



Year in Review

Leveraging partnerships, technology improvements and resident engagement to improve the health of residents of Boston Housing Authority and Section 8/Rental Assisted Housing

In its first year (9/30/14–9/29/15), *Boston REACH: Partners in Health and Housing (PHH)* worked to improve access to healthy food and home environments, as well as community resources and services for healthy living, for more than **55,000** residents of public and rental-assisted housing of the *Boston Housing Authority (BHA)*. By building visibility through communications, resident engagement, and partnerships, and increasing access and ensuring sustainability by leveraging technology and existing programs, PHH is working to make it easier for residents of BHA and Section 8/Rental Assisted Housing to maintain good health.

PARTNERSHIPS

PHH collaborated with diverse partners to develop healthy food environments, smoke-free housing, and clinical-community linkages to prevent and treat obesity and tobacco use and exposure.

Healthy Food Environments

Collaborating with 4 government agencies: the *Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC)*, *Greenovate Boston*, and the *Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)* to promote Boston's award-winning tap wa-

ter, and the *Office of Food Initiatives* through their Bounty Bucks and farmer's markets programs, PHH increased awareness and access to healthy foods and beverages. Year 1 also saw the establishment of partnerships with non-profit food organizations, including *Fair Foods* and *Fresh Truck* to bring healthy, affordable foods closer to BHA developments.

Smoke-Free Housing

Building on existing partnerships with the *Public Health Advocacy Institute* and *Health Resources in Action*, PHH also worked with BHA staff, tenant leaders, and Section 8 landlords and public housing management companies, to increase smoke-free home environments.

Clinical-Community Linkages

Meanwhile, with partners, such as *Boston Children's Hospital* and *UMass Medical School*, PHH improved local programs to meet the needs of BHA residents around smoking cessation and food access, in particular.

Evaluation

Led by the *Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH)* with input from BHA staff and residents, PHH has begun distributing its first BHA Resident Health and Wellness survey to get a better understanding of the health beliefs, needs and practices of BHA residents. **10** developments with a total of **2,500** residents are currently being surveyed.

COMMUNICATIONS

PHH also engaged in door knocking and flyering by resident health advocates, as well as social media in order to address knowledge gaps and promote culture change among BHA and Section 8 residents and stakeholders.



SPOTLIGHT: SOCIAL MEDIA

With a collective reach of over **26,000** followers combined over **10** social media accounts between BHA and the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), social media played a large role in communications efforts for Year 1. Boston REACH: PHH also tapped into the online communities of 2 new government partners, BWSC and MWRA, to engage the general public about tap water.

Videos are also helping get the word out in ways that are user-friendly, regardless of literacy level. **Six** new videos were created, garnering more **800** views as of 12/17/15. **Three** - *Soda-Free Challenge*, *SmokeFree Because*, and *Dr. Huang*—were selected for national dissemination by the CDC and HUD, to help other communities across the country.

To see our videos, visit www.YouTube.com/healthyBoston

TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS

Technology improvements are helping BHA resident access resources for healthy living, including smoke-free housing and health and social services in their communities.

Smoke-free home environments

BHA created multiple tools to improve access to smoke-free homes, including:

- smoke-free housing webpage with information and resources for tenants
- central reporting email address and phone line for residents to file tobacco exposure complaints
- smoking violation reporting database for BHA staff to track incidents
- smoke-free housing checkbox for Section 8 webpage to identify smoke-free housing; will also be used for Section 8 rental listings

The new improvements will impact roughly **55,000** residents of BHA and Section 8 housing administered by BHA and provide greater access to the health and safety benefits of smoke-free housing.

Access to community-based health services and resources

HelpSteps, a free online tool of BPHC and *Boston Children's Hospital*, that connects residents to over **1,700** health and social services and resources in their communities, is being updated with:

- additional food and smoking cessation resources
- improved user-friendliness and functionality via feedback from BHA residents

These improvements will better connect BHA residents with services and resources they need, particularly around food access and smoking cessation.

"It [smoking cessation counseling training] gave me a broader view of how to reach out to the residents in my development."

- BHA resident leader



Made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Send us an email to SmokeFree@bostonhousing.org.

Your email report will be entered into our database and forwarded to your manager.



Call the BHA Smoking Violation Report Line at **617-988-5030**.

Your voicemail report will be entered into our database and forwarded to your manager.

If you are Section 8 tenant or landlord seeking more information on going smoke-free take a look at [Boston Public Health Commission's page on Smoke Free Homes](#). See additional [Smoke-Free Living Resources](#) below.



"With a simple tool, I was able to cut down on...Google searches into one streamlined process of getting [a resident] connected to the resources she needed. The resident, a cancer patient, was incredibly grateful."

- Amina E., BHA Resident Health Advocate

CAPACITY BUILDING

Healthy food environments

More than **1,000** BHA residents participated in Unity Days organized by tenant leaders, including nearly **400** residents for the *Tap Water Taste Test* and close to **350** residents for the *Soda Free Summer Challenge* to increase BHA resident support of healthier environments in and around BHA developments. Tap water promotion and decreasing soda consumption were the main focus in Year 1, as studies have linked increasing rates of obesity to sugary drinks like soda.

25% of BHA developments, representing approximately **5,000** residents, were also trained about healthy foods, including local farmer's markets, Bounty Bucks, and portion sizes to facilitate support of healthier environments in and around BHA developments. Extensive progress was made in our goal to provide healthy food and related education and information at every event.

In Year 1, BHA residents and staff, Section 8 landlords and tenants, and others received training and technical assistance to facilitate access to healthier environments for BHA residents.

Smoke-free housing

Close to **200** BHA Section 8 units transitioned to smoke-free, which impacts about **500** residents.

Clinical-community linkages

36 participants, including BHA tenant leaders and staff, resident and youth health ambassadors and local clinicians, were also trained on smoking cessation counseling to ensure that smokers seeking to quit have support to do so. **10** BHA and PHH staff were trained to administer HelpSteps.

Boston REACH: Partners in Health & Housing is a 3-year initiative (2014-2017) to improve the health of Black and Latino residents living in BHA developments and BHA-Administered Rental Assisted/Section 8 Housing. A partnership comprised of BPHC, BHA, BUSPH and the Partnership in Health & Housing's Community Committee, we are working to address obesity and tobacco-related health conditions, two major causes of preventable death and illness in the U.S.