

Overcoming Health and Safety Barriers to Weatherize Income-Eligible Homes

Summary for Toolkit 4/22/22

Health and Safety Barriers Are Preventing Weatherization Work

Weatherization makes homes more energy efficient, saving households energy and money and improving occupant comfort. Yet, programs and contractors commonly find health, safety, structural, and other barriers that preclude moving forward with weatherization work. These barriers to weatherization work are increasingly being recognized as significant hurdles in addressing homes' weatherization needs.

Weatherization involves upgrading the energy performance of homes through measures such as air sealing, insulation, window treatments or replacement, duct sealing, and tuning and repairing HVAC and water heating systems. When health, safety, or structural concerns prevent these upgrades from happening, weatherization work must be deferred. For example, heating system upgrades must be put on hold if energy auditors identify potential asbestos-like material on duct work that would be disturbed by the energy improvements. Or empty walls with knob-and-tube wiring cannot be insulated due to potential fire hazards until wiring is replaced.

Common Health and Safety Barriers to Weatherization:

Asbestos and asbestos-like materials (including vermiculite), electrical issues (knob and tube wiring), failed combustion safety testing, gas leaks, moisture, mold, structural issues (roof repairs or replacement), and ventilation issues.

Barriers Result in Inequity

While health and safety barriers to weatherization are a problem across all household income levels, income-eligible homes are disproportionately impacted. For example, 15% of market rate homes in Connecticut were flagged as having health and safety deferral issues in 2019, while the income-eligible program documented a 21% deferral rate in that same year and a 30% average deferral rate 2014-2019.¹ Income-eligible households often face a high energy burden, meaning that a greater proportion of their income goes toward paying energy bills.

¹ Eversource, 2020. Eversource Barrier Report. PowerPoint presentation.

Households that could therefore benefit most from weatherization services are deferred more often.

Income-eligible homes are disproportionately impacted.

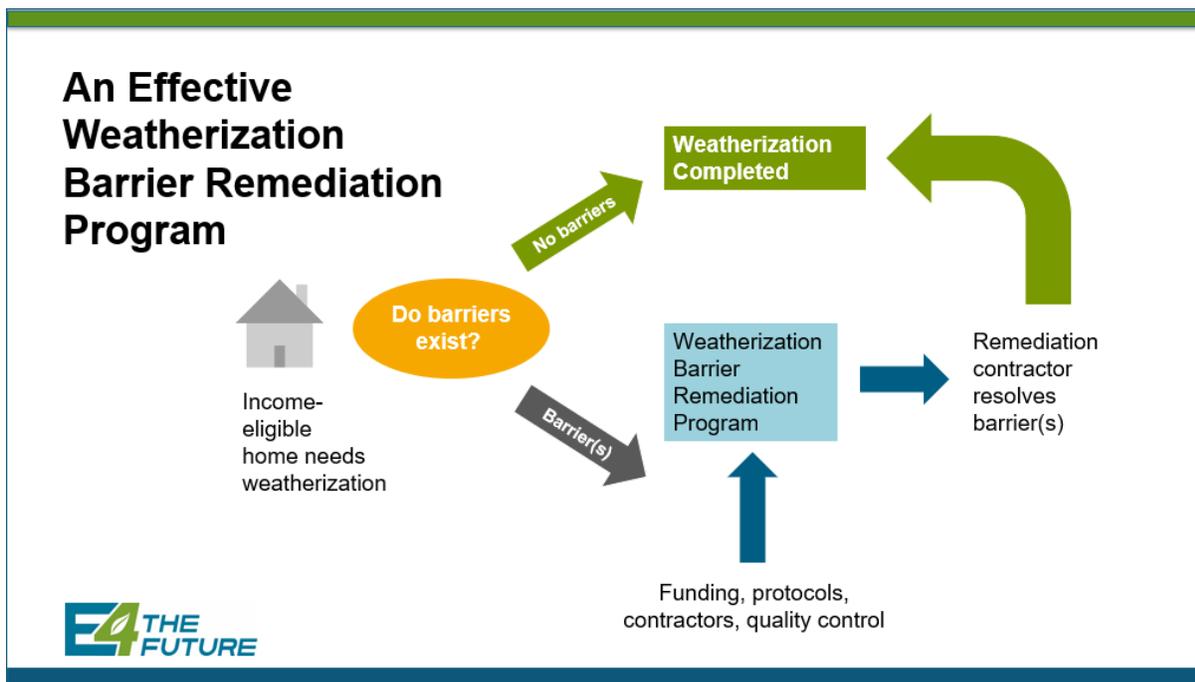
Deferral rates in income-eligible homes can be high. In Connecticut, 30% of income-eligible homes were deferred between 2014-2019. And in Washington state, between 40% and 50% of income-eligible homes were deferred in 2018.

Sources: Eversource, 2020. *Eversource Barrier Report*. Washington State Energy Program: *Memorandum Re: Rural Housing Rehabilitation Program*, March 9, 2018; "From Income Eligible to Achievable Low-Income Weatherization in Washington State: Challenges and Opportunities" Schueler V Washington State University March 2021.

It's Possible to Design and Fund a Program to Address Barriers

While the issue of health and safety barriers to weatherizing income-eligible homes is increasingly being recognized, there is often no process or dedicated funding source to enable a program, organization, or household to complete the necessary repairs at no or little cost to the household. With no funding or assistance available, these households face major impediments to weatherization work.

There are programs addressing barriers working in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Washington, Vermont, and other states to varying degrees. The diagram below lays out how an ideal program would function.



Funding can come from various sources. See below for potential funding sources for a weatherization barriers program.

Potential Funding Sources	
Federal <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)• Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)• American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)	State, Utility, Other <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State appropriation• State fee on all fuels• Philanthropic funds• Regional Energy Funding (RGGI, FCM)• Utility programs

Source: [Weatherization Barriers Toolkit: How to Address Health and Safety Barriers with an Income-Eligible Focus](#)

A New Connecticut Weatherization Barrier Remediation Program

Many Connecticut residents have encountered health and safety barriers to home weatherization, preventing them from accessing weatherization services in their state’s Home Energy Solutions (HES) and Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible (HES-IE) programs. In 2021, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) released an RFP for a Program Operator of a new Weatherization Barrier Remediation Program. This \$12.6 million program was designed to operate from mid-2022 to December 31, 2024. It is funded through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and supplemental funding from the U.S. Department of Energy’s State Energy Program (SEP). The program will aim to complete over 700 homes over three years.

The purpose of the program is to address health and safety issues that impede the completion of residential weatherization and energy efficiency measures.² The program will remediate barriers in homes that qualify for LIHEAP assistance, and the homes will subsequently be weatherized by the HES-IE Program or the federal Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).

The Weatherization Barrier Remediation Program will oversee “(1) establishing the eligibility of customers requesting services from the Program, (2) connecting customers with the appropriate resources to complete the barrier remediation work, (3) inspecting completed barrier remediation work, and (4) confirming that weatherization measures are completed once the barriers are remediated through the HES-IE or WAP”.³ Projects supported by LIHEAP and ARPA funds have a maximum job cap of \$30,000, and an anticipated average of \$15,000 per job. For jobs only utilizing LIHEAP funds, the cap is \$15,000.

² State of Connecticut, 2021. *Request for Proposals (RFP) For Statewide Weatherization Barrier Remediation Program Operator*. Issued by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Business-and-Financial-Assistance/Grants-Financial-Assistance/Statewide-Weatherization-Barrier-Remediation-Program-Operator>.

³ State of Connecticut, 2021.

Lessons Learned from Connecticut Process

- 1. Use data on deferrals to make a strong case to fund barrier remediation to ensure equitable access to low-income weatherization programs.**
- 2. Explore existing, new, or innovative funding sources.** LIHEAP, for example, is an established funding source which allows states to allocate funds to address repairs enabling energy-related work for households qualifying for fuel assistance. ARPA was a broad source of funding available in 2021, from which Connecticut allocated funds for its deferral program.
- 3. Build broad support by engaging stakeholders.** Stakeholders may include contractors, programs, and advocates for energy, housing, and social justice who can help build the argument for a program and funding. These organizations can ensure that the data and processes are transparent and drive equitable solutions.
- 4. Enlist the support of key decision makers within state government and the utilities; they are essential to establishing the program.** State decisionmakers may include the Governor, agencies overseeing energy efficiency, housing, or social services overseeing fuel assistance as well as legislative committees and champions.
- 5. Build upon existing structures and funding mechanisms.** Federal funds most easily flow through existing channels (e.g., LIHEAP state plans, utility low-income programs, Weatherization Assistance Program and state agencies managing WAP).
- 6. Ensure solutions address the interests of key state and utility staff.** Provide these staff the information and tools to help solve problems on their radar screens and that advance their interests. Be upfront and clear that deferral solutions advance equity within the energy programs and services.
- 7. Reframe what is possible, even if it is a new approach.** Make the case that investment in addressing deferrals- thereby getting more energy jobs done- will over time reduce demand for LIHEAP as households have lower energy usage, ultimately freeing up funds for more clients to use the LIHEAP funds in the future.

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