

# Healthy Rental Housing



Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a healthy, full life — but not everyone in our country has an equal opportunity to achieve this. CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, promotes a package of tried and tested policies that ensure all people in our largest cities have access to healthy choices.

Together, with visionary city leaders, we can make sure that all people have access to a safe place to live, a healthy body and mind, and a thriving environment. Policy solutions like Healthy Rental Housing can help make communities safer and resolve critical health disparities — now and decades down the road.

Healthy Rental Housing policies ensure that homes in our communities meet the safety standards we all want — from good plumbing to lead-free paint. Proactive rental inspections can help detect life-threatening toxins, like mold and asbestos. When communities have Healthy Rental Housing policies, hardworking families are protected from harm and can feel safer and healthier at home.

## THE SAFE RENTAL HOUSING CHALLENGE

- Substandard conditions in the home contribute to a wide range of significant health problems such as exacerbated asthma and respiratory conditions, exposure to mold and pests, and childhood lead poisoning.
- Renters typically live in older homes than do homeowners and are more likely to report living in houses with severely inadequate plumbing, heating, wiring, and general upkeep.
- According to 2019 Census data, 58% of Black households are rented, 53% of Hispanic households are rented, and less than 31% of white households are rented.
- Traditionally, housing code enforcement programs have been complaint-based, meaning that housing inspections are made only when a complaint has been filed.

## A HEALTHY SOLUTION: HEALTHY RENTAL HOUSING

- **Improves Housing Quality** — Healthy Rental Housing policies, including proactive rental inspection, provide a way for cities to adopt a more prevention-based, equitable approach to improve housing quality and ensure that housing on the rental market is habitable.
- **Ensures Homes are Safe** — Registered rental units are inspected on a regular basis to ensure they are safe and livable. Cities that implement Healthy Rental Housing policies can see a 50% decrease in home fires, saving millions of dollars in first-responder resources.
- **Addresses Problems Quickly** — Cities with Healthy Rental Housing policies reduce the length of time that property violations remain unaddressed. Instead of taking years to fix violations and protect families from harm, it can take days — helping to reduce the health risks associated with housing code violations.

# Going For Gold

CityHealth annually rates Healthy Rental Housing policies in cities with criteria that set the “gold standard” in each policy area. These criteria were developed with input from national experts, are backed by evidence, and work to reduce or remove systemic barriers to health equity. Medals are awarded to cities that meet the elements necessary for the best quality policy (gold), a good quality policy (silver), and a passable quality policy (bronze). Cities with no policy, or that don’t meet the minimum threshold for a bronze medal, receive no medal.

## HEALTHY RENTAL HOUSING MEDAL CRITERIA



|   | Bronze | Silver | Gold |
|---|--------|--------|------|
| 1. City has a policy that requires annual rental registration of buildings with three or more units for all property types. Certain exemptions may be allowed including, but not limited to, when the unit is vacant, a family member is living there but not on the deed, units where rent is not collected, and if the owner occupies one of the units. | ✓      | ✓      | ✓    |
| 2. City policy requires routine, periodic inspections conducted at least every 10 years.  | ✗      | ✓      | ✗    |
| 3. City policy requires inspection of the property exterior.  | ✗      | ✓      | ✗    |
| 4. City policy requires advanced notice of inspection to go to the landlord or the tenant.  | ✗      | ✓      | ✓    |
| 5. City policy requires routine, periodic inspections to be conducted at least every five years.  | ✗      | ✗      | ✓    |
| 6. City policy requires inspection of property exteriors and interiors when there is an exterior violation.   | ✗      | ✗      | ✓    |
| 7. City policy requires landlords to pay registration or inspection fees.   | ✗      | ✗      | ✓    |
| 8. City policy requires an evaluation or reporting requirement.   | ✗      | ✗      | ✓    |

## BOSTON'S HEALTHY RENTAL HOUSING

Boston passed a comprehensive Healthy Rental Housing policy in 2012. The ordinance covers about 140,000 rental units and requires landlords to register their rental properties annually. Boston’s ordinance requires inspections to be conducted at least once every five years, though the policy also creates mechanisms to target bad actors and problem properties for more frequent inspections. The city operates a chronic offender point system, which tracks housing violations and assigns them a point value. Owners who have accrued a certain number of points are classified as “chronic offenders” and must request an inspection of each rental unit once every three years.