

Research Protocol for Healthy Housing Laws in King County, Washington

- I. **Goal:** To compile and review both 1) local city municipal jurisdiction housing codes and King County code addressing how they address maintenance/upkeep of existing buildings, and 2) other city and county municipal codes related to smoke/ tobacco-free housing provisions, to understand the scope and contents of these laws as they relate to protecting the health of occupants, and/or identify gaps and limitations in the laws.
- II. **Primary Data Collection**
 - a. **Project dates:** Data was collected in September 2014, and again in August 2015.
 - b. **Project team:** Because the project focused on two types of policies that contribute to healthy housing, two project teams performed the work. The municipal property maintenance codes' project involved three researchers: Two preliminary researchers who collected codes and developed a draft of the codebook in 2014, and a third researcher who collected codes and finalized the draft codebook for property maintenance-related questions in 2015. The tobacco-related portion of the project was started by a preliminary researcher in 2014, who collected codes and developed a draft codebook in 2014, and a second researcher who finalized the codebook in 2015. Though not initially expected, the two projects were joined together into one project for purposes of releasing the dataset and report after the initial 2014 work. Both teams also involved multi-disciplinary advisory groups with expertise in environmental health, tobacco, and legal epidemiology/policy surveillance. These included two of the internal staff researchers.
 - c. **Jurisdictions included in the dataset:** A list of local city jurisdictions in King County (n = 39 cities, 1 county) (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/codes/cities.aspx>) and their respective websites was compile using King County cities and towns websites, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/codes/cities.aspx>, plus the unincorporated areas under King County (n = 1).
 - d. **Databases used:** Searches for local municipal codes was conducted using the online Municipal Research Services (MRSC) database (a publicly available service for local governments that compiles online local statutes of participating jurisdictions) [<http://www.mrsc.org/codes.aspx>]
 - e. **Search Terms:** Code Enforcement, Code Compliance, International Property Maintenance Code, IPMC, Uniform Building Code, International Residential Code, Maintenance, Upkeep, Habitable, Minimum Standards, Nuisance, Existing Housing Stock, Tobacco+Housing, Smoke+Housing, Tobacco-free+Housing, Smoke free+Housing, Tobacco, Smoke, Smoking.
 - f. **Primary Quality Control:**
 - i. For cities with no result in the Municipal Research Services database, a second search was conducted by searching on the city specific website, accessible through <http://www.mrsc.org/codes.aspx#city>. Search used the same syntax and search terms as stated above.
 - ii. For local city jurisdictions with no result from their respective website, or if this result was unclear, a phone call was placed to the city clerk, inquiring about how to access what model housing code is currently being used for the maintenance of existing buildings (i.e. minimum standards to enforce habitability of housing) (no similar phone call was made to clarify tobacco-free housing provisions .

Ongoing research and program activity has confirmed non-existence of tobacco-free housing provisions.)

- a) Means of electronic access to the document is determined, so that the most recent model code being used (with date stamp, and e-signature) was collected
- b) If the document was not available online, city clerks were asked to email a PDF version
- c) If no written version was available, but a model housing code existed, the name of the model code being used and relevant information on this was transcribed based on conversations with city clerks.
 - This process was logged, including website and/or contact information for city clerks who provided this information.
 - The following questions were used to guide/access model code for housing code enforcing maintenance of existing buildings and to guide development of the policy surveillance codebook:
 - 1) Does your jurisdiction have any standards that are applied (enforced) to ensure the maintenance of existing housing? (i.e. Housing code for properties to remain in habitable conditions)?
 - 2) If yes, → where might I find these? (Confirm what model code is used: IPMC and year? Uniform Building Code? Own code? Alternatively, confirm they don't have it)
 - 3) Based on your experience, would you say there any gaps/limitations to the work you do? Are there any issues that you wished these standards addressed?

Another way of asking the above questions: 1) What are the minimum standards for housing to be habitable and 2) where are these housing codes found in your municipal code? 3) What specifics does the code outline? (i.e. space requirements, requirements for lights and ventilation, requirements for sanitation, structural requirements (weatherproof, watertight, rodent free), minimum mechanical standards for heating, ventilation equipment and electrical equipment and minimum fire and safety standards)

If no → How does your jurisdiction handle housing that fails the requirements of the municipal code? Or nuances, for example, rodent complaints? Would you say there is a need for these standards in your jurisdiction?

- f. **Secondary Quality Control:** Public Health – Seattle & King County Environmental Health Services Division and Tobacco Prevention Program staff were asked for feedback based on their knowledge of the policy landscape to ensure that all codes had been collected during the search/collection process
- g. **Documentation:** Progress was logged in the policy project file for healthy housing, in King County's dedicated Policy Surveillance SharePoint site.
 - a. Any housing codes related to maintenance of existing buildings was saved as a direct link to the code section and extract the name of model code being used (i.e. IPMC, or noted as own or other). Policy is saved as PDF with file naming convention as: Jurisdiction_Code_HealthyHousing_MMDDYY
 - b. Any tobacco-related codes would be saved as a direct link to the code section, utilizing the standard naming convention and saved as a PDF, however no tobacco-related codes were found.

III. Coding

- a. **Codebook Development – Property-Maintenance Related Codes:**

- Researchers # 1 and # 2 reviewed collected codes in 2014 and created a list of potential codebook questions. Researchers # 1 and #2 met with the larger research team of subject matter and technical experts, including Researcher # 6, to vet and refine these questions.
 - Researcher #3 reviewed newly collected codes in 2015 and further refined the list of questions, and continued to vet and refine these questions with the larger research team.
 - Researcher #3 created an Excel spreadsheet that included all coding questions developed by the research team. A coder notes section was created to include “PARENT,” “CHILD” or “GRANDCHILD” and Question Number to denote skip logic. {e.g. Codebook: Question #1, PARENT;} Coder notes were included as necessary to provide additional clarification and guidance on a specific question, with a reminder to include citations. These notes were used extensively to direct coding.
- b. **Codebook Development – Tobacco-Free Housing Related Codes:**
- Researcher # 4 collected codes in 2014 and created a list of potential codebook questions. Researchers #4 met several times with the larger research team of subject matter and technical experts to vet and refine these questions.
 - Researcher #5 in 2015 continued to vet and refine the list of potential codebook questions. Because there were no local laws found in King County related to smoke-free housing, the codebook was refined utilizing California city ordinances to establish a baseline for future policy surveillance coding if local legislation is passed addressing this topic.
 - Researcher # 5 and # 7 test-coded 6 CA jurisdictions to determine efficacy of the codebook questions. (Note: these are not part of the WA policy surveillance exercise.)
 - Researcher #5 and Researcher #7 revised the Tobacco-Free Housing related questions for an overall codebook. Because there were no local codes found with tobacco / smoke-free housing provisions, only the yes/no dichotomous existence/non-existence question is included in the Healthy Housing codebook. The tobacco-free / smoke-free housing codebook will be retained for use if jurisdictions pass smoke free/tobacco-free housing code provisions in the future.
- c. **Coding Method – Property Maintenance-Related Codes & Tobacco-Free Housing Codes:**
- i. Researcher #3 (primary coder) coded all jurisdictions. Researcher #6 (secondary coder) coded property maintenance-related codes for all jurisdictions.
 - ii. No codes were found for smoke-free housing.
 - iii. Inter-Rater Reliability Review: Researchers # 3 and #6 met together and compared coding scores for all jurisdictions. Each discrepancy in coding was discussed, and resolved, until all coding showed 100% agreement.
 - iv. Questions and final validated coder response was then entered into King County LawAtlas Policy Tracker online database, in a separate record for each municipal jurisdiction.

IV. Dissemination

The interactive online PolicyTracker LawAtlas database dataset for healthy housing is published online at www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices.health/data. The online portal links to the research protocol, a downloadable version of the codebook, additional information called Essential Information that includes directions for how to query the dataset, and a downloadable version of the coded policy data which may be paired with other relevant data for research and other purposes. Other related reports and information are also provided.

V. Limitations

This study describes existence, absence, and contents of local municipal laws related to housing and health, specifically local property-maintenance codes and code provisions related to smoke-free housing. We did not review landlord-tenant codes for other types of tenant protections, nor does the study address implementation of the codes. We also did not review director’s rules or other administrative requirements that may exist in cities aside from the local municipal code provisions. Legal caselaw was also outside of the scope of this review (for instance, common law nuisance cases or criminal negligence cases). Further study is needed to understand local city and county capacity to implement codes (including budget and staffing), the experience of jurisdictions with proactive rental inspection programs, and to assess whether particular stronger code provisions correlate with stronger human health outcomes in those geographic areas.

Notes

Researcher # 1 – Sigolene Ortega

Researcher #2 – Ross Howell

Researcher #3 – Joseph Hayes

Researcher #4 – Nick Fradkin

Researcher # 5 – Lindsey Greto

Researcher # 6 – Nicole Thomsen

Researcher #7 – Laura Hitchcock