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**King County Board of Health  
Healthy Housing**

**2016**

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## OVERVIEW

Affordable, safe, quality housing is a social determinant of equity,<sup>i</sup> and ensuring access to housing is a key element in creating an overall healthy community. Poor quality housing stock and decreased neighborhood safety, services and amenities, unhealthy environments, and lack of health supporting policies contribute to significant health and opportunity inequities.<sup>ii,iii,iv</sup> By improving the safety and quality of housing and the surrounding neighborhood, a community can build resiliency and strengthen its capacity to face other everyday challenges while providing a healthy environment for adults and children to live.

### Housing Quality and Health

Children and adults spend as much as 65% of their time inside their homes.<sup>v</sup> Consequently, deficient physical housing conditions can cause significant illness including asthma, lead poisoning, and unintentional injuries especially in vulnerable populations such as children, persons with chronic health conditions and the elderly.<sup>vi</sup> A 2009 statement from Steven K. Galson, Acting Surgeon General, identified the leading causes of housing-related preventable deaths, disease, and disability in the United States as “asthma, lead poisoning, deaths in house fires, falls on stairs, and from windows, burns and scald injuries, and drownings in bathtubs and pools.” In King County, crowded or substandard housing can expose residents to risks of poor mental health, asthma, chemical poisonings or injury (see appendix A). In addition, affordable housing in high-poverty areas can increase exposure to greater stress, violence and other traumatic events.

Forty-three percent of rental housing units, in the Seattle Metropolitan Statistical Area, and 33% of owner occupied housing units have physical problems that could affect health; the most common issues are water leaks and roofing problems.<sup>vii</sup> Nineteen percent of all King County housing is described as having severe housing-related problems, such as overcrowding, high housing costs, or lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities.<sup>viii</sup>

Unhealthy housing conditions affect health, and contribute to excess healthcare costs and lost revenue. For example, asthma hospitalizations for King County residents cost \$11.8 million in 2004.<sup>ix</sup> Abating asthma triggers in housing would reduce the cost of treatment. Economic loss due to the impact of lead exposure on IQ is estimated to be up to \$1 billion annually in Washington State.<sup>x</sup>

Housing maintenance approaches that consider the housing structure, the people in the home and potential health hazards can support the improvements of all resident's health.

### Housing as a Component of Neighborhoods

Community design standards that consider aspects of land use and transportation planning strategies can support safe and healthy housing by providing health-supporting environments and services such as transportation choices, parks and open space and healthy and affordable food choices that support a high quality of life.

When neighborhood conditions can be improved without displacing residents, and when affordable housing is available in high opportunity neighborhoods, community residents have increased access to amenities, such as jobs, parks, healthy foods, health services and high quality schools, which generate more health benefits.<sup>xi</sup> Community design, government services, non-profits and other partners can impact the health of residents where they live. Design and services can provide residents with safe and easily accessible places to walk and bike, access to environments offering healthy, affordable food choices, parks and open space, and access to transit use – all of which can promote physical and mental health.

Knowledgeable and empowered residents can be more engaged in creating and maintaining a healthy housing environment.

## King County Board of Health Guidelines: Healthy Housing

### Promoting Equity

Community representatives often identify poor housing conditions and unaffordability as important underlying root causes of poor outcomes and inequities. Inequities in housing stock and neighborhood safety and amenities contribute to significant health and opportunity inequities. (see appendix B)

Anyone can suffer from housing-related illnesses or injuries; however, certain groups are more susceptible. Risk factors that increase the vulnerability for housing-related health issues include age of residents, income, ethnicity, geographic location, and tenancy. In King County, higher rates of moderate to severe housing problems are associated with rental units.<sup>xii</sup>

King County has 863,000 housing units with an estimated 757,000 residents living in rental housing<sup>xiii</sup>. Renters have several factors that may impact their ability to address or prioritize housing quality including fear of retaliation such as eviction, language, knowledge of their rights, and access to affordable housing. While renters have less control over their housing environment than owners, low-income owners also are frequently unable to afford repair of hazards in the home such as elders wanting to age in place.

### Housing Affordability

Residents are often asked to balance and prioritize housing quality, neighborhood characteristics and affordability. In King County, thirty-one percent of homeowners and almost half of rental households pay 30% or more of their income on costs of housing.<sup>xiii</sup> Spending a high proportion of income on housing reduces resources for essentials like food, heating, transportation, healthcare, and childcare and may force some to be homeless, live in shelters or substandard housing, or move frequently to seek more affordable housing.

Older adults are a significant portion of the population paying a high percentage of their income for housing<sup>xiv</sup> facing barriers to aging in place on a fixed income when housing and communities do not support independent living.

Healthy housing actions must be pursued simultaneously with preservation and expansion of affordable housing stock in King County order to prevent displacement and destabilization of residents.

## HEALTHY HOUSING GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following Guidelines and Recommendations are intended to inform government officials working at regional, county and city levels on housing strategies and policies to improve the health of residents and communities while preserving housing affordability throughout King County in compliance with the 2012 King County Countywide Planning Policies on housing. The Guidelines and Recommendations consider leading causes of housing-related disease, injury and death in King County – asthma, falls, and unintentional poisonings.

Section I of the Guidelines and Recommendations are intended to be actionable within the scope and rule-making authority of jurisdictions. Section II of the Guidelines and Recommendations emphasize that jurisdictions are part of a broader metropolitan area with regionalized and interconnected services and structures such as healthcare and housing affordability, where the need for cross sector partnerships are crucial to create and maintain healthy housing.

The Guidelines and Recommendations should be considered and applied through an overall policy strategy that considers equity in housing opportunities and balances the need to address unhealthy housing conditions with preservation and expansion of affordable housing stock in King County.

### **SECTION I – Local Policy Actions**

#### **1. Overarching Healthy Housing Policies**

**Board of Health Guideline: Acknowledge the connections between housing and health for all residents.**

**Key Healthy Housing Recommendations:**

- 1.1 Adopt an ordinance or resolution, affirming the importance of housing as a determinant of health; acknowledging the tension between costs associated with improvements in housing quality and housing affordability.
- 1.2 Determine and collect standardized housing quality indicators to assess housing quality and include relevant indicators as part of the Growth Management Act housing inventory and analysis.

#### **2. Residential Building Design and Maintenance**

**Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County have access to housing that is dry, clean, pest-free, ventilated, thermally controlled, safe, contaminate-free, and maintained.**

**Key Healthy Housing Recommendations:**

- 2.1 Implement and enforce a property maintenance code that includes healthy housing standards. Examples of health-related standards include:
  - 2.1.1 Adopt property maintenance codes requiring building materials that are discolored or deteriorated by mold to be cleaned, dried, and repaired.
  - 2.1.2 Implement smoke-free policies in multi-family housing.
  - 2.1.3 Require integrated pest management methods that maintain every dwelling free of infestation and conditions that harbor pests.

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- 2.1.4 Building material used in maintenance and renovations, shall be certified as having no or low volatile organic chemicals, and have no halogenated flame retardants.
- 2.1.5 Require all renovation, repair and painting work that disturbs painted surfaces in pre-1978 dwellings to be performed in compliance with the requirements of the Washington Department of Commerce to reduce exposure to lead contaminated dusts.
- 2.2 Implement a rental housing inspection program that inspects rental units on a periodic basis to ensure they are safe and habitable.
- 2.3 Implement a rating system for rental housing quality that emphasizes physical housing quality, community design indicators and affordability to be used by residents in evaluating health benefits gained.
- 2.4 Implement universal design building standards that enable seniors and persons with disabilities to live safely in a house.

### 3. Housing Knowledge and Education

**Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County are provided proactive and meaningful opportunities to engage in decisions about their housing.**

**Key Healthy Housing Recommendations:**

- 3.1 Adopt a local version of the Residential Landlord-Tenant Act (RCW 59.18) that includes housing safety and quality standards.
- 3.2 Empower residents to understand their rights and responsibilities, and to learn how to be a good steward of their dwelling.
- 3.3 Assist landlords to understand their rights, responsibilities, home maintenance requirements, and potential funding mechanisms to assist in making repairs.
- 3.4 Resolve housing quality issues in a way that averts the need for code enforcement or litigation activities.

### 4. Community Design

**Board of Health Guideline: Residents throughout King County have access to housing that is part of a broader community that supports healthy and equitable opportunities.**

**Key Healthy Housing Recommendations:**

- 4.1 Utilize a health and equity assessment model for assessing impacts of land use and community planning on housing displacement, siting and design.
- 4.2 Utilize multicultural engagement strategies to include more residents in community planning and design processes and decision making.
- 4.3 Implement policies and programs that consider a variety of active transportation needs in the community (e.g. bicycling, walking and transit) as residents travel from their homes to school, work and other community services.
- 4.4 Implement policies, plans, codes and incentives in local jurisdictions that promote access to healthy and affordable food in close proximity to housing (e.g. urban agriculture, farmers markets, farm-to-table food distribution sites, grocery stores).

## **SECTION II – Cross-Sector Partnership Opportunities**

### **1. Connect Housing and Health Services**

**Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County have access to health and human services that work to improve the housing environment in ways that improve the health of residents.**

**Key Healthy Housing Recommendations:**

- 1.1 Activate partnerships with public health providers, other jurisdictions, housing authorities, nonprofit organizations to provide a home visiting program for residents that will offer health education and connection to services that promote improved housing conditions along with better health.
- 1.2 Improve access and communication between healthcare providers treating clients with housing-related health issues, public health and housing agencies.
- 1.3 Seek ways to create, enhance and refer residents to services in the community that will improve their housing quality, such as weatherization programs and healthy housing home visiting programs.

### **2. Housing Affordability**

**Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County have access to a range of affordable healthy housing.**

**Key Healthy Housing Recommendations:**

- 2.1 Seek financing opportunities such as tax exemption policies available at the state and federal level that could assist land lords improve their properties without raising rents significantly, thereby reducing displacement of residents.
- 2.2 Develop a loan fund to assist landlords who do not have the resources to improve housing stock to standard without raising rents. Such a loan fund would tie affordability to favorable loan terms.
- 2.3 Require and provide housing quality metrics as part of HUD's Assessment of Fair Housing for use in consolidated plans or by the public housing authority.

Appendix A

**BACKGROUND HEALTH DATA**

**Hospitalizations by Age Group and Select Cause — King County, WA, 2014**

	Adults (19+ yrs.)		Children (0-18 yrs.)	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
Asthma	546	34.7	532	117.2
Falls (all intents)	5,867	372.5	178	39.2
Unintentional Poisoning	752	47.7	50	11 (§)

**Notes:**

Rate is per 100,000 population

§ Too few cases to meet precision standard, interpret with caution.

There are no unduplicated hospitalization data at this time. An individual hospitalized more than once will be counted more than once, even if hospitalized for the same condition.

2014 population estimates are preliminary; final estimates for 2014 will be available in February 2016.

Obtained from WA DOH Community Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) on 11/30/2015

**Data Source:**

WA Hospital Discharge Data, Comprehensive Hospitalization Abstract Reporting System (CHARS) 1987-2014. Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics. June 2015.

Prepared by: Public Health - Seattle & King County, Assessment, Policy Development & Evaluation Unit, 11/2015.

Appendix B

HOUSING QUALITY MAPS

Two or more housing conditions

Rank of King County Census Tracts, 2007-2011 averages

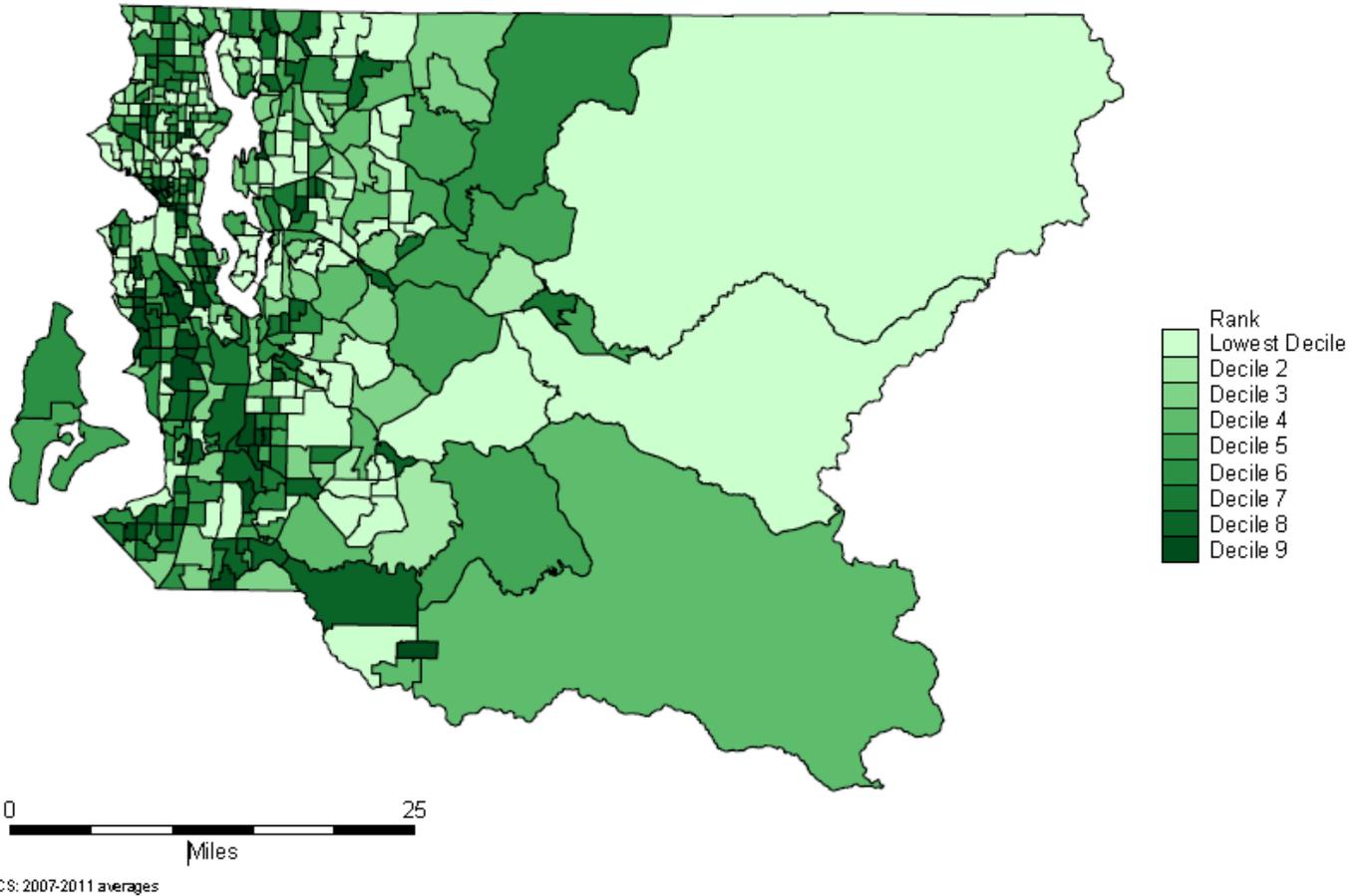


Figure 1: Poor Housing Conditions: December 2013 “Building a Healthier King County” Forum available at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/HHStransformation/strategies.aspx>. Rankings are based on housing costs more than 30% of income, more than one person per bedroom in the house, no working kitchen and no working bathroom.

# King County Board of Health Guidelines: Healthy Housing

Sources: U.S. Census, 2010; American Community Survey, 2006-2010; HUD User, 2010

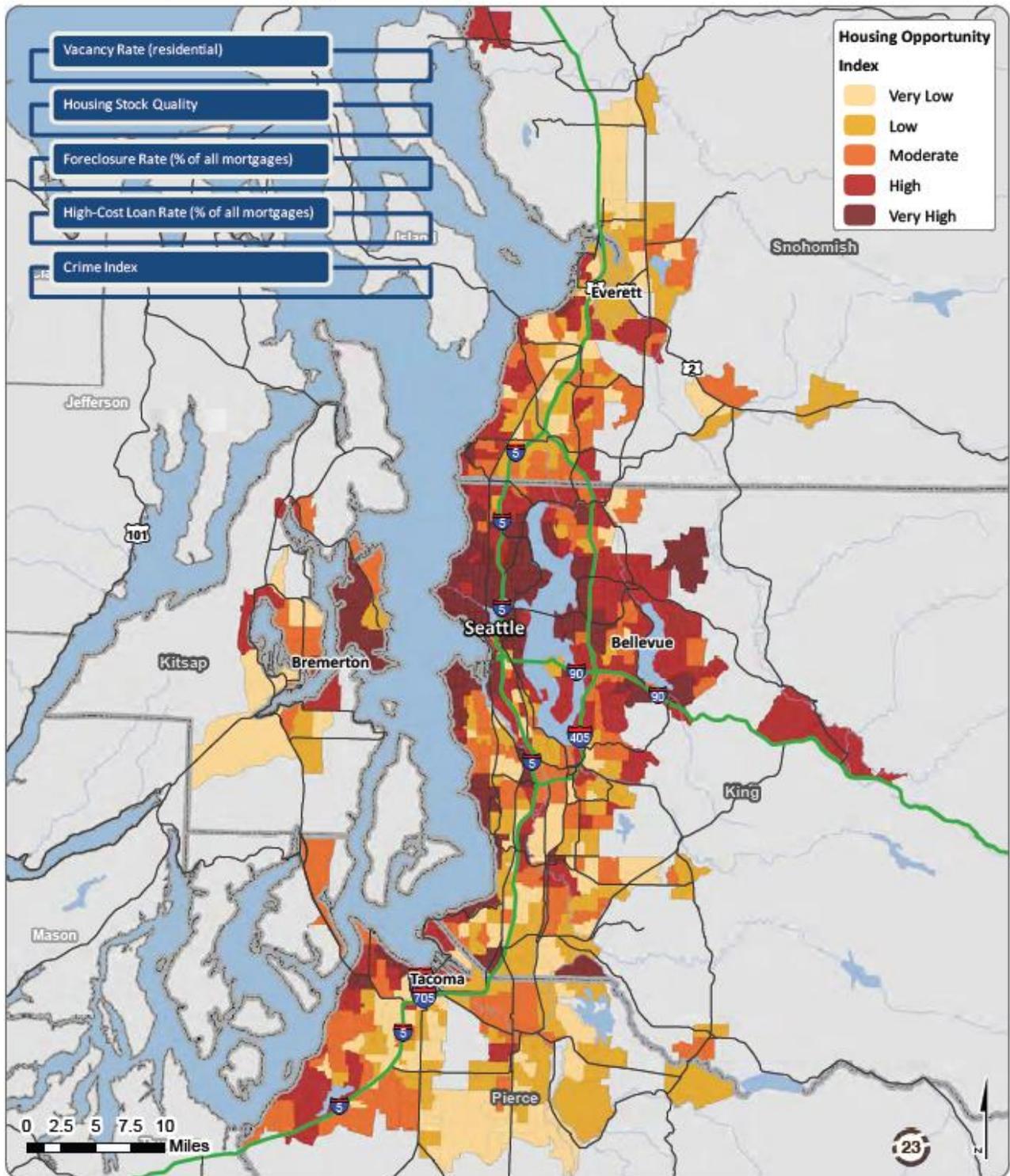


Figure 2: Housing & Neighborhood Quality is from the Puget Sound Regional Council, *Equity, Opportunity, and Sustainability in the Central Puget Sound Region: Geography of Opportunity*, page 23, May 2012. Index includes vacancy, foreclosures and high cost loans rates, housing stock condition and crime index, available at [www.psrc.org/growth/growing-transit-communities](http://www.psrc.org/growth/growing-transit-communities).

## Appendix C

### RESOURCES

Resources are organized by guideline.

#### Section I:

##### 1. Overarching Healthy Housing Policies

Housing Facts Standard, City of San Francisco  
<http://housefacts.codeforamerica.org/SF/>

##### 2. Residential Building Design and Maintenance

National Healthy Housing Standards, 2014  
[http://www.nchh.org/Portals/0/Contents/NHHS\\_Full\\_Doc.pdf](http://www.nchh.org/Portals/0/Contents/NHHS_Full_Doc.pdf)

City of Tukwila, Ordinance 2481 - 2015 International Property Maintenance Code (with Specific Provisions of National Healthy Housing Standard)  
<http://records.tukwilawa.gov/WebLink8/DocView.aspx?id=267242&page=1&dbid=1>

Rental Housing Licensing and Inspection Program, City of Tukwila, 2011,  
<http://www.tukwilawa.gov/departments/community-development/rental-housing/>

Rental Housing Registration and Inspection Program, City of Seattle, 2012,  
<http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/codesrules/licensingregistration/RRIO/aboutrrio/>

Inspections by Local Municipalities, Washington State Legislature, RCW 59.18.125,  
<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=59.18.125>

Chronic Offenders Registry, City of Boston, 2012  
<https://law.resource.org/pub/us/code/city/ma/Boston/chapter09.pdf>

##### 3. Housing Knowledge and Education

Solid Ground, <https://www.solid-ground.org/get-help/housing/for-tenants/>

Tenant's Union of Washington,  
<http://www.tenantsunion.org/en/programs/about-the-education-program1>

##### 4. Community Design

Planning for Healthy Communities Guidelines and Recommendations, KC Board of Health, 2011  
[https://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/~/\\_media/health/publichealth/documents/healthyplaces/PHCGuidelines.ashx](https://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/~/_media/health/publichealth/documents/healthyplaces/PHCGuidelines.ashx)

King County, Equity and Social Justice Tools and Resources.  
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/tools-resources.aspx>

## King County Board of Health Guidelines: Healthy Housing

The Equity Team has developed a variety of tools and resources to increase equity and social justice work, including resources on impact reviews, community engagement, and increasing language access.

Society of Health Impact Assessment Practitioners. <http://hiasociety.org/>

Health Impact Assessment is a process used to identify how a project, policy or program might influence health

PolicyLink. Center for Health Equity and Place.

PolicyLink and the Center for Health Equity and Place advances health equity as an essential component of a society that values the well-being of all people. Provide tools on food systems, health systems and the built environment.

<http://www.policylink.org/focus-areas/health-equity-and-place>

### Section II:

#### 1. Connect Housing and Health Services

Breathe Easy at Home: Web-Based Referral System Linking Clinical Sites with Housing Code Enforcement for Patients with Asthma, Boston

[http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/uploads/5823\\_4\\_20\\_33.pdf](http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/uploads/5823_4_20_33.pdf)

#### 2. Housing Affordability

Property tax exemption program for preservation of certain affordable housing, Washington State Legislature, 2015-16 Senate Bill 6239

<http://app.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=6239&year=2015>

Healthy Neighborhood Equity Fund Report. Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council

<http://www.mapc.org/hnef>

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing. U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development.

[https://www.huduser.gov/portal/affht\\_pt.html#affh](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/affht_pt.html#affh)

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- <sup>i</sup> Krieger J, Higgins DL. 2002 Housing and health: time again for public health action. *Amer J Public Health*. 2002;92(5):758–768
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- <sup>vii</sup> National Center for Healthy Housing. 2009 American Housing Survey. <http://www.nchh.org/Policy/2013StateofHealthyHousing/LocationSummary/tabid/858/msa/44/Default.aspx>
- <sup>viii</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. 2007-2011 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy data. <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/washington/2015/measure/factors/136/data?sort=sc-2>. Accessed November 13, 2015
- <sup>ix</sup> Public Health – Seattle & King County. *Public Health Data Watch*. November 2005
- <sup>x</sup> Washington Department of Health. Healthy Homes Strategic Plan, An Integrated Approach To Protecting and Improving Human and Home environmental Health. August 2013.
- <sup>xi</sup> Health Resources in Action and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, "Community Development and Health: A health impact assessment to inform the community investment tax credit program." September 2014
- <sup>xii</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Census Bureau. Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) Data Tool. 2008-2012 American Housing Survey. King County WA
- <sup>xiii</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, King County, WA
- <sup>xiv</sup> Center for Housing Policy. Housing an Aging Population: Are We Prepared? 2012. Available at: <http://www.nhc.org/media/files/AgingReport2012.pdf>