



# WE ACT & NYCHA

## CHALLENGES

Decades of federal rollbacks and other declining funding, failed policies, and natural disasters have eroded the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) infrastructure. An affordable housing shortage and dilapidated conditions within the existing system have combined to create New York City's public housing crisis, which disproportionately affects people of color. The more than 560,000 New Yorkers who call NYCHA home must endure living conditions that regularly include pest infestations, water leaks, persistent mold, extreme temperatures, faulty heating and ventilation, noise pollution, broken elevators, and lead exposure. These conditions, in turn, impact residents' physical, mental, and social well-being and obstruct their right to healthy housing.

Studies have demonstrated a clear link between these unsatisfactory living conditions and the negative physical and mental health outcomes that many residents experience. Substandard housing has been linked to infectious disease, injuries, poor nutrition, mental disorders, and chronic illnesses. According to the 2011 Health of Older Adults in New York City Public Housing report, the majority (61 percent) of elderly NYCHA residents report fair or poor health, many (19 percent) have a history of diagnosed depression, and most (80 percent) have been diagnosed with two or more chronic diseases (i.e., diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, arthritis, or osteoporosis). The current state of NYCHA robs residents from the opportunity to live, work, play, learn, and worship in a safe and healthy environment. And these impacts are compounded by the systemic racism, economic challenges, and other social disadvantages that most NYCHA residents face.

The NYCHA crisis impacts all New Yorkers, not just the 1 in 15 served by the authority. As we learned during COVID-19, our economy is dependent on the health and well-being of the countless low-wage workers who keep the city running. And many of these workers – the bulk of those deemed essential workers – reside in NYCHA housing.

According to the Regional Plan Association's 2018 report, "[NYCHA Crisis: A Matter for All New Yorkers](#)," "NYCHA Developments provide more than just housing. They're an integral part of many of our neighborhoods, providing space and services for children, senior citizens, and other neighborhood residents. Without NYCHA we would lose more than just housing, we would lose many of the things we need to make our neighborhoods work."

As a community organization, WE ACT works with many NYCHA residents and recognizes the need to ensure that NYCHA puts an end to years of neglect and finally takes immediate steps to improve all developments and provide residents with sustainable, healthy and safe homes.



## **SOLUTIONS**

After the release of the NYCHA Sustainability Agenda in 2016, WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) began working to address the substandard housing conditions faced by NYCHA residents and the negative impacts these conditions have on their health and well-being. Some of the projects we've pursued include:

### **NYCHA Villages: Dyckman Houses**

Between 2017 and 2019, WE ACT worked with residents of Dyckman Houses, a NYCHA development in Inwood, to better understand how NYCHA's policies and practices impact their health and well-being. In doing so, we created [a community-driven plan](#) of what a sustainable and healthy future would look like for their development. This document was designed to be used as an advocacy tool for residents of Dyckman Houses and other NYCHA developments across the city to effectively advocate for improvements to current living conditions. The community-driven plan focuses on environmental, social, and economic aspects that can be improved upon by NYCHA. It was developed with as much resident involvement as possible, utilizing a community survey and seven community meetings to determine residents' priorities.

### **Healthy Homes Working Group**

In August 2018, WE ACT launched its Healthy Homes Working Group (HHWG), comprised of WE ACT members living in NYCHA. This group meets monthly and works collaboratively towards improving indoor environmental health conditions in our community through organizing, education, and advocacy. Lead by NYCHA residents and facilitated by WE ACT staff, the HHWG is a new space for members to come together and identify shared environmental health hazards in their homes, develop bottom-up solutions to address these systemic problems, and build solidarity across developments. Some actions members of the HHWG have taken include:

- Submitting public testimony as residents of NYCHA to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.
- Meeting with New York State elected officials to demand the release of funding allocated for NYCHA in the State's budget.

### **NYCHA Land and Healthy Homes Coalition**

WE ACT has spearheaded work with the NYCHA Land and Healthy Homes Coalition. Formed in 2018 as a response to NYCHA public health and land crisis, community-based organizations working in public housing came together to take action. Members of the coalition include: Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), St. Nicks Alliance, Families United For Racial and Economic Equity (FUREE), Community Development Project (CDP), and WE ACT for Environmental Justice. The coalition meets regularly to exchange knowledge and support each other's efforts.

### **NYCHA Healthy Homes Campaign**

Beginning in 2020, WE ACT started organizing NYCHA residents in preparation for the 2021 New York City Council and Mayoral races. Our goal is to mobilize and engage residents, raise awareness of the health inequities they face, and develop leaders who can advocate on behalf of the NYCHA community to ensure that protecting public housing and improving their living conditions is a top priority for the 2021 candidates.



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