
Bridging Climate Change and Public Health
Energy Insecurity Workgroup Meeting
Meeting Notes – | September 30th | 2:00PM -3:30PM

Purpose of Meeting:

1. Discuss the connection between energy insecurity and public health, climate change, and vulnerable populations through the lens of health equity.
 2. Discuss the need for community and stakeholder engagement: establish the energy insecurity workgroup
 3. Facilitate communication and collaboration across different community sectors
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Introduction to Project – Dr. Vjollca Berisha, Senior Epidemiologist, Maricopa County Department of Public Health, Office of Epidemiology, Climate and Health Program

Icebreaker– Diana Hernández, PhD, assistant professor of sociomedical sciences at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

Overview of project– Lauren Ross, PhD, senior policy director, American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

Breakout 1 and report back

- *Discussion question:* What do you see as the greatest needs of the community that relate to energy insecurity? What data tools exist to help you understand the issue(s) in your community?
- **Lauren's Breakout Room Takeaways:**
 - Strong consensus on shared understanding of cumulative impact of poverty, housing, and heat on energy insecurity
 - The most vulnerable population mentioned was those living in mobile homes, those who face social isolation, those experiencing job loss, immigrants,
 - Great understanding of the impacts of energy insecurity on vulnerable communities

- **Diana's Breakout Room Takeaways:**
 - Acknowledgement that energy is human right
 - Understanding that energy insecurity is rooted in multiple inequalities
 - Part of the challenge is that energy insecurity is a hidden hardship, all while being a competing hardship
 - Current programs have bureaucratic issues and other barriers that impeded customers from participating in programs design to offer assistance
 - Currently LIHEAP formula presents limitation and is not set up for cooling assistance and is set up mostly for regions that experience cold temperatures.

- **Vjollca's Breakout Room Takeaways:**
 - Affordability / cost of electricity; people stuck choosing between rent, paying utilities, etc. Weatherization, Cost of repairs;
 - Compounding factors: inefficient A/C and homes that are not energy efficient; some people can afford A/C and utilities some of the time, some can afford all of the time, and some can afford none of the time; unemployment; eviction and utility amends's expiring; homes that need weatherization
 - Energy insecurity can affect health, employment, nutrition, money available to spend on medications and other needs
 - Fixing energy insecurity can fix health outcomes such as asthma, thereby no longer needing to pay costs related to these health outcomes
 - *Develop/look into way to track and reach people right before they get disconnected*
 - Flexes in income due to COVID – people new to using assistance services may need help navigating these services. Additionally, do these services provide adequate help?
 - Cost of heat on society: (Ambulance rides, Hospital visits, Time, Impact on kid's education)
 - *These services may not be the answer, need sustainable solution instead of "band aid" approach*
 - Need to make it easier to apply and decrease the amount and intensity of the hoops people must go through
 - Strong consensus among group about how poverty, housing, and extreme heat are tied together
 - *Need to streamline utility assistance applications*

Energy Insecurity Working Group goals and objectives – Vjollca Berisha

Breakout 2 and report back

- *Discussion question:* How can a project like this support your needs and efforts to address energy insecurity in the community?

Health & Energy Equity

- Addressing energy insecurity will be helpful to reduce health problems. Is interested in exploring solutions to reduce the compounded burdens (energy & health) that vulnerable population in AZ experience

Distribution of Cooling Systems

- Current solutions are region-focused and has not be effective so far. Interested in exploring short-term solutions, such as providing access to cooling versus the grand scheme.
- Making homes more efficient and focus on the build environment (green belts, tree canopy)

Increasing participation among Vulnerable Communities

- Creating a tool index to target communities
- Identify strategies to target and engage communities
- Community-based participatory approach
- Acknowledge the resiliency of these populations that are overburdened by social and economic inequities and view them as partners in surfacing solutions that can be developed to positively impact their health and well-being. Drop the use of the term "vulnerable."

Program Design and Implementation

- Create wrap around program if you qualify for financial support, you automatically qualify for utility assistance. Part of the issue is that heat is not recognized as threat in federal legislation therefore there are no funding streams
- Target benefits to assist the most vulnerable people in our communities
- Protective factors too that we can possibly strengthen and build on

Wrap up and next steps – Diana Hernández

Participation Recap:

Total Attendance: 40 participants

- Academia: 4
- City Government: 4
- CBOs: 2
- County Government Agency: 5
- Foundation: 2
- Health Care: 4
- Non-Profit: 4
- State Government: 3
- Utility Provider: 7
- Unknown: 4