

Green and Healthy Homes Initiative

An AMCHP MCEH CoIIN Success Story

Lead exposure remains one of the greatest public health issues in the United States due to the detrimental health effects on children, including the unborn. Lead can be detected in pregnant women's plasma and breast milk and can cross the placental barrier. Children are particularly vulnerable to lead exposure due to the susceptibility of their developing organ systems. Children exposed to lead before birth or shortly after are at increased risk of neurodevelopmental challenges, including lower IQ, difficulty concentrating, and inability to control emotions.

Green and Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) provides housing intervention services, including lead poisoning prevention services, in low-income communities to make homes safer. GHHI provides services to cities, counties, and states across the country, including trainings, technical assistance, and innovative funding strategies. GHHI has extensive experience in lead exposure prevention and a broad list of national and local partners. Because of this background, GHHI is in a unique position to assist state health departments in expanding their lead programs and services.

To serve in this role, GHHI participated in the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) Maternal and Child Environmental Health (MCEH) Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoIIN). This initiative aims to build state capacity to increase the number of infants and children who have access to a system of coordinated care to address their needs related to lead exposure, with the goal of decreasing maternal and child morbidity and mortality associated with exposure. GHHI provided technical assistance and partnership engagement with the states participating in the CoIIN.

Strengthened Collaboration with Parents and Realtors

GHHI encouraged states in the CoIIN to promote community engagement in their projects by including parents in discussions of efforts to increase testing levels for lead. GHHI emphasized the importance of including parents as key stakeholders in decision-making, a mindset that has been particularly effective in states lacking federal funding and strong lead policies. Encouraging health departments to engage with parents creates education opportunities and allows health departments to discover community-specific barriers and needs. GHHI also encouraged states in the CoIIN to engage with realtors. Regrettably, health departments and realtors frequently conflict over enforcement of lead policies, but GHHI emphasized the importance of including realtors as a collaborative partner. Following laws and policies around lead is mutually beneficial to health departments and realtors to provide non-toxic, properly maintained, and safe housing.

Promoted Lead Services with Children's Health Insurance Program

GHHI also facilitated opportunities for states in the CoIIN to establish federal- and state-level partnerships by engaging with governors to encourage them to utilize lead services with the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Health Services Initiative. In this initiative, the federal government matches money spent by the state through the CHIP program to address lead hazards in the home. Through this program, Pennsylvania was able to develop a broad lead poisoning prevention program, and New Jersey was able



to establish a general obligation bond to address lead hazards in the housing and drinking water. GHHI connected Pennsylvania and New Jersey with states in the CoIIN to share these successes.

Shared Enforcement Strategies

In addition to these partnership-building strategies, GHHI introduced successful lead enforcement strategies to states in the CoIIN. A strategy used in Maryland to identify areas at risk for lead exposure is the use of a registry of homes built before 1978, which are more likely to contain lead-based paint. This strategy was introduced to states in the CoIIN. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is replicating this approach to develop a similar registry. Another successful strategy introduced to states in the CoIIN came from New York. New York developed a model for outreach to privately insured populations, which are typically more difficult to engage with. This model was brought to states in the CoIIN to provide outreach to unique populations. These strategies gave states innovative ideas for expanding their lead poisoning prevention work.

Despite their experience and expertise in conducting lead poisoning prevention projects, GHHI experienced several challenges while participating in the CoIIN, including limited resources and time. One of the challenges of working with multiple states on the same project is that activities need to be scaled up, requiring more resources and staff time. GHHI also expressed a need for more time to connect with each state individually to provide technical assistance. In addition, GHHI recommended more time for states in the CoIIN to engage with each other, as this can be a valuable peer-learning opportunity.

Future Plans: Engage with New States

To address these challenges moving forward, GHHI plans to encourage virtual meetings with states participating in the CoIIN. GHHI will also be engaging with three new states outside of the CoIIN to develop statewide lead poisoning prevention strategies. Their goal for the future is to continue helping states make progress in lead poisoning prevention.

Meet GHHI

GHHI's mission is to break the link between unhealthy housing and unhealthy families by creating and advocating for healthy, safe, and energy-efficient homes. The organization integrates funding from private and public sources to address threats to healthy housing, including lead hazard reduction, asthma trigger control, fall and injury prevention, energy efficiency, weatherization, and housing rehabilitation.

Learn More

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and other partners are part of the leadership team for the AMCHP MCEH CoIIN, which is funded through a three-year grant from the United States Health Resources and Services Administration. By joining the collaborative, NEHA has an important platform to affect policy within the participating states. The objective of the CoIIN aligns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the United States Department of Health and Human Services' broad goal to protect children from the health risks of harmful exposures by developing innovative strategies to reduce and prevent emerging and re-emerging environmental health concerns. Learn more at the following websites: neha.org, mchb.hrsa.gov, amchp.org, atsdr.cdc.gov, and www.MCHLeadToolkit.org

