

## Un-Doing The Privilege of Healthy Housing: Advocacy & Policy Recommendations

*Arcela Nuñez-Alvarez, Ph.D.*  
*Research Director*

*National Latino Research Center*  
*California State University, San Marcos*  
*May 28, 2009*



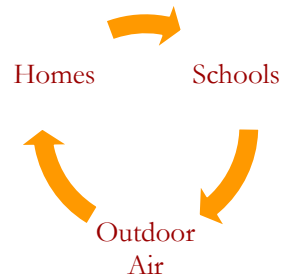
## National Latino Research Center

The National Latino Research Center (NLRC) at California State University San Marcos specializes in applied research, training, technical assistance and research-based services that contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the rapidly growing U.S. Latino population.



## Community Action to Fight Asthma

CAFA is a network of asthma coalitions in California working to shape, local, regional, and state policies to reduce the environmental triggers of asthma for school-aged children where they live, learn and play and, ultimately, to improve the health of all of California's children.



**CAFA**  
Community Action to Fight Asthma

## Social Inequality = Poor Health



Photo by Poder Popular para la Salud del Pueblo

## Environmental Injustice

Seminal Report: *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* (1987) by United States Church of Christ

New Report: "Toxic Waste and Race at Twenty, 1987-2007: Grassroots Struggles to Dismantle Environmental Racism in the United States," shows that 20 years later, disproportionately large numbers of people of color still live in hazardous waste host communities, and that they are not equally protected by environmental laws.

Poor Environment Means More Illness such as asthma



Photo by Proyecto Casas Saludables

National Latino Research Center at Cal State San Marcos

## Current Knowledge

Racial and housing segregation disproportionately exposes people of color to unhealthy housing conditions.

Large numbers of housing units are in substandard conditions and in need of repairs.

Relationship between tenants and housing authorities such as code enforcement is tenuous.

Tenants are often unaware of reporting and enforcement systems in place to file complaints.

Landlords are resistant to making repairs in units with substandard conditions.

Tenants often face retribution from landlords when they report housing conditions.

Limited resources on health and safety exist in culturally and linguistically appropriate languages for community use.

Legal claims are an option to address substandard housing.

Economic effects are compounded by language, cultural and social barriers that limit their access to the programs and services.



## I. Community Engagement

| Challenge   | Solutions   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>LACK OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION</b></p> <p>Historic exclusion of most affected and vulnerable populations in decision-making</p> | <p><b>STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY</b></p> <p>Create and promote institutional and structural mechanisms promoting and facilitating full participation decision-making process.</p> |

## Community-Based Research



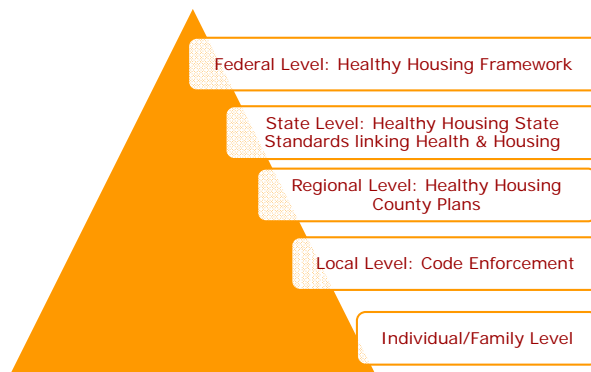
## II. Research & Evaluation

| Challenge   | Solution  |
|---|---|
| Research establishing connection between health and housing has not been well coordinated and has focused on local interventions. | <p>Employ more community-based participatory action research methodology.</p> <p>Identify key research gaps.</p> <p>Assess innovative interventions including culturally and linguistically appropriate approaches.</p> |

## III. Education

| Problem   | Individuals & Families   | Government  | Landlords                                |
|---|--|---|--|
| Lack of awareness about health and housing connection | Increase education and awareness programs regarding indoor air, pesticides, mold/moisture, hazardous household products, smoking, etc. in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats. | Institutionalize environmental health and housing training and education for code enforcement | Participate in healthy housing trainings |

## IV. Policy Framework



## IV. Policy Recommendations

### General

- Establish comprehensive and proactive standards and enforcement mechanisms for healthy housing.
- Create a state-focused healthy housing center (similar to the National Center for Healthy Housing to focus on healthy housing issues at the state level).
- Implement Healthy Homes Strategic Plan.
- Establish enhanced protection from retaliation for undocumented tenants from landlords.
- Increase collaboration across health and housing agencies.
- Integrate cultural competency and linguistic standards into healthy housing framework.

## Policy Recommendations

---

### Mold & Mildew

Establish standards for assessment and remediation of mold complaints.  
Increase sources for mold remediation.

### Indoor Air Quality

Establish, implement, and enforce statewide standards on indoor air quality.  
Establish, implement, and enforce countywide standards on substandard housing and its connection to health.

## Policy Recommendations

---

### Code Enforcement

Move from complaint-driven to a pro-active home inspection process (such as annual inspections of multi-unit housing).  
Establish countywide standards for assessment and remediation for mold complaints.  
Institutionalize environmental health training for code enforcers.  
Enact and enforce healthy, affordable housing laws and high levels of penalties for non-compliance, particularly in the case of criminal, repeat violators. These penalties, in turn, can help pay for the stepped-up code enforcement.

## Policy Recommendations

---

### Green Building

Establish mandatory green building standards.  
Strengthen existing green building standards by increasing the minimum number of required indoor air quality related green points.  
Include indoor air quality and health related measures in new retrofit programs.  
Conduct health and safety code inspections at point-of-sale audit.

## Policy Recommendations

---

### Incentives

Provide incentives for landlords who choose healthier practices when renovating or cleaning rental units.  
Promote healthy housing best practices and the use of incentives for asthma-friendly affordable housing development and renovation.  
Allocate incentives to expand community health worker (*promotor*) models to work in most severely affected communities.

## Healthy Housing for Healthier Children

---



Photo by Proyecto Casas Saludables

## National Latino Research Center

---

For additional information:  
Arcela Nuñez-Alvarez, PhD  
National Latino Research Center  
Cal State San Marcos  
333 S. Twin Oaks Valley Road  
San Marcos, CA 92096-0001  
760.750.3503  
[anunez@csusm.edu](mailto:anunez@csusm.edu)