in All Policies (HiAP) strategies, ACHD and the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition incorporated health into existing decision-making processes, fostered cross-sector policy development and educational outreach, and created consistent messaging and communication with the public. With an approach focused on both education and policy-related efforts, ACHD utilized this project to create an effective coalition with systems in place to achieve the long-term goal of decreasing the number of children exposed to lead and to increase the volume of housing stock that is lead-safe or lead-free.

Challenge

In Allegheny County, more than 86% of housing stock is was constructed prior to 1978, and 300-400 children per year are identified as having elevated blood lead levels. ACHD is the only organization responsible for the investigation of lead exposure in the county, including the investigation of children with elevated blood lead levels, enforcement actions when hazards are identified, and education to help families reduce childhood exposures. ACHD has used lead data and housing information to identify high-risk communities across Allegheny County – most of which are largely disadvantaged communities with higher percentages of minority residents. In addition to these challenges posed by enforcement capacity, demographics, and the vastness of lead exposure in the county, early intervention services for children with lead levels of 5 µg/dL are available, but referrals are still relatively low.

Solution

In conjunction with WHE, ACHD undertook a policy- and education-driven approach to reducing lead exposure in Allegheny County that focused primarily on the formation of a countywide coalition. Mirroring the structure of a previously existing coalition, ACHD rebooted the Lead Safe Pittsburgh coalition as the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition, convened monthly meetings, and established four standing committees within it to start. These committees were formed to establish goals, objectives, and action steps to further the work of the broader coalition. With the opportunity to convene between larger coalition meetings, these four committees were identified as Policy and Planning, Education and Outreach, Data and Research, and Infrastructure and were tasked with identifying action steps and presenting ideas to the whole coalition. In addition to the formation of the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition and the four standing committees within it, ACHD created a work group that established a governing document to establish structure, guidelines, and accountability within the coalition. Once procedural issues were identified and addressed for the coalition and committees, ACHD worked to grow and improve representation of the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition by identifying key people and organizations from the community, including healthcare providers, contractors, trainers, and housing authorities. These structures established for and within the coalition set the foundation for the immediate and long-term results of this project.

Results

Most visibly, ACHD and WHE founded the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition and provided a platform for increasing a variety of countywide efforts to reduce and prevent childhood lead poisoning. The coalition grew its representation to include individuals and organizations from multiple sectors including county and city

BY THE NUMBERS

1

County-wide coalition

4

Coalition committees

6

Coalition meetings

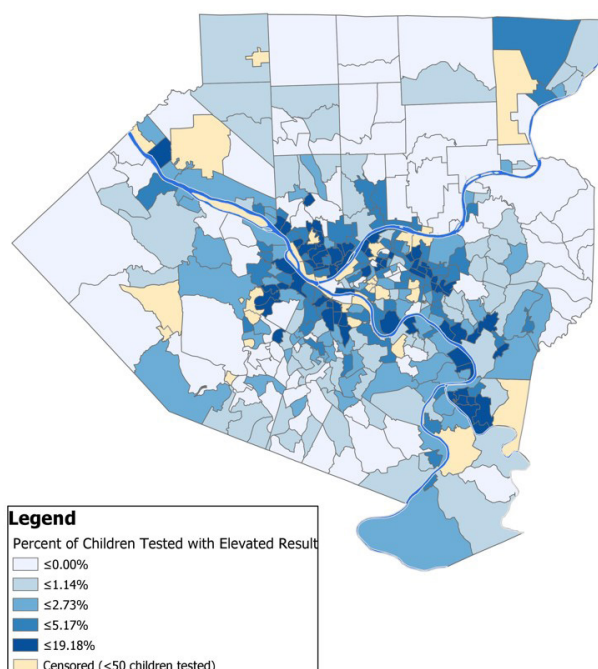
61

Coalition members

8

Process initiatives

Allegheny County, Aggregated (2015-2018) Percent of Children Tested with a Venous Result $\geq 5 \mu\text{g/dL}$ by Census Tract



*Updated February 2019



Lead Safe Allegheny coalition meeting, April 26, 2019

governments, county and city housing authorities, managed care organizations, early intervention program staff, child development specialists, contractors, trainers, and healthcare providers. Within the coalition structure, the four committees accomplished various outcomes dependent on their focus as follows:

Policy and Planning Committee:

- Charged with tracking and advocating for statewide regulations and funding for lead hazard control.
- Actively working to engage with municipal leaders to impact local policy by introducing ordinances that include lead hazard control in rental registries and certificate of occupancy processes.
- Has two pilot projects underway to demonstrate a cost-benefit analysis and the improved safety of utilizing a demolition model ordinance that includes the wet-wet-wet standard.

Education and Outreach Committee:

- Tasked with identifying different populations impacted by lead.
- Has begun compiling information and creating language for the coalition that has messaging specific to targeted audiences including do-it-yourselfers, contractors, and physicians.

Infrastructure Committee:

- Has identified gaps and a focus around RRP compliance, training, and awareness.
- Working to engage contractors, homeowners, and store owners.

Data Research Committee:

- Actively supporting the work of the other committees by finding and interpreting data that reflects and advocates their initiatives.

In addition to the successes of the committees, Lead Safe Allegheny has identified and addressed several process and procedural issues including:

- Working with a Head Start representative to ensure proper reporting practices of capillary lead testing,

- Bringing attention to the quarterly lead report lag time at the state lead task force meeting, and
- Referring families with children ages three to six directly to local early intervention staff.

The Lead Safe Allegheny coalition also established several other initiatives, including a new effort to streamline investigation data and connect ACHD with the City of Pittsburgh Housing Authority to cross-check and map public housing and elevated blood lead levels. These ongoing initiatives, procedural corrections, and work of the standing committees demonstrate and are the result of the collaboration and inclusion initiated by the Lead Safe Allegheny coalition.

Lessons Learned

In the process of implementing HiAP strategies to forming an active and engaging coalition, WHE and ACHD encountered several challenges, both universal and unique to Allegheny County. Among the common barriers Lead Safe Allegheny experienced were the general lack of knowledge of lead exposure and its long-term effects on individuals and the challenge of engaging landlords and property managers; Lead Safe Allegheny acknowledges that both of these will be continual challenges that require ongoing support and attention. Specific to Allegheny County, the coalition experienced challenges of strategizing and expending the time required to engage the county's 130 municipalities and fully engaging the City of Pittsburgh, a key player. Despite these challenges, Lead Safe Allegheny has succeeded due to deliberate collaboration, transparency, and inclusion. It continues to make small advances and to create a space where government, community organizations, contractors, and healthcare providers intersect to make informed decisions.

Value of HiAP

Prior to utilizing the HiAP approach, organizations and agencies in Allegheny County were working in a silo, and much of the work being done around lead poisoning prevention was not communicated efficiently and timely. Implementing HiAP strategies specific to lead poisoning prevention has transformed the way ACHD operates, presented an opportunity to collaborate, and provided the tools and foundation to continue to implement the HiAP approach. Through Lead Safe Allegheny, the county now has a forum to answer questions, address issues, and generate ideas. ACHD plans to continue this work and approach.

Value of Technical Assistance

Being a grantee of the first "HiAP+Pb" cohort, the TA (technical assistance) experience was invaluable and incredibly positive. As the coalition was being formed,

the support provided by the TA provider throughout this grant was crucial to creating a structure and governing document for the coalition to function. Additionally, when first establishing goals and setting policy priorities, the TA provider shared resources and information about what strategies are being employed in other cities and best practices in prioritizing outreach. Moreover, the site visit was incredibly helpful and created a space for in-depth idea sharing and planning with the TA provider. Likewise, the feedback shared by the TA related to understanding HUD funding as well as identification of additional revenue streams for lead poisoning prevention was extremely beneficial. Overall, the TA experience contributed greatly to the success of our coalition, and we continue to utilize the expertise and resources provided through the TA.

Sustainability

Lead Safe Allegheny plans to sustain these HiAP activities in continuing to make small advances and victories. The coalition plans to continue to advocate for local level policy change and to ensure a representative and diverse coalition

in a variety of ways. Specifically, Lead Safe Allegheny is in the process of creating a communication toolkit with targeted messaging, planning a forum centered on National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, planning RRP educational outreach, compiling a comprehensive and centralized “data atlas” tool, and gathering early intervention referral source data. Lead Safe Allegheny is still actively looking for ways to include families and other sectors, including landlords, real estate agents, and housing agencies, in the coalition and plans to create ways to engage them through targeted outreach and by hosting roundtable forums. Despite the challenge of time required, the coalition plans to continue to engage municipalities to include lead inspections in certificate of occupancy and rental registries, and to provide training for municipal inspectors and code enforcers. Given Lead Safe Allegheny’s accomplishments during this grant period, it still plans to sustain the momentum gained, complete initiatives already set in place, and to continue to engage sectors in the coalition. In order to sustain these efforts, Lead Safe Allegheny plans to utilize existing funding, secure more grant funding, and to strategize for future HUD funding opportunities.

Stories from the Field

Allegheny County Health Department and Women for a Healthy Environment

September 2019

We gratefully acknowledge the following organizations for participating in the development of this case study document:

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