

Understanding the Potential of Weatherization Programs for Low Income Households from 150% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

Lark Lee, PA Consulting Group, Grantham, NH
Pam Rathbun, PA Consulting Group, Middleton, WI
Laura Schauer, PA Consulting Group, Middleton, WI

Less than a quarter of states offer weatherization or energy-related low-income programs to households who fall between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Many authors have hypothesized that households that are not income eligible for low-income programs still have difficulty sustaining energy payments. This poster presents customer survey results that indicate the often underserved income group of 150% to 200% FPL are experiencing hardships to a similar degree as those below 150% FPL. The poster also demonstrates the potential of weatherization programs to deliver significant energy and non-energy benefits to these households.

The State of Wisconsin is offering weatherization services through their Public Benefits Program, Focus on Energy, to households from 150% to 200% FPL¹. This new program, Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star (Targeted HPWES), is being administered by Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corp. In the first year of the three-year evaluation, we conducted 250 baseline telephone surveys with households from 150% to 200% FPL. These households had earlier applied for weatherization and energy assistance services, but had been denied due to income eligibility criteria. Because they fell into the 150% to 200% FPL, they were identified as being eligible for Targeted HPWES. Since these households had not yet received weatherization services through Targeted HPWES at the time of the survey, the evaluation was able to establish a pre-program baseline of eligible households' quality of life and their perceptions of their home's comfort, safety and energy efficiency.

In the Spring of 2002, the evaluation also conducted 997 telephone interviews with participants in the State's low-income Energy Assistance and Weatherization Assistance programs. This allowed for a comparison of the situation of households below 150% FPL participating in the state energy low-income programs and those just over the income criteria that are not eligible for the low-income programs. The comparison found that households from 150% to 200% FPL face many of the same affordability and home comfort, home safety, and energy efficiency barriers as households below 150% FPL. The baseline study with households from 150% to 200% FPL concluded that Targeted HPWES has a significant opportunity to deliver more than energy savings to participants. Survey findings suggest the program could increase households' ability to meet their energy bills, and increase households' quality of life through decreased mobility, increased comfort and safety, and increased ability to meet non-energy bills. This poster presents results of how the program can deliver energy and non-energy benefits to this income group.

¹ Wisconsin statute s.16.385 limits eligibility for their state low-income program to households at or below 150 percent of federal poverty level. Certain other households may be considered eligible for the state low-income programs by federal law and by Wisconsin statute s.16.385. These categorically eligible households amount to less than one percent of all households' eligibility determinations in Wisconsin.

