

THE DAILY YONDER

Housing For Health: Grants Offer Support For Healthy Housing Opportunity

November 28, 2022

By: Kristi Eaton



Rural LISC supports 22 community development corporations in creating and maintaining supportive housing for health outcomes.

From supporting people who have experienced homelessness to conducting energy audits, a new set of recipients have received grants from the Rural LISC Healthy Housing Initiative.

The 22 grant recipients span across the country and focus on healthy housing for people in rural communities, said Director of Housing, Tim Klont, in an interview with the Daily Yonder.

“LISC recognizes that housing is a social determinant of health,” Klont said. “And yet, that housing stock in many rural communities is aging, and in need of repair, which can contribute to unhealthy living conditions in many places. And we know that over these last few years during the pandemic, this really exacerbated existing health challenges, and underscored the need for people to have quality stable, healthy places to live.”

Moreover, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) are further burdened by health outcomes associated with poor housing quality. “So healthy housing is also a key component of health equity,” he added.

He said that since 2015, Rural LISC has awarded over \$3.8 million in grants to more than 240 community development corporations across the country.

“This year, we were especially interested in housing as a structure: how can you make the house or the apartment or the living conditions healthier?” he said.

Housing is truly foundational, he said. Without healthy housing, it can affect all areas of a family or individual’s life. If a home is not healthy, a family may be forced to move around a lot, causing disruption to education, for example.

“If I’m a child, or if I’m raising a child, in an unhealthy living environment, where they are more prone to asthma, where it’s not heated or cooled properly, so maybe I’m not sleeping, maybe the child’s not sleeping as well. So they’re not doing as well in school,” he said. “And then that can contribute to any number of things. I don’t think it’s hard for most people to be able to make the connection between the two.”

Betsy McGovern-Garcia is Program Director – Real Estate Development for Self-Help Enterprises in Visalia, California, one of the grant recipients. Self-Help Enterprises is implementing a healthy housing program for 23 permanent supportive housing residents who’ve experienced chronic homelessness to help them improve mental and physical health and build tenancy skills to stay housed.

“It is a tremendous honor to receive this grant and it will allow Self-help Enterprises to expand supportive services for individuals in our Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units,” said McGovern-Garcia in an interview with the Daily Yonder. “All of the residents in PSH had previously experienced homelessness and PSH is only successful with wrap-around supportive services to assist residents in transitioning from street homelessness to housing stability. This grant will expand our capacity to deliver those supportive services.”

The PSH units which will be supported through this grant include mostly one-bedroom units as the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness in the region are single adults, she said. The units are approximately 500 square feet and rent is established at an affordable level based on the extremely low-income tier. The sites include solar PV to offset electrical loads, an on-site community center, laundry room and computer lab, and open spaces with recreational amenities.

“Housing is a social determinant of health,” she said. “Once in stable housing, residents can focus on additional needs such as engagement in mental health services, access to substance abuse counseling, attending regular health check-ups and prevention screenings and other activities to improve long-term health outcomes. Our housing sites are located in close proximity to community health clinics and supportive services include referrals to a variety of behavioral health services.”

In South Dakota, meanwhile, the Healthy Housing Initiative awarded a grant to GROW South Dakota to help support low-income households in making their homes healthier, safer, more energy efficient, and environmentally sound, said Kristin Hofland, Home Improvement director.

“By addressing health and safety factors in homes and providing client education to homeowners and homebuyers, health improvements are presented via reduced hospitalizations and emergency room visits due to thermal stress, asthma conditions, and carbon monoxide poisoning,” she told the Daily Yonder.

Hofland said that home improvement can have a trickle effect on communities.

“As homes are improved, it adds value to neighborhoods and instills pride, making rural communities an ideal place to live and work.”