



**Health Resources in Action**  
*Advancing Public Health and Medical Research*  
Asthma Regional Council

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October 12, 2011

Re: Save CDC's Healthy Homes and Lead Prevention Program

Dear New England Senators,

The Asthma Regional Council of New England and Health Resources in Action, along with the individuals and institutions signed below, are writing to express our extreme concern about the complete elimination of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program by the Senate Appropriations Committee in the proposed FY12 spending bill for Labor, Health and Human Services and Education.

The U.S. EPA has found that children (and most adults) now spend 90% of their time indoors and that the prevalence of indoor air pollutants can be 25 times higher than outdoor air pollutants. Health conditions closely related to the indoor environment – including both lead poisoning and asthma – are largely a product of 'unhealthy housing'/substandard housing and other indoor environments such as work or school. Elevated blood lead levels (EBLLs), as defined by the CDC at a level of 10 µg/dL or higher, are associated with nervous system damage, behavior and learning difficulties, stunted growth and hearing disorders in children, and yet, they are completely preventable. <sup>1</sup> Recent studies suggest that there is no safe level of lead in the blood, and that even lesser concentrations can contribute to lower IQs and other learning and behavioral problems. <sup>2</sup>

CDC's Healthy Homes/Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program funds state and local health departments to screen children for elevated blood lead levels, to ensure that lead-poisoned infants and children receive medical and environmental follow-up, and to support prevention of lead poisoning and other housing-related illnesses. The complete elimination of the program would:

- Discontinue all grants to states plus annihilate the branch's key central functions such as surveillance/epidemiology, blood laboratory proficiency, technical assistance, convening, and expert public health leadership.
- Decrease blood lead testing rates drastically, and subsequently, referrals for follow-up care such as nutritional and environmental interventions.
- Make local data collection rare and random, making it impossible to define "hotspots" for lead poisonings. CDC relied on these data when it discovered lead poisoning among newly arriving refugees and international adoptees, and helped remove leaded ayurvedic medicines and unsafe chelation agents from the market. <sup>3</sup>
- Make it difficult for CDC to identify new sources of lead, new risk factors, or options for treating lead poisoning in a timely way.
- Mean far fewer homes being inspected and cited for lead-paint hazards. **Enforcing lead laws saves more than \$45,000 per address made lead safe.** <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Canfield, R., Henderson, C., Cory-Slechta, D., Cox, C., Jusko, T. and Lanphear, B. "Intellectual Impairment in Children with Blood Lead Concentrations below 10 µg per Deciliter." *New England Journal of Medicine*. 348.16 (2003): 1517-1526.

<sup>2</sup> 2007 American Community Survey, U.S. Census

<sup>3</sup> Brown MJ . Med Decis Making. 2002 Nov-Dec; 22(6):482-92. Costs and benefits of enforcing housing policies to prevent childhood lead poisoning.

<sup>4</sup> Brown MJ . Med Decision Making. 2002 Nov-Dec; 22(6):482-92. Costs and benefits of enforcing housing policies to prevent childhood lead poisoning.

***Short-sighted cuts will result in significant long-term costs***

Any near-term savings within CDC would be eclipsed by significant long-term costs to our health care and educational systems, and to our overall economy. For every \$1 spent to reduce lead hazards there is a benefit of \$17-220.<sup>5</sup> CDC's lead poisoning prevention and healthy homes efforts prevent approximately 100,000 children from being lead poisoned each year.

***Communities of color and low-income families will be disproportionately burdened***

The impact of the elimination of this program would fall squarely on the backs of low-income families and communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by environmental health hazards. African-American children ages one to five are nearly three times as likely to be lead poisoned as their white peers.<sup>6</sup>

***Environmental public health work force will be dealt a significant blow***

The proposed elimination would exacerbate an already dire need to revitalize the environmental public health workforce. Roughly 19% of the nationwide local health department workforce has been eliminated since 2008, posing a staggering challenge to local health departments striving to keep Americans safe and healthy. About 6,000 local health department jobs were eliminated last year, for a total of 29,000 since 2008.<sup>7</sup>

The Asthma Regional Council of New England (ARC) is a coalition of nearly 75 public agencies, private organizations and researchers across New England working to tackle environmental and clinical aspects of pediatric and adult asthma. ARC is a program of HRiA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting public health and advancing medical research, in partnership with federal and state government agencies, academic and research institutions, nonprofits, and communities throughout the country. ARC's mission is to reduce the impact of asthma across New England, through collaborations of health, housing, education, and environmental organizations with particular focus on the contribution of schools, homes, and communities to the disease and with attention to its disproportionate impact on populations at greatest risk.

One of ARC's main goals is to promote systems that address healthier home environments in order to reduce asthma triggers and other environmental hazards in the home, including lead. Over the last several years, ARC has been and continues to provide strategic planning services to state and local government agencies and their partners for the development of holistic healthy homes strategic plans. State and municipal Lead Programs are key partners in developing an integrated approach to developing safe and healthy home environments.

ARC and HRiA were heartened to learn that the CDC National Asthma Control Program has been fully funded for FY'12. We also acknowledge and appreciate that the Senate bill recommends that the lead and healthy homes program's functions could be continued through Maternal and Child Health programs that visit vulnerable families in their own homes. However, the unique lead poisoning prevention functions (such as environmental intervention and enforcement) of state and federal programs are still needed to continue to reduce lead poisoning, and are critical components in building successful prevention strategies for safe and healthy home environments. This relatively small program accounted for \$34 million in the FY'10 Federal Budget.

We respectfully urge you to work to ensure that the CDC Healthy Homes and Lead Prevention Program is fully funded in FY'12 in order to protect our nation's children from the risk of injuries, lead poisoning, asthma, and other environmental public health threats.

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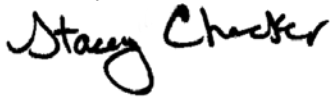
<sup>5</sup> Gould E, 2009 Childhood Lead Poisoning: Conservative Estimates of the Social and Economic Benefits of Lead Hazard Control. Environ Health Perspect 117(7).

<sup>6</sup> Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. May 27, 2005/54(20); 513-516.

<sup>7</sup> National Association of City and County Health Officials. Local Health Department Job Losses and Program Cuts: 2008 – 2010. March 2011. Available at: <http://www.naccho.org>. Accessed March 22, 2011.

If you have questions, please contact Stacey Chacker, Director of Environmental Health at HRiA and the ARC at [schacker@hria.org](mailto:schacker@hria.org) or 617-279-2240 ext. 536. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Stacey Chacker, Director of Environmental Health  
HRiA and Asthma Regional Council



Laurie Stillman, Chief Strategy and Policy Officer  
Health Resources in Action

**Organizations:**

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, New England Chapter  
Boston Healthy Homes and Schools Collaborative, Dorchester, MA  
Breathe Easy Coalition, Portland, ME  
Children's Hospital Boston, MA  
Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice  
Connecticut Public Health Association  
Greater Lawrence Community Action Council Inc.  
New Hampshire Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health  
New Hampshire DHHS Tobacco Prevention and Control Program  
Project RIGHT, Inc., Roxbury, MA

**Individuals:**

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