

# Improving Energy Efficiency to Improve Public Health

## High Energy Burden Leads to Poorer Health Mapping Weatherization Need

In Washington State, over 700,000 households are at or below the 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This means many households have difficulties paying their energy bills. These households spend a disproportionate amount on heating their homes compared to those who do not live in poverty. They may also have to choose between paying for energy or medicines, healthcare, or healthy food. These financial tradeoffs can lead to poorer health outcomes. Residents in poverty and with draughty homes are also more affected by extreme weather events, as paying to heat or cool their homes to a safe temperature may be financially out of reach.

The Department of Commerce's Weatherization program awards money to households in poverty to make their homes more energy efficient. The program also provides services such as lead remediation.

## Mapping Weatherization Need

The Washington Tracking Network (WTN) created the [Lead Exposure Risk Map](#) on its interactive Information by Location mapping tool. The map uses poverty and lead risk from housing as indicators. (Lead risk from housing is based on the age of housing stock, which is a marker of risk for presence of lead paint because paint typically contained high levels of lead before 1980. In the early 1970s, the paint industry issued voluntary standards limiting lead content in paint. In 1978, lead was banned from use in the manufacture of residential paint.)

These indicators are particularly relevant for the Weatherization program. Older homes tend to have both more lead risk and are less energy efficient. Residents in poverty are less likely to be able to pay their energy bills and may have more health impacts from high energy expenses.

## Targeting Weatherization Benefits to Areas with Highest Needs

The Weatherization program uses the Lead Exposure Risk map to help target its resources to households that need them the most. In a typical year, the Weatherization program helps approximately 3500 households with energy efficient upgrades and services to make their homes healthier.



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