

## News Release

# State awards grants to build local capacity for addressing health hazards in homes

## \$250,000 in funding awarded to seven local agencies for first year of three-year project

The Minnesota Department of Health has awarded grants totaling \$250,000 to seven local health agencies to develop and implement programs that address health hazards frequently found in homes; hazards such as lead, radon and other indoor air pollutants, including tobacco smoke and carbon monoxide, fire safety risks and others.

The grants will fund local efforts that are designed to encourage prevention activities, provide guidance and support to individuals exposed to lead, asthma triggers and other unhealthy conditions within their homes. The grantees will be required to:

- Complete a strategic planning and needs assessment process.
- Pilot home assessments and education methods.
- Provide training to local health and housing organizations to better identify health threats in housing.

Most local health agencies in Minnesota already participate in lead poisoning prevention programs for people living in homes most likely to have lead hazards. This project builds on that foundation to address other health hazards in homes.

"What we've found over the years is that the same homes that have lead hazards often also have other environmental hazards that expose their occupants to health risks that are largely preventable," said Dan Symonik, program supervisor. "This project seeks to address those hazards in a one-stop-shop kind of way so that intervention or prevention can happen sooner rather than later - and health outcomes can be improved."

The grant activities will target high-risk populations, which include children under age 6, low-income and minority populations, the elderly and parts of the state with a known high prevalence of radon or older housing stock with lead hazards.

As part of the strategic planning and capacity-building requirements of the grants, local agencies will establish healthy homes networks in their communities. The networks will meet regularly and will consist of professional staff working for health and housing organizations; community

members at large; members of volunteer and professional organizations representing business, community and faith-based interests.

The networks will collaborate on resources, identify opportunities for training, education, advocacy and prevention and build local capacity to improve children's home environments by ensuring that all the agencies working with a family coordinate their efforts to meet a common goal: healthy people in healthy homes.

The grantees also will be required to conduct a certain number of home health assessments during the project's anticipated three-year period. MDH estimates the project will support approximately 700 home assessments by grantees over the three-year period. Once health and safety issues have been identified, grantees must provide educational materials, resources such as carbon monoxide detectors or radon testing kits, or programs such as smoking cessation that can help the family in addressing their particular health and safety concerns.

A primary focus of the home health assessments will be working with licensed in-home child care providers to conduct lead-hazard assessments.

Finally, all grantees will be working with local building code officials on how to incorporate healthy homes assessment tools into their inspection practices.

Some of the grantees will be working with owners or operators of local multi-unit housing to implement smoke-free policies. Others will be focusing on community engagement and education activities such as participating in community events or working with schools to bring healthy homes concepts into the classroom so children can bring the messages home.

Agencies applied for either \$25,000 or \$50,000 grants, depending on the scope of the work they chose to do. Grants of \$50,000 each were awarded to:

- City of Bloomington.
- Meeker, McLeod, Sibley Community Health Board.
- Southwest Health and Human Services (a multi-county collaboration serving the southwest corner of the state).

Grants of \$25,000 were awarded to:

- Pope County.
- Rice County.
- City of Minneapolis.
- St. Paul/Ramsey County.

Agencies will be required to provide matching funds of at least 25 percent of their grant amount. The department's funding for the grants comes through a federal Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The capacity established by the local grants will help MDH implement its statewide healthy homes initiative, with the goal of promoting healthy housing for all Minnesotans. A healthy home is

considered to be one that is clean, safe, well-maintained, dry, pest-free, ventilated, and contaminant free. Additional information is available on the MDH Healthy Homes website: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/homes>.

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