

Experiences with energy efficiency among New Haven, CT tenants

Energy Efficiency programs for low-income Connecticut residents include the federally funded Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and EnergizeCT's Home Energy Solutions-Income Eligible (HES-IE) program, funded by utility ratepayers. As part of the TEA project, we learned from tenants about some limitations of these programs. Some were unaware of the programs. Those who knew about them had encountered difficulties in completing the application or participating in the programs for various reasons, including poor follow-up, scheduling difficulties, and health and safety barriers. Some tenants didn't bother to apply because they believed their landlord would not sign off or be willing to pay their share of the cost of upgrades.

Most tenants know about energy efficiency programs...

Approximately half of the tenants we spoke to are aware of what energy efficiency is and the existing energy efficiency programs; some had energy efficiency upgrades installed since living in their homes.

“I know about energy efficiency because I've done it before like years ago in the past... you'll have someone come in and you know like, basically weatherize your windows and your cracks underneath your doors and your windows and making sure like, they use like these little plastic films that they use on your window to keep the heat and the cool air in too.”

“So to the best of my knowledge, the energy efficient programs are based on... if I'm correct ...to insulate your...windows? You know, put the sealings around the windows or what how can you put a seal around the door what, you know, so that in the winter, you don't lose the heat. The heat doesn't constantly escape drastically.”

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“They did all that there [in his previous apartment].. That's how I found out about the faucet heads. I said, ‘They even got energy sufficient water faucet heads.’ Wow. That was cool. When I moved I don't have that.”

...but the programs need to improve outreach.

Despite most tenants knowing about energy efficiency programs, many told us that more should be done to get the word out further, especially for low-income households and those with language barriers.

“I just wish there was more, you know, flyers or more communication on stuff like that, to also notify people to let people know, like me, I'm on Section Eight, that, you know, can I go and get this done? You know, have you know, have them to come to my apartment and weatherize the house? Let me know what's what.”

Some tenants think that the only way to apply is online; it's important to get the word out that anyone can call 877-WISE-USE (877-947-3873) to get sent a paper application form for the HES-IE program.

“It's just a hassle, you know, even doing things like that online... You know, everybody doesn't know how to work a computer system or how to do you know, an online. And that can be a hassle all by itself...I'm the type of person that I like to be face to face. Direct. So you know, there's no misunderstanding.”

Tenants were frustrated by a lack of follow up after completing the application.

A number of tenants who had applied for energy efficiency programs complained about poor communication and follow up, both with HES-IE and WAP.

“And then you put in all this paperwork, and then you get no follow up, nobody calls you, you know, and then you call, and you're put on hold, and gotta go through all these prompts. You know, people have language barriers... they have to do better with programs like that.”

“Yeah, like every year, I sign up for the energy and then they have what they call weatherization where you check off but nobody never follows up with that. That's the problem. And then there's something that came in the mail that said, we can make your home efficient and then I had to fill it out and then the landlord had to fill it out. When we both filled it out, and nothing happened. So, no follow up. Then I called the person and said, ‘Okay, we're gonna get somebody’. They came. And stuff was half done. Somebody was supposed to come back. They never came back.”

Requiring landlords to sign applications is a barrier.

Tenants said that it is burdensome to get their landlords to sign the application.

"[In the past], I was just able to sign up and that was easy. But like the last couple of years they've been wanting you to get approval from the landlord... So I just don't bother. It's just too much when I was able to do it without having to go get approval from them and all of that I've done it. But with the approval now I just don't even bother. I throw it out."

One tenant had a good experience with energy efficiency upgrades in the past but was discouraged from applying in her new place due to needing to get her landlord's signature.

"It did help, you know... I saw the difference in the light bill...I saw a big difference in the air coming in and everything. You know, because they sealed everything.... But like I said, to go through the landlord, and well, I'm dealing with a management company and don't know what a management company for me is, it's too much."

Most tenants said their landlords would not be interested in signing up for energy efficiency program, particularly if it would cost them any money.

"We get letters or something with utility bills like for the weatherization, you know... But then, your landlord will have to, you know, sign up and he's not going to sign up for that, you know? I know he's not going to do it. He doesn't fix your building. So he's not gonna, you know, pay for this."

"I bet he would be supportive if he doesn't have anything he has to do."

"I don't know if they'll be supportive... because they don't really fix anything."

"I just want to be warm, and not be cold. And like I said, I reached out to them several times about how bad the windows were and not getting a response"

**"I guess whoever owns the complex makes the decision overall, but I don't even think these people have enough time to get to that. ...I think [Energy Efficiency programs] are more for... like a single apartment, not a complex 'cause I have a lot of neighbors...there. It's a long complex... I don't know... I think if they did that they would have to do it to 600 more houses, 500, something like that...So I think he'll just avoid it at all costs. I'm sure of that....After this much time you learn people. People show you who they are.
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He's not really doing too much. The best thing you can do if you wanna do energy sufficiency out there is move out to where there's energy sufficient. That's the best you're gonna get.”

Scheduling challenges and health and safety barriers get in the way of energy efficiency upgrades being completed.

Tenants also described scheduling conflicts and health and safety barriers that prevented significant upgrades from being installed.

“Coordinating times that I would be home for it and all that stuff... It’s a three family house, though we all got to be, you know, someone's coming into your house you gotta be there and stuff like that.”

“I did sign up one year to Community Action for weatherization... They did come you know gave me plastic and stuff. But that was only the one time, other than that. That wasn't helpful at all.”

“They said that because mold is transferred through the air, the pollens and stuff like that or whatever. They are afraid to seal up the apartment and you know, and fear that we might get sick from inhaling the mold and stuff like that, you know, and they are they are legally bound not to winterize, weatherize, whatever you want to call it any house that has any type of mold in it that they are they are legally bound not to... I said... I don't care about the mold I said please. I said my gas bill is super high.”