Hazardous conditions found in unsafe housing can lead to lead poisoning, asthma and other respiratory illnesses, cancer, and unintentional injuries or death, resulting in poor school attendance and performance for children, missed workdays for parents, and the loss of loved ones for all. These hazards and their health impacts disproportionately affect communities of color and low-income communities, making the need for healthy housing a significant environmental and racial justice issue. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed, urgently, our need for safer, healthier, and affordable housing: The increased time spent at home and challenges to healthy housing service delivery have not only affected health negatively but also displayed—in sharp contrast—the longstanding crisis of inequitable access to quality housing and healthcare. In addition, climate change and the associated increase in both incidence and severity of extreme weather events are expanding the scope of policies contributing to healthy housing.

In Puerto Rico, 28% of children live in households with a high housing cost burden, and 57% of children live in poverty.

In Puerto Rico, 54% of the housing stock was built prior to 1978 and may contain lead-based paint.

Puerto Rico does not require blood lead data reporting. Blood lead prevalence (5 µg/dL) for children under six is estimated at over 3%

Almost 11% of adults and approximately 15% of children have current asthma in Puerto Rico (2019).

Puerto Rico recorded over 95,000 emergency room visits due to asthma in 2013. The region of Cagus experienced the highest percentage of these claims.

Over 97% of the population in Puerto Rico is served by water systems violating the EPA’s Lead and Copper Rule.

FEMA reported a total of 357,492 homes damaged by Hurricane Maria as of May 11, 2018. About 23% of Puerto Rico’s housing stock was affected.

Fall-related injuries increased from 25.6% to 46.2% of older adults admittances for injury at one Puerto Rico hospital from 2000-2019.

CRITICAL FEDERAL FUNDING FOR HEALTHY HOUSING

A broad array of programs across the federal government support healthy housing activities and related efforts including increasing affordable housing, improving health outcomes, providing supportive services to families, improving energy efficiency, and identifying and addressing environmental hazards. Critical programs and services supporting crucial health and housing services in states and localities are outlined below; increasing appropriations allows new states to access funding and currently funded states to expand their programs.

Has PR received funding since 2020?

CDC’s:

✔ Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
✔ National Asthma Control Program
❌ Environmental Health Tracking Network

HUD’s:

✔ Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes

EPA’s:

✔ Lead Categorical Grants
❌ State Indoor Radon Grants
✔ Environmental Justice Grants

DOE’s:

✔ Weatherization Assistance Program

For more information on these programs and their impacts, as well as many others available to support healthy housing efforts, refer to NCHH’s Agency Fact Sheets.

December 2022. For references, additional state-specific healthy homes information, and to learn how you can engage your members of Congress on these vital issues...

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