

Los Angeles Healthy Homes Symposium Report

May 27, 2009, 9:30-4pm

Location: Audubon Center at Debs Park

In Attendance: 55 people

Overview

The idea behind healthy homes is to eliminate housing deficiencies and hazards that affect health and safety. The key to doing so is to develop a common vision with the various housing, health, and environmental agencies, departments and organizations to cross collaboratively implement this vision. The Los Angeles symposium was one of the first steps toward realizing a holistic healthy homes vision in a concerted effort.

The symposium aimed to establish a baseline where agencies recapped their basic work plan and critically analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of their work in order to improve outcomes. Rich discussions during caucuses began to establish the framework for a collaborative local vision. As we move toward implementing this common vision, we need to be flexible, integrative, and strategic given dwindling resources. Follow up meetings throughout the year will provide a safe space where the discussion can evolve. Healthy Homes Collaborative (HHC) is a coalition of community based organizations who combat environmental health threats in homes in LA, and will take the lead in planning follow up symposia throughout the year.

The following symposium is being planned for late July/early August and will focus on cutting edge research and science followed by substantial caucus time. The idea is to integrate cutting edge research into Healthy Homes programs and strategic plans. Dr. Rufus Edwards will present on the effects of air pollution on paint and Dr. Hillary Gershwin will present on the cumulative effects of lead on other health outcomes such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Panelists will then discuss the policy implications of their work, and collaboratively we will discuss how we can integrate these new ideas into the Healthy Homes vision for LA.

Structure

The overall structure of the LA conference integrated agencies with a high propensity to advance a healthy homes agenda locally and throughout the State. As a result, each panel strategically included a variety of organizations working on different fronts to address a similar problem or task. The plenary included the National Center for Healthy Homes, the County Department of Public Health and the Environmental Justice Branch of the City Attorney's Office. The three ensuing panels drilled down from top to bottom starting with a State/ Regionwide Planning Panel, a Code Enforcement Panel, and a Grassroots panel.

After each panel the idea was to caucus in smaller groups of 12-14 to flesh out the vision and to discuss the implementation strategies/barriers of each vision. Individuals were strategically assigned to a caucus so each caucus was representative of the cross section of attendees. Due to time management issues, two caucuses were eliminated in order to include all speaker's presentations. During the caucus report back at the end of the symposium, team leaders each relayed 3 main issues that came up for their caucus, resulting in the following:

Group 1:

- 1) County moving to healthy homes - How much time will be allocated to doing the healthy homes inspections and does the county have time to do this given other priorities?
- 2) Need more external outreach by county with staff from CBOs
- 3) 38 different public health programs within the county – need better coordination
 - a. Are tablets the solution for County?

Group 2:

- 1) Need better communication between housing department and city agencies not at the table such as Building and Safety.
- 2) Need better follow through by government agencies
- 3) Need more IPM contractors

Group 3:

- 1) Shift from giving owners multiple notices to criminalizing code violations
- 2) Get CBOs to support government proposals and build political will
- 3) Set the standard for the rest of the country

Group 4:

- 1) Support CBOs work through contracts (e.g. 20% of grant funding go to CBOs)
- 2) Set goals and evaluate results
- 3) Sell healthy homes program to tenants and find ways to incentivize participation.

Outcomes

The City

The City of Los Angeles has paved the way in developing the pro-active inspection model “Systematic Code Enforcement Program” (SCEP). SCEP collaborates with CBOs during the inspection process and integrates them in decision making efforts. SCEP Inspectors are also equipped with electronic tablets that enable them to take photos, fill out reports, tabulate data and upload everything online in real time. While this is a model program there is always room for improvement. Efforts to communicate with outside agencies can always be improved, but this is a

two way process. By capitalizing on the assets such as SCEP that the region already has, we can better align our other programs to follow suit.

The County

The County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health is the largest in the nation, and has strong potential for positively affecting millions of lives. Despite efforts to proactively inspect mf units at a random basis in the County, there are opportunities to increase efficiency and gain access to more units.

Community Based Organizations

The nature of the on the ground work that CBOs typically do is essential for advancing innovative solutions. CBOs have their finger on the pulse of the community, and work on a variety of projects ahead of their time. It is essential for government agencies to develop partnerships with CBOs in order to be able to build upon pre-established community relationships and avoid duplicative strategies while employing effective programs on a wider scale. Given the current funding climate, it is important to remain open to sharing the small availability of resources where it makes sense.

General

- Transparency
- Collective decision making
- Partnerships with outside agencies
- Engaging agencies not at the table and identifying potential partners
- Opportunity to continue Healthy Homes discussion both formally (local symposia, conferences) and informally, (emails, small group meetings)

Next Steps

Los Angeles is open to serious cross-dialogue with outside agencies in an effort to work more strategically. We as a region are ready to drill down and detail personal, organizational/departmental work commitments to advance the common vision. We are also ready to lead the State and collaborate with other cities in order to exchange best practices and ensure for efficient models tailored to local needs. The next healthy homes symposium will focus on integrating cutting edge science and research into the healthy homes vision and implementation strategy and will take place in mid-summer 2009. A survey for all respondents who attended the Los Angeles Healthy Homes Symposium has also been disseminated in order to gauge responses from the meeting, and to get a better sense of the healthy homes commitment as we move forward.