



## News Release

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### **University Hospitals makes \$1.2 million ‘Community Health Investment’ in Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition**

*In first investment made under new community benefit strategy, UH seeks to help Cleveland’s children grow up in healthy, lead-safe homes*

**CLEVELAND** -- In its first investment as part of its new Community Health Investment Strategy, [University Hospitals](#) is committing a total of \$1.2 million to the [Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition](#), a public-private partnership formed to address and prevent the pernicious issue of lead poisoning.

“We recently launched a new bi-directional, data-driven community investment strategy that allocates UH resources where needs are greatest,” explained Cliff A. Megerian, MD, CEO of University Hospitals. “We are thrilled that our first action in this new mission-related investment strategy is taking a proactive step toward making Cleveland homes safe from lead poisoning. As an anchor institution, one that has been deeply rooted in this community for 155 years, we hold dearly our responsibility to care for our community. Guided by the words of our founders that ‘the most needy are the most worthy,’ our goal is to make more of these type of ‘anchor and social investments’ to catalyze positive change in the region.”

As part of this new strategy, UH will take a portion of assets that would traditionally have been invested in such vehicles as stocks and bonds and make them available for investments into the under-resourced parts of Cleveland.

UH’s investment will go entirely toward the Coalition’s Lead Safe Home Fund. The Lead Safe Home Fund is a first-of-its-kind pool of resources to help families and property owners make their homes lead safe. UH’s investment, along with investments from the public sector, private sector, and philanthropic partners brings the total pool of funds to \$47.3 million over the next 5 years.

\$1 million of the investment will officially cap the Coalition’s initial \$20 million loan fund, which finances low-interest loans to qualifying landlords and homeowners. The remaining \$200,000 will serve as grants to property owners, lead safe worker training and/or community engagement.

According to Aparna Bole, MD, a former Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition Steering Committee member and pediatrician with special interest in environmental health at the UH Rainbow Babies & Children's Ahuja Center for Women & Children in Cleveland's MidTown neighborhood, lead is a major issue in the Cleveland-area. There is no safe level of lead exposure in children, and lead is toxic to the developing brain. It can affect attention, behavior, and learning with lifelong consequences. However, exposure to this health risk is entirely preventable.

“In our practice, we routinely test at-risk children's blood lead levels – and this is important, so we can work on removing sources of ongoing exposure and provide supportive developmental resources to families,” said Dr. Bole. “However, it's frustrating as a clinician to discover an elevated blood lead level on routine testing of a child at a check-up, when that exposure has already occurred, even though we have long known that preventing exposure before it occurs should really be the imperative. Focusing attention and resources on primary prevention of lead exposure is so important for safeguarding the health and well-being of children in our community.”

A Case Western Reserve University study found over 25 percent of Cleveland children tested positive for lead poisoning prior to kindergarten. Cleveland's lead poisoning rates are about four times the national average. The problem is even more severe in specific neighborhoods such as Glenville and Clark-Fulton where a disproportionate number of children of color live, often in substandard housing.

“We know that most lead hazards are coming from lead dust in Cleveland homes,” said Kevin J. Nowak, Executive Director of CHN Housing Partners, administrator of the Lead Safe Home Fund loans and grants for property owners. “The dust can come from paint on windowsills, porches, or walls, as examples. We make funds available for loans to mitigate this dust, through various methods, such as a coat of paint or a technical cleaning.”

More than 90 percent of rental units in the City of Cleveland were built before 1978—the year consumer use of lead-based paint was banned nationally. “Because of this, many residents, especially low-income renters of color, may have trouble finding homes that are safe from lead hazards,” said Nowak. “On behalf of the Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition, we'd like to thank University Hospital for this investment in our homes, and in our children.”

Heidi L. Gartland, Chief Government & Community Relations Officer at UH, said, “We traditionally haven't put funding into housing, but several hospital systems around the nation are beginning to do this because we have found that social and environmental factors play such a large role in one's health.

“Our strategy also calls for additional health and services investments based on community needs assessments. Our investments will align with UH's clinical and community health intervention goals and leverage the power of our health system's more than 30,000 caregivers to make a difference through volunteerism and board service,” Gartland said.

Homeowners located in City of Cleveland and landlords in good standing with the City of Cleveland's rental registration will be eligible for the loans for single family, townhome, duplex,

triplex, fourplex + multifamily properties built before 1978. Loans range from \$1,500 to \$7,500. Other criteria apply. For more information on the City of Cleveland Lead Safe Certification, visit [www.leadSAFEcle.org](http://www.leadSAFEcle.org), or to apply for financial assistance here: <https://chnhousingpartners.org/lead/>.

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#### *About UH*

To read more about University Hospitals' Community Health Investment Strategy and its 2020 Community Benefit, click [here](#).

#### *About Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition*

The Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition is an inclusive, public-private partnership founded to address lead poisoning. This approach protects Cleveland's children by merging smart, adaptable public policies; knowledgeable agencies willing to collaborate; proven community programs and leaders; and public and private sector accountability. With community voice embedded in all aspects, the Coalition is working on: 1) Supporting and measuring the City of Cleveland's Lead Safe Certificate system, 2) Developing a lead safe workforce, 3) Rolling out a public awareness campaign, 4) Advocating for state and federal lead safe policies and resources, 5) Securing investments into the Lead Safe Home Fund, and 6) Launching the Lead Safe Resource Center (administered by Environmental Health Watch) and Home Loans and Grants (Today, the Coalition has over 450 members and six working committees and continues to grow. Website: [www.leadSAFEcle.org](http://www.leadSAFEcle.org) Email: [info@leadSAFEcle.org](mailto:info@leadSAFEcle.org) Social Media: @LeadSafeCLE, #LeadSafeCLE

#### *About CHN Housing Partners*

Founded in 1981, CHN Housing Partners is a large-scale affordable housing developer, and housing service provider and residential lender that works with its partners to solve major housing challenges for low-income people and underserved communities in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York. CHN partners with utility companies, financial institutions and public agencies to manage and deliver large-scale housing resources. CHN also partners with people—low-income individuals, families, seniors, the disabled and the homeless—to improve their housing stability. CHN's impact in Cleveland includes 2,500 new homeowners, the housing stability services it provides annually to nearly 50,000 individuals, and the development of 7,000 new homes. CHN is a chartered member of the NeighborWorks America Network.