

NYS Joint Legislative Budget Hearing for Health

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Written Testimony

Submitted By

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Thank you, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Rivera, and Paulin, and Members of the New York State Senate and Assembly for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am Katrina Korfmacher, Professor of Environmental Medicine and Public Health Sciences at the University of Rochester and Director of the Community Engagement Core at the University's Environmental Health Sciences Center, and I am testifying in support of the Healthy Neighborhoods Program in the 2026-27 Budget, which the Executive Budget proposes eliminating.

Established statewide in 1985, the Healthy Neighborhoods Program (HNP) is a home visitation program that has served tens of thousands of families, providing referrals, education, and low-cost supplies to address health hazards in their homes. Currently, the program is active in 17 counties, including Monroe County. At an annual cost of \$1.45 million, this program yields tremendous benefits through prevention of injuries, lead poisoning, asthma, fire, and other home hazards for a very small amount of taxpayer investment. Prior research has found the HNP program to be effective in reducing home hazards and to be extremely cost effective, particularly for asthma prevention (Gomez et al. 2017, Reddy et al. 2017, Reddy et al. 2017).

Home-based hazards have significant impacts on health, particularly for low-income children and older adults. Americans spend up to 90% of their time in the home. The primary source of exposure for most children with elevated blood lead levels is the home. Home-based triggers are responsible for up to 40% of excess asthma cases (Krieger, 2010). Fires, carbon monoxide, poisoning, and unintentional injuries in the home also harm health significantly. The Healthy Neighborhoods Program home visitors help families identify hazards in their home, learn ways to improve home health, and access additional community resources, services, and programs.

The Healthy Neighborhoods Program has been implemented continuously by the Monroe County Department of Public Health since 2004, conducting nearly 500 home visits in the City of Rochester every year. At the University of Rochester, we have collaborated with the Healthy Neighborhood Program through clinical services, research, and community partners. As a result, we seen first-hand the positive impacts on the health of our community, particularly in high-risk zip codes in the City of Rochester.

Clinical services:

University of Rochester clinicians provide preventive services and care to families who disproportionately come from the poorest neighborhoods in Rochester. When a patient has a health problem or risk associated with their home, there are very few resources clinicians can refer to for help. The Healthy Neighborhood Program is often the only resource that can visit the homes of families in high-risk zip codes, regardless of whether they are homeowners or renters.

Community Partnerships:

The University partners with many groups that interact with residents to promote community health. Our Environmental Health Sciences Center Community Engagement Program has convened the Rochester Healthy Home Partnership monthly for nearly 20 years. This group of over 30 community organizations and service providers meets monthly to share information, identify opportunities for improvement, and coordinate to address home hazards in the greater Rochester community. The Healthy Neighborhoods Program is a longstanding member of this partnership, and the partners regularly shares information about the program and refers community members to their services. As well, the HNP staff are continually updated about additional resources and information to share with their clients, contributing to their effectiveness.

Research

Our faculty and staff have conducted extensive research on home hazards contributions to health, particularly lead poisoning and asthma. Researchers in the Department of Environmental Medicine recently completed a study that was based on the well-recognized effectiveness of the Healthy Neighborhoods Program, and studied the effectiveness of integrating an HNP-like intervention into home rehabilitation grant programs as well as the potential to extend the HNP approach to additional environmental health risks including pesticides, phthalates, flame retardants, and other harmful chemicals in the home (www.rochome.urmc.edu).

The ROC HOME study, which I co-led, partnered with the City of Rochester, Rochester Energy Efficiency and Weatherization (RENEW), and the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) to work with 86 owner-occupant families participating in Rochester's HUD-funded healthy homes housing grant program between 2020-2025. The study was supported by HUD's Healthy Homes Technical Studies program, a grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the Konar Foundation.

Because of the HNP's long track record and well-established effectiveness, the ROC HOME researchers chose to use it as a model. One goal of the research was to inform whether the HNP should be integrated into housing rehabilitation programs in other states – or even across the country. While analysis of ROC HOME data are still ongoing, initial unpublished findings include that participants took more healthy home actions after ROC HOME's HNP-like intervention. Thus, just like in previous studies of New York's Healthy Neighborhoods Program, ROC HOME is showing that low-cost supplies and education can help residents change family behaviors, choices about purchasing products, home maintenance, and other practices likely to promote a healthy home over the long term. This suggests that expanding the HNP into other communities and integrating it into programs like housing rehabilitation programs may be effective.

In conclusion, the New York State Healthy Neighborhoods Program is recognized as a cost-effective, equity-promoting, model approach by partners across the state and nation. With reductions in preventive services, growing recognition of the importance of environmental factors to health, and increasing challenges finding safe housing for low-income New Yorkers, this is a time to sustain or expand this highly effective program, not cut it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and your past support.

Gomez, M., A. L. Reddy, S. L. Dixon, J. Wilson and D. E. Jacobs (2017). "A Cost-Benefit Analysis of a State-Funded Healthy Homes Program for Residents With Asthma: Findings From the New York State Healthy Neighborhoods Program." J Public Health Manag Pract **23**(2): 229-238.

Krieger J. Home is Where the Triggers Are: Increasing Asthma Control by Improving the Home Environment. *Pediatr Allergy Immunol Pulmonol*. 2010 Jun;23(2):139-145.

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