Background of Health Hazards, Prevention, and Solutions

Many homes in Monona County fall short of the basic requirements of a healthy home and contain one or more of hazards that adversely affect human health.

Scientific research has shown that these more common housing-related hazards pose a broad spectrum of risks, including the following:

- **Mold** and pests — such as cockroaches, rodents, and dust mites — can cause and contribute to asthma, allergies, and other respiratory illnesses. Since housing conditions can play a significant role in respiratory health, these hazards can greatly increase and intensify susceptibility to respiratory illnesses.
- Toxic materials such as lead, asbestos, and chemical pesticides can harm human health in a variety of ways. For instance, lead poisoning in children causes reduced IQ and attention span, hyperactivity, impaired growth, reading and learning disabilities, hearing loss, insomnia, and a range of other health, intellectual, and behavioral problems.
- Poisonous gases such as carbon monoxide and radon also pose threats to health. Carbon monoxide poisoning results in more than 200 accidental deaths a year and, at much lower levels, causes flu-like symptoms, which often go undiagnosed. Radon can increase the risk of cancer, which is the second leading cause of death among adults and children in the U.S.

*The key over-arching healthy homes principles are to keep homes dry, clean, pest-free, well ventilated, free from contaminants, safe, and well-maintained.*

HUD Healthy Homes Strategic Plan

**Challenge 1: Silos of agency responsibility and funding discourage cross-agency communication and collaboration**

One of the most challenging aspects of achieving a model healthy homes program results from the fact that responsibilities for various program components are allocated to different agencies at local, regional and state levels.

**Challenge 2: The lack of housing codes, outdated housing codes and lack of enforcement have significantly limited the transition to healthy homes.** Responsibility for formulating and enforcing property and health codes currently resides at the state and local levels. The review and updating of state and municipal building codes to add healthy homes components is a necessary strategy. Having codes that reflect the key healthy housing components is essential as they form the basis for legal enforcement targeted at correcting hazardous conditions in homes.
In addition to updated codes, an aggressive enforcement strategy is needed in dealing with homeowners and landlords who are unwilling to address the hazards that have been identified in their properties. Without an effective enforcement strategy, any code is useless.

**Challenge 3: Working effectively with impacted families is critical to ensure their cooperation and participation.** As noted throughout this paper, a key outcome of implementing the Healthy Homes Model is the establishment of a fully integrated approach to simultaneously addressing multiple problems found in the home.

Whereas before, one individual from one agency normally dealt with the family to address one problem, under the healthy homes approach a single staff person may now be talking to the family about the six or seven problems that have been identified - everything from lead hazards to pest management, to mold in the basement, improper ventilation, and so on. Having an inspector come into your home and say: —I need to talk to you about how the lead paint on your windows caused your child to become lead poisoned… and we also need to discuss the mold we found in your basement…and your poor ventilation system because those have an impact on your child's asthma…and it’s also important that we get your cockroach problem under control can be overwhelming for any family. This can be especially difficult when the family is dealing with other issues such as unemployment, keeping food on the table, and making sure the house is adequately heated.

**ACTION PLAN**

**Vision**

Monona County homes which are affordable and designed, constructed, rehabilitated, and maintained in a manner that supports the health and safety of our residents.

**Mission**

To reduce health and safety hazards in housing in a comprehensive and cost-effective manner, with a particular focus on protecting the health of children and other sensitive populations in low-income households.

**Goals**

Key goals to guide activities:

1. Foster local and regional partnerships for implementing a healthy homes agenda.
2. Focus improvement efforts on links between housing and health and cost-effective methods to address hazards.
3. Promote the incorporation of healthy homes principles into public health system (schools, government, businesses, law enforcement, et al) practices and programs.
4. Build sustainable local healthy homes programs.
Short term strategies include:

1. Creating a mechanism for coordinating healthy homes activities, collaborating with local and regional health & safety improvement coalitions to promote the Healthy Homes principles.

2. Enhance lead hazard control programs' and home visiting program's (LFL) capability to address broader housing issues that impact occupant health (e.g., radon, mold, pests, etc.).

**Action objectives to help assist overall planning:**

1) Presentation of proposal to MCCA Steering Committee at the September 2012 meeting.

2) Submission of proposal to the Monona County Board of Health for review, comment and/or recommendations.

3) Identification of homes where interventions would be appropriate (focusing on properties that pose the greatest health risks, that is; those properties that are older, low-income, or in sub-standard condition, will yield the greatest improvement in health).

4) Development of appropriately scaled and efficient intervention strategies, (include review of current county & municipality policies, building codes and enforcement practices, and the accompanying recommendations for improvement).

5) Selection of efficient strategies for evaluating intervention effectiveness.

6) Define core functions intended to support a comprehensive approach to working effectively with impacted families:
   a. Assessment
   b. Linking and coordinating services
   c. Monitoring and follow-up
   d. Re-assessment

7) Actively, and collectively (local, regional and inter-agency), seek governmental and non-governmental funding to correct multiple residential health and safety hazards that produce diseases and injuries to children and other sensitive sub-groups (e.g., elderly).

8) Support the development of key healthy homes messages and materials (*standardized & culturally sensitive*) that can be used to explain:
   a. what a comprehensive integrated home assessment is,
   b. how it is conducted,
   c. how the problems that have been identified will be addressed,
   d. how and when the work will be done,
   e. what agencies will be involved; and
   f. the role that the family needs to play in making their home healthy and safe.