

Washington State Weatherization Plus Health Enhanced Grantee Profiles: Snohomish County Human Services

Snohomish County Human Services (SCHS) is one of six public service agencies in Washington to receive an Enhanced Weatherization Plus Health (Wx + H) Grant. These funds enabled SCHS to provide additional Healthy Homes services and measures to low-income households that include occupants with respiratory conditions.

The SCHS Weatherization Program initially focused on developing referral arrangements with SCHS's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Early Head Start (EHS) Program, Your Air Matters Program, Tribal Healthy Homes Network, and local schools. When these efforts did not yield enough applicants interested or eligible for weatherization services, SCHS focused on identifying existing weatherization clients and applicants with respiratory conditions, and providing additional services to them.

SCHS provided weatherization and Healthy Homes measures and education to 19 households, exceeding its initial target of 18 comprehensive projects. Ten household received assessments, education, and low-cost measures, and 24 people with respiratory conditions were served.

Program Delivery Strategy

When initial outreach efforts did not yield successful applicants, SCHS revised intake and auditing processes to capture information on whether people in households had respiratory conditions. Households meeting these criteria were referred to an auditor with Healthy Homes training who completed the Healthy Homes assessment.



Wx + Health Initiative

The Wx + H Initiative, funded by Washington State's Energy Matchmaker Program, integrates investments in energy efficiency and Healthy Homes improvements in low-income households with education and services to reduce energy bills; increase home durability; and improve occupant health, safety, and well-being.

The focus of the Wx + H Enhanced Grant initiative is assessing the effectiveness of integrating weatherization and Healthy Homes services to serve households with members who have asthma or other respiratory illnesses. Enhanced grants are intended to support pilot projects to develop, test, and deploy new measures, strategies, and partnerships to deliver services.

SCHS educator and outreach staff reviewed the assessment, and scheduled education and home visits during the upgrade process. Education focused primarily on Healthy Homes and green cleaning. All measure installations were contracted out. Education and follow-up calls and visits were completed by SCHS staff around their other duties.

Key Lessons

Health benefits are compelling

Although it was difficult to get qualified referrals from partners, the benefits and outcomes were compelling and easy to convey to stakeholders. Outreach staff deeply valued the opportunity to connect and work with clients in the home visit process. In their words, **"It chokes me up thinking about the difference we made in people's lives."**

Existing applicants have significant health needs

SCHS attempted to develop an extensive referral and outreach network, anticipating that it would be hard to find households with respiratory health concerns among existing clients. SCHS staff were somewhat surprised at how common and extensive health concerns were among existing clients.

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Developing referral relationships takes time

Initial efforts to develop referral relationships were not successful with early childhood education programs (ECEAP and EHS). Due to late start up for Wx + H, the early school sign-up window was missed. Families with young children are also less likely to be homeowners and, therefore, are much more challenging to qualify for weatherization. Outreach efforts to rural school districts were met with skepticism of government services. While there was some initial interest in engagement from the Tulalip Tribe, it takes significant investment and time to build trust and relationships in tribal setting. Ultimately, none of the comprehensive projects SCHS completed were referred from initial partners.

Weatherization application process is a barrier

As with other grantees, SCHS found that the application process was a significant barrier to participation. The application requires extensive documentation of income, assets, and citizenship. Further, the process places additional requirements and restrictions on rental properties.

To address some of these issues, SCHS requested that households who has established income eligibility for other programs such as ECEAP be granted “categorical” eligibility for Wx + H as way to ease the application requirements. This was determined to not meet documentation requirements attached to U.S. DOE and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – LIHEAP weatherization funding was not approved.

Contracting challenges

SCHS status as a municipal organization made it much more challenging to contract for services. Grant startup was delayed because the contract needed to be approved by the County Council. Contracting for Wx + H measures could not begin until the original contract was signed. County procurement rules are complex and difficult to negotiate, even for “simple purchases” like green cleaning kits or HEPA vacuums.

Existing weatherization contractors were generally not interested in providing Healthy Homes measures. For example, when flooring was sent out for bid, only one contractor (with very limited capacity) responded. Consequently, flooring and other approved Healthy Homes measures were not offered because of lack of contractor capacity.

Healthy Homes education works better after installation

SCHS outreach staff found that Healthy Homes education had far more traction with clients when offered after or in tandem with measure installation.

Going Forward

The initial management sponsor for the Wx + H program at SCHS Weatherization Services retired during the early rollout the program. While there was general support for Wx + H services, there was limited capacity and organization bandwidth to work with the broader community, referral partners, and stakeholders. The focus of the SCHS grant became meeting the grant’s basic requirements and delivering the project as a modest extension of existing weatherization services. SCHS returned about 40% of its grant to Commerce unspent.

Raising awareness of the health needs of existing clients

The Wx + H program raised program and staff awareness of the health needs of existing clients. Staff indicated that there was value in screening for health conditions in the future.

Limited capacity to provide Healthy Homes services

SCHS primarily see themselves as offering weatherization services. Much of the extra work for Wx + H was done around existing duties.

Outreach and education staff did not feel they had the expertise or training to address the clients’ health issues. Nor was SCHS able to establish adequate contracting infrastructure to deliver comprehensive Wx + H services. There was some

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interest in having the option to provide a limited number of lower-cost Healthy Homes measures and education, such as green cleaning training for households with respiratory illness or other health conditions.

Partners

SCHS provides comprehensive social and health services including weatherization and energy assistance to Snohomish County. ECEAP, EHS, and the Case Management Program all deploy community health workers for home visits as part of their services. The weatherization program did reach out to these programs, which resulted in a limited number of referrals

Air Matters Program

The [Air Matters](#) program works within the Tribal Healthy Homes Network, which serves the Tulalip Tribes and other tribes in the region to provide low- and no-cost Healthy Homes measures and educational material. SCHS initially contracted with Air Matters for green cleaning kits and client education tools. Due to cost and availability considerations, SCHS eventually assembled the kits themselves.

Local schools

ECEAP/EHS already works closely with local school districts to identify “at-risk” households, and to provide prevention and support services. SCHS reached out to these groups but did not have the time or resources to adequately maintain referral relationships.

Services provided by SCHS and these partners are summarized in Tables 1. Table 2 summarizes installed weatherization Healthy Homes measures.

Budget

Enhanced Wx + H Grant: **\$137,500**

SCHS funded most measures from existing low-income weatherization and Wx + H funding. About one percent of installed measure costs were leveraged from other sources.

Installed Healthy Homes and Weatherization measures cost an average of \$9,364. Funding for installed measures came from the following sources:

- DOE, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, BPA, Matchmaker: 68%
- Matchmaker, Wx + H: 27%
- Utility: 5%
- Other: 1%

Contact Information

Mathew Bell, Supervisor
Housing & Community Services
M/S 305
Everett, WA 98201
425-388-7202; mathew.bell@snoco.org



Energy Program

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Washington State University Energy Program
905 Plum Street SE, P.O. Box 43165
Olympia, Washington 98504

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Table 1. Services Provided by the Snohomish County Partnership

Service	SCHS (Wx)	SCHS (ECEAP/EHS)	Your Air Matters	Local Schools
Outreach and referrals	X	x	x	x
Intake/screening/qualification	X			
Initial Healthy Homes Assessment	X			
Energy audit/assessment	X			
Service coordination	x	x		
Weatherization	X			
Healthy Homes measures	X			
Client education – follow-up	X			
Additional services (repair, social)	x	x		

LEAD = X, Support = x, Green shading indicates new partner or existing partner in new role

Table 2. Percentage of Wx + H Projects with Healthy Homes and Weatherization Measures Installed (n=19)

	Plus Health Measures			Weatherization Measures	
	All Grantees	Snohomish		All Grantees	Snohomish
Green cleaning kit	94%	100%	Air sealing	77%	95%
Bedding (dust mite)	71%	86%	Floor insulation	44%	84%
Mechanical ventilation	65%	86%	Attic insulation	54%	84%
HEPA vacuum	65%	57%	Wall insulation	12%	11%
Walk-off mats	65%	95%	Windows	17%	21%
CO detector	57%	71%	Door	19%	16%
Low VOC flooring	33%		Duct insulation	20%	53%
Smoke detector	24%	29%	Duct repair	10%	
Advanced ventilation	18%	10%	Duct sealing	33%	68%
HEPA/MEPA filter	17%	57%	HVAC - replace	33%	16%
HVAC cleaning	17%		Furnace T and Cn	22%	63%
Air filter	15%		HVAC - repair	13%	37%
Plumbing repair	13%	19%	Thermostat	15%	21%
Gutter, downspout	13%	38%	Passive venting	44%	74%
Moisture/mold abatement	13%		Lighting	33%	11%
Roof repair, replace	11%	5%	WH low cost	52%	79%
Pest mitigation	9%	24%	Water heater	12%	11%
Comprehensive cleaning	8%		Electrical repair	13%	32%
Crawlspace	7%	10%	Wx repair	1%	
Slip/fall prevention	5%				
Dehumidifier	2%				

Darker cell colors indicate higher rates of installation.

Blank cells indicate that a measure was not installed by the grantee.