

Addressing Substandard Housing: A Resource Guide

Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP) is pleased to present six easy-to-use guides outlining governmental and community based resources to address substandard conditions in rental housing. Substandard housing exposes residents to indoor allergens such as moisture and mold, cockroaches, rodents, and dust. These triggers can lead to asthma symptoms such as wheezing, chest tightness and respiratory distress. These guides are designed primarily to help Community Outreach Health Workers (CHOWs) as they assist their clients in six Bay Area Counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Solano, and Sonoma. They are not intended to be comprehensive; instead, they highlight the types of services available to deal with violations of housing and health codes. Services offered in languages other than English are noted in the guides. Each guide is divided into six major sections:

1. **General Information:** Key resources to a broad range of social services available in each county.
2. **Code Enforcement:** Departments and agencies responsible for responding to housing and health code violations.
3. **Legal Assistance/Tenants' Rights/Mediation:** Governmental and community organizations that can support tenants and home owners through legal advice and representation, dispute resolution and mediation, and referrals to needed services.
4. **Affordable Housing:** Agencies and organizations that build and manage affordable housing.
5. **Rehabilitation & Remediation:** Home repair programs to help owners fix and improve their properties and bring them into compliance with housing and health codes.
6. **Additional Resources:** Key resources to asthma prevention and management services.

Quick Guide on Addressing Substandard Housing Problems

When confronted with housing or health code violations many people may not know what to do. Below are general steps tenants can take. We highly recommend contacting a legal aid or tenants' rights organization from the guide that can provide support throughout the process:

- **Know your rights:** State law establishes the "implied warranty of habitability" for tenants which define minimum health and safety standards for rental dwellings. These standards are listed in the *Dealing With Problems* section at: <http://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/landlordbook/catenant.pdf>
Some cities may have stronger standards. Tenants can contact their local housing and/or health department to find out local regulations. Tenants should also check their rental leases that will state the owner or manager's responsibilities for maintaining the property. For further research refer to legal self help resources identified in the guide or visit the National Center for Healthy Housing's, *Law, Rules and Codes for Healthier Homes: Approaches Impacting Existing Homes* at: <http://www.healthyhomestraining.org/Codes/index.htm#Landlord>
- **Report issues to the landlord:** Tenants should first notify the landowner or property manager and request needed repairs or maintenance in writing, maintaining copies of all requests. Those living in public housing should make requests to their local Housing Authority. It is also advisable to take pictures and gather other documentation of the problem. The legal organizations listed in the fact sheets can assist tenants with this process if needed.
- **Report unaddressed problems to the local code enforcement agency:** Give the property manager or owner adequate time to deal with the issue. If good faith efforts to outreach to those responsible for repairs and maintenance fail, tenants can report the code violations to the appropriate enforcement agency or department for their jurisdiction. Alternatively, tenants can contact an organization that can mediate tenant/landlord disputes as a means of solving the problem before contacting the authorities.

RAMP thanks all the Community Outreach Health Workers and other professionals who kindly contributed their expertise and volunteered their time to this project. RAMP has made all efforts to present accurate and updated information and welcomes ongoing feedback to improve and update these guides.