

## ECHO Series: Local Strategies for Responding to Hoarding Condition, 2023

Below are some key questions asked in CHAT during the ECHO Series, with responses from ECHO participants and/or panelists. *Note the responses are not necessarily definitive, but based on the experience and knowledge of the various respondents.*

- 1) When considering whether there are “public health hazards” does the fire department or EMS staff count as the “public”.

Response: Some towns have made this argument that the conditions inside a home were a public health hazard because of the risk they were posing to first responding staff (such as firefighters or EMS representatives). Using this argument, some towns have chosen to evoke RSA 147 to require an individual or homeowner to clean up or remediate certain conditions in the home. It is encouraged that local municipalities consult with their legal representative before taking any enforcement action based on this argument.

- 2) Would someone that collects substantial items (clothes, household items, food, etc.) be considered a hoarder even if they do give a small amount of those items away? The person still does continue to replace those items given away with new items though.

Response: People with Hoarding Disorder may definitely get rid of items or give away items at times but still be considered to have Hoarding Disorder if they generally meet the diagnostic criteria. Indeed, some people with Hoarding Disorder save or acquire items with the expressed intent to give away those items to others because they perceive the items to have value regardless of whether other people wish to receive them. People can make significant progress in clearing possessions while still being considered to have Hoarding Disorder. Many people will refer to themselves as being ‘in recovery’ and just as depression can occur again for someone, Hoarding Disorder can persist. As with all psychiatric disorders, there is a requirement that the person’s symptoms result in substantial impairment or distress.

- 3) Does autism commonly co-occur with hoarding disorder?

Response: Autism does not commonly co-occur with hoarding disorder per se, but rather, individuals diagnosed with autism may sometimes have an excess of possessions or clutter. This is distinct from Hoarding Disorder and would have a different approach accordingly. People with autism may also appear perseverative over specific things and interests which could result in excess acquisition, but again, the understanding of the problem is different, as is the individual's response, so the approach would be different. One study (Storch et al., 2016) found that hoarding behaviors (though not Hoarding Disorder, to be clear) were observed in approximately 25% of children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. Another study (Pertusa et al., 2012) found that although individuals with Hoarding Disorder showed more autism “traits” than the general population, they did not show more of these traits than people with other psychiatric disorders. A conclusion that can be drawn is that, when autism co-occurs with Hoarding Disorder or simply hoarding behavior, the hoarding behavior may be more difficult to effectively manage.

- 4) What are the safe guards or procedures in place or the lack of that protects an individual from being susceptible to eviction and housing instability as a result of reporting to a municipality, APS, etc...

Response: Choosing to issue an order to vacate or remove a person from their home is often a worst case or last option. If there is an imminent health hazard in the home that is putting the resident and or surrounding community members in immediate danger, it may be the best interest of the resident to be moved to a safe location to continue receiving the necessary supportive services. In most situations, the goal is to address the person's mental health condition or connect them to the appropriate supportive services in their current location.

- 5) What is the correct procedure to report suspected animal abuse or neglect cases?

Response: In many towns there is a local official who responds to animal control issues. It is first recommended to identify if the town has such a resource (it is often times a member of the police department). Alternatively, the [NH Society for the Protection of Animals](#) receives animal abuse concerns and will conduct follow up inspections.

- 6) Do municipalities have a responsibility to house someone as a result of a removal from their housing?

Response: There is no statutory responsibility for municipalities to provide housing or financial support that we are aware of.

- 7) How can you determine that the hoarding conditions of one location is the cause of a public nuisance such as rodents?

Response: When making the argument that a hoarding or unsanitary living condition is presenting "public health hazards", it is important to have evidence to support the claim. If you are making the argument that the rodent issue the neighbors are complaining of is a result of this person's environment, document conditions that may be encouraging rodent proliferation. Does the person living in the unsanitary condition have excess accumulation of rodent attractants (food material, bedding material, standing water). Can you identify excessive rodent droppings on that person's lawn or rodent burrows? Is there a reasonable assumption that these conditions are creating conditions rodents are attracted to when compared to other adjacent property. You probably will not be able to completely prove that this location is in fact causing the public health nuisance, but rather your goal is to accumulate enough evidence and documentation leading you to the reasonable belief that this location is in fact causing the issue.

For further information regarding management of hoarding and squalor in your town, please contact Sophia Johnson, MPH. NH DHHS, Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Public Health Protection 603-271-3468, [Sophia.I.Johnson@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:Sophia.I.Johnson@dhhs.nh.gov)

