Introduction to the National Healthy Housing Standard Implementation Tool

The relationship between health and housing has been known for centuries. Although there exist many thoughtful building codes, standards, and guidance documents that describe how to rehabilitate or construct dwellings that are safe and healthy, industry practices affecting existing owner-occupied and rental housing have not kept pace with our knowledge about housing-related disease and prevention of disease and injury through routine maintenance.

The National Healthy Housing Standard (Standard) was developed as an evidence-based standard of care for those in the position of improving housing conditions in existing dwellings. The Standard reaches beyond current property maintenance and building codes and other inspection standards to assist developers, property owners, and property managers. The Standard provides clear, specific, science-based recommendations that, when implemented, can help to adequately protect the health and safety of occupants who live in the housing we manage and create.

In 2014-2015, NeighborWorks® America and the National Center for Healthy Housing considered the applicability of the Standard for NeighborWorks® organizations. NeighborWorks® organizations have an opportunity and a responsibility to develop and manage in a manner that addresses existing health issues and avoids creating new health problems in the built environment. Would it be beneficial for NeighborWorks® organizations to apply and adopt the Standard? What would it take to do so? And what resources and tools would be most helpful?

In 2015, select NeighborWorks® organizations reviewed the Standard and were interviewed about their reactions.

We talked to developers, managers, and maintenance staff of large-scale multifamily buildings, scattered site developments, and those who work primarily in single-family housing programs. Their experience and insights are the basis for the creation of this National Healthy Housing Standard Implementation Tool (Tool).

Although the Standard was originally developed as a maintenance standard for existing buildings, we learned that most NeighborWorks® organizations were interested in learning how to ensure that all of their housing stock complies with a healthier standard. Those interviewed also believed that while some of the provisions would be cost-prohibitive or structurally impractical for existing buildings, they could easily be incorporated into new construction or substantial housing rehabilitation projects.

This brought us to consider this Tool not only as a maintenance standard but also as a living document that could highlight positive actions developers can take, regardless of

their housing stock or the stage of the development process. Some recommendations can be implemented during routine inspections or unit turnovers, some are better suited to moderate or full housing rehabilitation, and others may apply only during new construction.

Understanding the Implementation Tool: This Tool presents the Standard in abbreviated form. The intended audiences are developers, property managers, and maintenance staff of NeighborWorks® organizations.

The Standard: Originally written in code parlance for potential adoption by municipalities, the Standard has been paraphrased in some sections of the Tool for ease of understanding. The goal is to provide inspiration for what organizations can do to improve situations, not merely what not to do. Specific sections of the Standard are referenced by section number, so that users can refer back to the Standard for greater detail.

Stretch Provisions: The Stretch Provisions are recommendations for organizations that want to achieve the highest level of protective requirements. Some may be difficult to implement at unit turnover or moderate housing rehabilitation but may make sense during more substantial housing rehabilitation or during new construction.

The Who: Although many sections could apply to all users, this column attempts to highlight which of the potential user groups (developers, property managers, or maintenance staff) may find individual sections most valuable.

The Rationale: This is the "why it matters" column, with brief explanations of the evidence behind the recommendations.

Tools and Resources: Organized for specific user groups, we've included links to further information to help you apply the Standard. Specific suggestions for where to find compliant products and installation methods along with suggestions for creating necessary policies and procedures are included.

Priority: Recognizing that it may not be feasible for organizations to adopt and apply the entire Standard, at least not all at once, all sections have been prioritized (color ranked) from highest to lower priority items, to help you decide how to allocate your limited funds.