



## **INCREASING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH GRANT STREAMLINING AND OUTREACH**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awards discretionary funding to more than 20 grant programs to support agency initiatives, including grants under the Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes (OLHCHH). Since the mid-1990s, OLHCHH grants have focused on outreach, research, and removal of lead-based paint hazards. In 1999, Congress expanded these efforts to include other health and safety hazards in the home, such as mold, asbestos, and other contaminants. With Congress' increasing support, HUD has continued to tackle the growing list of hazards that harm the health and safety of millions of children in their own homes. HUD also works with other federal agencies to identify more communities in need of assistance and on improved methods of making homes safe and healthy. In recent years, OLHCHH changed its business process to make things easier for grantees, HUD employees, and service recipients, and launched a campaign to update its stakeholders on how these changes would help their communities.

*"HUD understands the close connection between health and housing. This year, HUD is awarding a record number of awards to jurisdictions to directly support their efforts to identify and clean up housing-based health hazards like lead and mold."*

– Matthew Ammon, Director of HUD's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes

### **What was the challenge?**

HUD publishes yearly Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs) on Grants.gov, a website for federal agencies to post discretionary funding opportunities, and for grant seekers to search and apply for them. Since OLHCHH worked with multiple categories of hazards and services, the grants they sponsored followed that same model (e.g., grants for lead hazards removal, grants for removing other health hazards, and grants for education and demonstrations). This meant that if a grantee was awarded a grant for lead hazards removal, they entered the unit and conducted the lead hazards removal process only. However, if, while in the home, they found other health hazards, they could not address them because removing those hazards was not included in the scope of the lead hazard control grant. An organization had to submit two different grant applications and be awarded two different grants to enter the unit and remove both lead and other hazards. This was a time-consuming process for applicants and HUD employees. OLHCHH realized there was a simpler way to address more than one issue in a home.

Years of lead research has allowed HUD to discover that housing in the United States built before the 1980s has high percentages of lead-contaminated paint on the surfaces. The highest percentages of lead paint and lead hazards is found in pre-1940s homes. Through its survey research, HUD confirmed a troubling correlation that low-income families are more likely to live in homes with lead hazards,<sup>1</sup> and has been focusing its lead hazard control grant efforts on their homes. This presented an opportunity to address health hazards in multiple homes more efficiently.

<sup>1</sup> This was first established on a national scale by OLHCHH's National Survey of Lead and Allergens in Housing. Jacobs DE, Clickner RP, Zhou JY, et al. "The Prevalence of Lead-Based Paint Hazards in U.S. Housing." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 110(10):A599-A606, October 2002. <http://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.021100599>.



## What was the solution?

To address the limitation of requiring separate grants for addressing lead-based paint hazards and other housing-related health and safety hazards, starting in 2012, OLHCHH added a “Healthy Homes Supplement” funding option that applicants could request in their application. Grantees can use this funding to address additional hazards in homes in which lead-based paint hazards are being controlled under their grant.

Starting in 2018, OLHCHH launched a streamlined NOFA for the Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Program. This new NOFA merged two grant programs into one: the grant that addressed lead hazards in communities with highest lead abatement needs (e.g., large numbers of pre-1940 housing) and the grant that addressed lead hazards in all communities. The 2018 NOFA also reduced the number of rating factors from five to three, focusing on the (1) applicant and partner capacity and experience, (2) justification of need within the target area, and (3) fiscal accountability and budget. The consolidated NOFA also allowed grantees to service a home for both lead and health hazards, while saving time and resources for HUD and the grantees.

In 2019, responding to a Congressional set-aside in HUD’s lead hazard control budget, the Department made another significant change to help grantees focus their efforts. HUD’s Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) partnered with OLHCHH to mine data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey to identify “high impact neighborhoods,” OLHCHH’s term for sets of adjoining census tracts (portions of a county) with high concentrations of pre-1940 housing and low-income families. These are neighborhoods that are most likely to have housing with lead-based paint hazards.<sup>2</sup> HUD created a “High Impact Neighborhoods Online Mapping Tool” that applicants used to determine their potential eligibility for the grant and select target areas for making homes lead-safe within their jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup>

## What was the result?

HUD correctly anticipated fewer home visits after enabling grantees to address multiple hazards under the Healthy Homes Supplement approach, and, in 2019, an increased number of applications under the combined NOFA. Additionally, in 2019, OLHCHH awarded grants under the High Impact Neighborhoods category to seven communities with high impact neighborhoods, allotting up to \$9 million each to assist these jurisdictions. While these extensive changes to the NOFA resolved policy and procedural issues that grantees were facing, 2018, the first year of the streamlined format, unexpectedly had a drop in applications. Many applicants did not realize that there was a change in the grant approach, or did not understand the changes fully, resulting in inaccurate or incomplete applications. To overcome the lack of information, OLHCHH started an outreach and education tour in 2019 and updated stakeholders on the new format. By visiting communities, speaking at conferences, and hosting webinars, HUD educated potential applicants directly. This resulted in an uptake in 2019 applications, including new applications, and HUD was able to award grants using the 2018 carryover and the 2019 appropriations.

These grants are a critical resource to the communities and there is a verifiable need for them. The 2019 NOFA enabled the grantees to focus their resources on working for the communities, instead of spending time and labor on submitting multiple grant requests for the same units they were visiting already. A streamlined process has also enabled the HUD employees evaluating the grant applications to spend more of their time

<sup>2</sup> These most recent findings from OLHCHH’s American Healthy Homes Survey were published at Salatino B, Holmes D, Ashley PJ, et al. “Prevalence of Lead Hazards and Soil Arsenic in U.S. Housing.” *Journal of Environmental Health* 78(5):22-29, December 2015. [www.neha.org/node/6429](http://www.neha.org/node/6429).

<sup>3</sup> The mapping tool is available at [www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/healthy\\_homes/fy\\_2019\\_LHR\\_NOFA\\_Appendices](http://www.hud.gov/program_offices/healthy_homes/fy_2019_LHR_NOFA_Appendices).



managing grants instead of reviewing additional applications from the same applicants with content that served the same purpose: helping children and families live in safe and healthy homes.

### Future Steps

In 2019, HUD awarded: a record \$314 million in grants under the Lead Hazard Reduction Program, which includes \$30 million for the Healthy Homes Supplements. In addition, HUD awarded \$5 million for the Healthy Homes Production for Tribal Housing program and \$8 million for Lead and Healthy Homes Technical Studies grants. These investments will protect children and families in more than 14,700 low-income homes with significant lead and health hazards, and provide the research framework for enhancing the methods used for addressing these hazards. OLHCHH will continue to collaborate closely with state and local governments, and with safe housing and children's health stakeholders, to make sure applicants receive the information and training they need to submit competitive grant applications and that OLHCHH addresses the evolving needs of the communities it serves.