

# Health and Housing

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## Context

New Haven is experiencing a building boom, with many new housing developments recently built and more planned. At the same time, healthy and affordable housing is in short supply. Unmanaged, the City's growth threatens to further segregate our community by race and income. Without adequate access to not only housing but also healthy food, adequate mental health services, and freedom from addiction, the disparities in our communities will continue to increase relative to health, jobs, and economic stability. The administration should lead in addressing the social determinants of health—the conditions in which people live, learn, work, and play—that affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. These include, most notably, safe and affordable good-quality housing. Housing development should create options across the full range of affordability and at market rates; it should be informed by community needs and desires and represent inclusive and equitable investment in all neighborhoods and downtown. Addressing health inequities will provide for healthier families who, in turn, are able to work, pay taxes, and reinvest in New Haven.

## First 100 Days

### Recommendation 1: Issue a call to action to create more affordable housing in the City and the region.

Announce a long-term goal of expanding affordable units in New Haven through a combination of naturally occurring, privately subsidized, and publicly subsidized approaches, including new units in the twelve surrounding towns that, with New Haven, make up the South Central Regional Council of



Governments. Appoint senior staff to coordinate with the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and the New Haven Coordinated Access Network, among others, to advocate for regional investment in affordable housing to alleviate the strain on City resources and create equity for families needing affordable housing. Staff the Affordable Housing Commission to begin implementation of the Affordable Housing Task Force's recommendations.

### Recommendation 2: Establish the infrastructure for a lead-safe City.

Appoint members to the Lead Advisory Commission and fill vacant positions on the Board of Public Health Commissioners. Work closely with the board to hire a Health Director with strong management skills, a health background, and a bold policy vision.

### Recommendation 3: Manage the development of market-rate housing.

In neighborhoods that include limited affordable housing, complete a strategic study of housing

and consider imposing a fee for larger market-rate developments that fail to include affordable housing. Eliminate tax abatement for market-rate housing developments. Support zoning policies that ensure affordable units are available whenever market-rate housing is built.

## Two Years

### Recommendation 1: Set health priorities that are innovative, transparent, and collaborative among City departments and community organizations.

Healthy priorities should be systems-focused, with emphasis on: reproductive health; maternal, infant and child health; chronic disease prevention and control; infectious disease prevention; access and equity; mental and behavioral health; substance use; injury and violence prevention; and toxic stress and trauma. Specific priorities: Include robust services to enroll residents in health insurance programs. Develop clear and concise public health messaging and campaigns. Align health priorities across the City and ensure collaboration across departments, particularly the Community Services Administration, and with community organizations.

### Recommendation 2: Establish lead-safety protections.

Ensure full staffing of the Environmental Health Division, including a director and a full lead inspection staff. Initiate a thorough review of the data on current Health Department performance regarding lead, and study best practices in other municipalities concerning lead enforcement. In collaboration with the Lead Advisory Commission, look to develop clear policies and procedures for ensuring lead-safe homes, as well as implement increased resident and landlord education around lead safety and the dangers of lead, strengthen

landlord commitment to renting lead-safe homes, and seek new sources of funding for lead abatement.

### Recommendation 3: Reduce harm from the substance use crisis.

Continue the Mayor's Overdose Response Task Force and develop an ongoing collaborative relationship between the Police Department, drug treatment providers, and community groups. Implement stronger and more informed messaging regarding the availability of substance treatment. Rethink or dismantle the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program while continuing or expanding programs that provide medication-assisted treatment, Narcan, and needle exchange. Direct police to deemphasize investigations of sales of unadulterated heroin and non-counterfeit pharmaceutical drugs. Start a conversation around safe injection facilities and decriminalization to make sure police are not arresting people for possession of methadone or Suboxone. Distribute fentanyl test strips for users to protect themselves.

### Recommendation 4: Prevent gun violence and injury.

Collaborate with existing programs to prevent gun violence, particularly among youth. Consolidate related efforts at City Hall with one point of access for services, and work to identify and engage youth. Ensure that decisions are informed by data about needs and services.

## Longer Term

### Recommendation 1: Realign investment in housing development to meet the call to action.

Reconfigure the use of federal, state and local funds to prioritize development of affordable housing.

Among the steps to take:

- Complete a study of housing development and develop appropriate guidelines for the development of market-rate, mixed-rate, and other community development programs;
- Engage local housing development partners and property owners;
- Consider zoning ordinance changes to diversify housing options and incentivize affordable housing and mixed-income communities;
- Study zoning changes and consider allowing accessory dwelling units (including Tiny Houses and bungalow courts); reducing parking requirements; promoting inclusionary zoning, set-asides, and land trusts; and reassessing building height and density requirements;
- Realign building codes to incentivize affordable construction opportunities;
- Concretize a strategy to move housing development projects forward in ways that foster vibrant mixed-income communities downtown and in each neighborhood; and
- Invite anchor institutions to revamp homeownership programs to help meet the need for affordable housing via a focus on multifamily owner-occupied units in targeted neighborhoods.

### **Recommendation 2: Improve transparency and inclusive decision-making.**

Reinvigorate community processes for obtaining resident input into proposed neighborhood changes and development proposals. Draft an ordinance requiring all LLC owners to be listed with contact information, as Hartford has done. Create a searchable online database of landlord registries and oversight programs, including property code violators; an online system to file housing code complaints; and a database for record-keeping for all inspections and enforcement.

### **Recommendation 3: Restructure the Livable City Initiative and improve code enforcement.**

Reorganize the Livable City Initiative to focus on support to property owners and code enforcement, and reduce emphasis on housing development. Invest in LCI staffing and resources to better meet the mandate for safe and vibrant housing and neighborhoods. Support a housing code enforcement unit that is staffed and resourced to support property owners and to inspect housing units and enforce codes in the City. Improve the coordination of inspections across departments and consider consolidation of code enforcement. Develop clarity in addressing complaints about housing conditions. Establish a written relocation plan, consistent with the state Uniform Relocation Act, to provide policy and procedure for administering relocation assistance for tenants displaced by code enforcement activity.

### **Recommendation 4: Create a Healthy Homes Coalition.**

Bring together City and state departments, community organizations, and Yale New Haven Hospital to focus on creating safe and healthy homes and address poor housing conditions such as mold, asbestos, vermin, lead, and other hazards. Waterbury's One Touch system is an example of such a community approach to healthy homes.



Photo: Sarah Miller

### **Recommendation 5: Develop resident-focused initiatives to access and maintain affordable housing and build resident power.**

Support small local landlords and homeowners with incentives for owner occupancy and with tax deferrals and abatements to improve homes. Strengthen and extend Yale University and Yale New Haven Hospital's Homebuyers Program to include support for City employees, particularly teachers, firefighters, and police officers. Create online platforms to aid in the search for affordable housing options. Support eviction prevention and rapid rehousing initiatives, including security deposits, to encourage housing stability.

### **Recommendation 6: Create a "Health in All Policies" agenda.**

To address health equity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that cities articulate and integrate health considerations into policymaking across sectors.

### **Recommendation 7: Increase state and federal dollars for affordable housing production and preservation.**

Effectively engage state and federal partners to ensure the preservation of historic properties while also addressing the issue of blighted properties. In conversation with the community and the Board of Alders, gradually shift the allocation of Community Development Block Grants and other federal dollars to incentivize affordable housing development and preserve affordable housing.

### **Recommendation 8: Facilitate state legislation to allow further management of absentee landlords.**

Legislation can increase fines that property owners are assessed for failing to be a part of the City's rental registration program.

### **Recommendation 9: Ensure tenants' rights to counsel in eviction proceedings.**

Support a feasibility study on tenants' right to counsel in eviction proceedings to increase housing stability. There are a number of successful models in other cities, including Philadelphia, New York, and San Francisco.

### **Recommendation 10: Explore the Green and Healthy Homes Initiative.**

As part of a long-term strategy, work with the state and other municipalities to justify higher expenditures on energy-efficient and healthy affordable housing by documenting cost savings in other areas of the budget and cost reductions to the local economy.

### **Recommendation 11: Make school buildings accessible for improved community health.**

Explore the "community school" model of the Federation of Community Schools to provide community access to school buildings after hours for after-school programming, health services, physical exercise, adult education, and other services that improve health, public safety, and community cohesion. Train community members to run these programs and keep the schools open. As a first step, consider opening the Hillhouse track to the public in the evening and on weekends.

### **Recommendation 12: Expand the use of school-based health centers to provide primary care to families year-round.**

Ensure at least one nurse and one counselor in every New Haven public school. The leading causes of school absenteeism are health-related. Nursing and health services in every school would ensure that our children are healthier, miss fewer days of school, and have better immunization rates. The City can also administer many health services for families in these facilities at low to no cost. Review the feasibility of expanding nursing services and counselors in every school.