

# INVEST IN HEALTHY HOMES, FAMILY WAGE JOBS, & CLIMATE ACTION

## WA Needs Weatherization Plus Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgent need for people to be safe and healthy in our homes. On top of this, the climate is changing rapidly. We need to do more to protect people from extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and storm events — while reducing emissions through energy conservation. Families with lower incomes, overburdened communities, and many Black people, Indigenous people and people of color face the greatest economic and health risks from the pandemic and climate change, including unhealthy housing — and have fewer resources to make necessary home repairs and recover from disasters.

### What is Weatherization Plus Health?

Over 400,000 Washington households living in poverty need weatherization services. Washingtonians with lower incomes often live in homes with high energy bills and frequently cannot afford to address problems like moisture, mold, and dust mites that cause or aggravate respiratory illnesses like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. These diseases cost lives and livelihoods every year in Washington, leading to tens of thousands of hospital visits.

Weatherization Plus Health was established by the WA State legislature in 2015. Since then, the state has invested more than \$63 million dollars to keep children and adults healthy in their homes. By combining improvements to conserve energy — such as installing insulation — with health measures — such as replacing old carpet with clean flooring and improving ventilation — the legislature has made a win-win investment. Every dollar spent on weatherization directly improves families' access to affordable housing and health improvements, creates jobs, and tackles the climate crisis.

### Why Act Now?

Washington has made significant investments to develop the Weatherization Plus Health program, but these investments are endangered by the failure to fully fund the program in the 2021-2023 capital budget. If core funding levels are not restored, the state will lose investments already made and crucial services that take years to ramp up will be discontinued.

Absent state funds, only 5-10% of Washington's income-qualified households will qualify for the federal funding they need.<sup>1</sup> This is because state funds enable the minor repairs necessary for tens of thousands of low-income households to qualify for federal weatherization dollars, like patching a roof leak before installing insulation and new windows. State funds are the only resource for healthy home measures and the only funding available to many working families. At the same time, state dollars are needed to unlock the historic opportunities offered by new federal funding sources.

**Shift Zero supports protecting the state's assets and restoring \$10 million base funding in the Capital Budget. We also urge legislators to take full advantage of federal ARPA funds and make a one-time investment of \$37 million to scale up this proven program. We have a historic opportunity to deliver on affordable, healthy housing, family-wage green jobs, and climate action — but only if we act now.**



*Weatherization of a home in Bellingham*

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**Weatherization maintains affordable housing.** Weatherization Plus Health protects against displacement by reducing repair and energy costs that can create financial instability and housing insecurity. Maintaining existing houses is critical to having sufficient housing for all Washingtonians and is far less expensive than letting good houses rot while trying to build even more new ones. Weatherization Plus Health delivers essential structural repairs, energy efficiency upgrades, and health and safety improvements to families who need them. The program helps preserve affordable housing and prevent homelessness in every county in Washington and in seven Tribal Nations.

## FAMILY-WAGE CAREERS

**Weatherization supports workforce development.** The Weatherization Plus Health Program is administered by the Department of Commerce and implemented by a network of 27 community action agencies and city, county, and Tribal housing authorities. Improvements are installed by agency-based crews and more than 140 local contractors. Restoring funding will provide much-needed consistency to keep Washingtonians working and create more than 170 jobs.<sup>2</sup> Increased funding is also essential to expand workforce training and contractor development programs in the weatherization, HVAC, electrical, and plumbing trades. We can only fully realize the potential of the program by growing our base of well-trained and diverse trades workers in every county of the state.

## CLIMATE ACTION

**Weatherization is a sound and cost-effective investment in our state's clean energy future.** Washington's 2021 State Energy Strategy identifies the need to "increase funding for low-income weatherization to address a minimum 10% of eligible households annually"<sup>3</sup> as a must-do step to meet the challenges of climate change. We are currently reaching fewer than 1%. Weatherization Plus Health lowers emissions by reducing energy use and supporting fuel switching from unhealthy and inefficient fuel sources like oil and propane. We must ensure that all residents are included as our state transitions to a clean energy economy.

## FATIMA'S STORY



Fatima has lived in Grays Harbor County for over 15 years with her husband and five children. Her family has rented their house for the past five years, but with many repairs needed, it has not been a healthy home.

The window frames are rotten and need to be replaced. Large parts of the kitchen, bathroom, windows and her son's room are covered with mold due to water leaking from the roof through the ceiling and due to inadequate insulation and lack of ventilation fans. The baseboard heaters got wet from water seeping in from the windows, and so the family is forced to use oil heating. In the winter months, their monthly utility bills are \$500-\$600, far beyond what they can afford to pay. "One of the things that worries me the most is that water that leaks through the ceiling of my son's room. I am afraid that the ceiling will fall on my son," says Fatima.

Fatima says, "I would like to have a healthy home for my family without worrying about the roof leaking or mold. That is why we ask for a Weatherization Plus Health program to solve these problems. Like all human beings, we have the right to a decent life with clean and accessible housing."

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Homebuilders

<sup>3</sup> WA State Energy Strategy