CARES Advisory Group Meeting Agenda
July 15, 2026 2:00 – 4:00pm Pacific

Advisory Group Member	
Blue Mountain Action Council (BMAC)	Sylvia Schaefer
Benton-Franklin Community Action Connections (CAC)	Dalia Ochoa
Community Action of Lewis, Mason, & Thurston Counties (CACLMT)	Ester Castro, Mar Cuellar
Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP)	Debbie Gregg
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council (CDCAC)	Tom Bonwell, Sarah Brito, Alan Walker
Kitsap Community Resources (KCR)	Kandi Balandran
Lower Columbia Community Action Center (LCCAP)	Kathy Bates
NW Community Action Center (NCAC)	Jose Alvarez
OIC of Washington (OIC)	Heidi Silva, Casandra Ochoa, Candi Jaeger
Opportunity Council (OPPCO)	Marie Stanley, Melissa Gong
Community Action of Skagit County (SCCAA)	Misty Velasquez
Snohomish County Human Services Dept (SCEAP)	Constance Hockett, Traci Baugh
WUTC Staff	Andrew Roberts, Andy Sellards, Corey Cook, Jacque Hawkins-Jones, Keith Quinata
The Energy Project	Shaylee Stokes
Public Counsel	Kai Hiatt
NW Energy Coalition	Charlee Thompson
Department of Commerce	Michelle DeBell
Cascade Natural Gas	
Dan Tillis, Dir Customer Experience	Jennifer Gross, Regulatory Affairs Mgr
Teri Sovak, Mgr Customer Service, Credit & Collections	Noemi Ortiz, Mgr Energy Efficiency & Conservation
Shannon Steed, Consumer Specialist	Rodney Fowler, Business Analyst

1. CARES enrollment update (Dan)
2. WA Energy Burden Assessment presentation (Empower Dataworks)
3. Open Discussion

Meeting notes:

- **Washington Energy Burden Assessment Overview:** Hassan Shaban from Empower Data Works presented the 2026 Washington Energy Burden Assessment, explaining the methodology, key definitions, and overall findings.
    - **Assessment Methodology:** Hassan described the energy burden assessment as a data-driven analysis using customer-level data on energy use, bills, and household incomes to estimate energy assistance needs and evaluate program performance.
    - **Key Definitions:** The assessment defined low-income households in Washington as those earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level or 80% of the area median

    - income, whichever is greater, and set a high-burden threshold at 3.5% of income spent on Cascade bills.
    - **Overall Findings:** Cascade's median gas burden is about 0.9%, lower than other utilities, attributed to higher incomes and newer homes in the service area; approximately 61,000 households are low-income, with 16,000 classified as high burden.
    - **Energy Burden Distribution:** Most customers spend less than 2% of their income on gas bills, but a subset of low-income households faces much higher burdens, making them the primary targets for assistance programs.

- **Energy Assistance Program Funding and Impact:** Hassan detailed the funding landscape for energy assistance programs, showing that Cascade's programs currently provide about 120% of the estimated need, but only 32% of eligible customers participate, with Shaylee and others clarifying program components and funding sources.
    - **Assistance Need Calculation:** The energy assistance need is calculated as the dollar amount required to bring all high-burden households below the 3.5% threshold, estimated at over $8 million annually for Cascade's Washington service area.
    - **Program Funding Sources:** Available funding includes $5.6 million from the CARES discount and $4 million from other programs such as LIHEAP, arrears grants, and energy efficiency, totaling $9.8 million and exceeding the assistance need.
    - **Program Impact:** Participation in Cascade's programs reduces average energy burden from 7% to 1.8%, with median values showing similar reductions, indicating strong impact for those enrolled.
    - **Program Saturation Challenge:** Despite sufficient funding, only about 32% of eligible customers participate, prompting discussion on outreach and program design to improve saturation.

- **Stratified Energy Burden and Program Targeting:** Hassan presented a breakdown of energy burden levels among low-income customers, discussed program participation rates by county and tier, and received feedback from Shaylee on category naming and targeting, with Dan and others discussing outreach strategies.
    - **Energy Burden Categories:** Low-income customers are categorized by gas burden: very affordable (0-2%), somewhat affordable (2-3.5%), somewhat unaffordable (3.5-5%), very unaffordable (5-10%), and extremely unaffordable (10%+), with half of low-income customers in the very affordable range.
    - **Program Participation by Geography:** Participation rates are highest in central Washington counties like Franklin and Yakima, and lowest in coastal counties such as Kitsap and Snohomish, indicating areas for targeted outreach.
    - **Tier-Based Participation:** Program participation is highest among the lowest income tiers, with 73% in tier 1 and 56% in tier 2, aligning with the intended targeting of assistance to those most in need.
    - **Feedback on Category Naming:** Shaylee suggested revising category names to better reflect affordability, proposing that burdens above the median should be considered somewhat or very unaffordable, and Hassan acknowledged the feedback.

- **Impact of Rate Increases and Seasonal Burden:** Hassan analyzed the effects of rate increases and seasonal income fluctuations on energy assistance needs and customer burdens, recommending increased promotion of budget pay plans, with Dan and Shaylee discussing customer preferences and barriers.

  - **Rate Increase Effects:** A 10% rate increase can lead to a 20% increase in energy assistance need, highlighting the importance of monitoring rates and adjusting program funding and discount levels accordingly.
  - **Seasonal Burden Analysis:** Low-income customers experience spikes in gas burden during winter months, especially those with seasonal incomes, which can lead to arrearages and disconnections.
  - **Budget Pay Plan Recommendation:** Budget pay plans help smooth out monthly bills, reducing winter bill shock and disconnection risk; Cascade's enrollment rate is only 14%, lower than peer utilities, prompting recommendations for increased marketing and possible incentives.
  - **Customer Preferences and Barriers:** Shaylee shared qualitative research showing customers value predictable bills, but some face barriers to enrolling in budget pay due to past due balances or missed payments, and Dan confirmed these criteria apply at Cascade. In Washington, Cascade customers can enroll in Budget Pay with up to two months past due. If a customer on Budget Pay misses two payments, the account will be removed from Budget Pay.

- **CARES Discount and Arrearage Grant Program Review:** Hassan reviewed the CARES discount and arrearage grant programs, showing high participation rates in key counties and tiers, low disconnection rates, and effective targeting, with input from agency representatives on follow-up and wraparound services.
  - **Discount Tier Analysis:** Current discount levels closely match the assistance need for each income tier, with no changes recommended unless rates increase by more than 20%.
  - **Disconnection and Arrearage Statistics:** Cascade has a low disconnection rate (0.7%), with most disconnected households eligible for assistance; arrearage grants are used primarily by higher tiers, and most recipients stabilize within six months.
  - **Program Interaction and Follow-Up:** Agency representatives confirmed they receive referral lists and follow up with customers, offering additional services such as SNAP benefits, though some programs have waitlists and limited capacity.
  - **Wraparound Services Discussion:** Participants discussed the value of including more referral options (housing, food, healthcare) in applications, with agencies noting the importance of targeting based on income and program eligibility.

- **Post-Enrollment Verification (PEV) Process and Challenges:** Hassan and Dan discussed the PEV process, highlighting high rates of discount removal due to non-response, reasons for customer confusion, and mitigation strategies, with Maria Aispuro, Melissa Gong, and others sharing agency experiences and suggestions for improvement.
  - **PEV Outcomes and Statistics:** About 40-50% of PEV customers lose their discount, mainly due to non-response; among those with known outcomes, 12% are over-income, 7% receive a lower discount, and 14% receive a higher discount.
  - **Reasons for Non-Response:** Common reasons include not receiving or understanding the PEV notice, unclear repercussions, perceived effort versus benefit, privacy concerns, and temporary hardship resolution.
  - **Agency Feedback and Mitigation:** Maria Aispuro and Melissa Gong described customer confusion, reluctance to provide documentation, and literacy barriers; agencies attempt multiple contacts and provide detailed notes, and suggestions included clearer notices, more accessible communication, and inclusion of phone/email in referral reports.

    - **Program Auditing Perspective:** PEV is used more for program auditing than customer auditing, with Cascade accepting current rates of over-income and discount adjustments but seeking improved response rates and agency feedback.

- **Energy Efficiency and Weatherization Program Integration:** Hassan presented recommendations for integrating energy efficiency measures with the CARES discount program, emphasizing the need for targeted energy audits for high-use customers and cost-effectiveness assessments, with Noemi and Dan describing outreach expansion efforts.
    - **High-Use Customer Targeting:** A small group of high-use customers utilize a disproportionate share of program funds; Hassan recommended requiring energy audits for these participants to identify root causes and potential savings.
    - **Weatherization and Efficiency Measures:** Not all high-use homes need full weatherization; many can benefit from lighter touch measures such as appliance upgrades or tune-ups, and cost-effectiveness should be evaluated for each project.
    - **Outreach and Specialist Role:** Cascade has expanded its outreach by adding CBOs and a new team member, Luisa Perez, to focus on underserved areas and support both energy assistance and weatherization efforts.
    - **Customer Education on Weatherization:** Maria highlighted the need for better education about the weatherization audit process, as some customers are reluctant to allow auditors into their homes; participants agreed on the importance of clear communication and training.

- **Next Steps and Program Changes:** Jennifer outlined the timeline for proposed program changes based on the EBA findings, including a draft filing by August 14th and a potential off-cycle meeting to review structural changes, with Dan and Shaylee confirming the need for further discussion and feedback.
    - **Draft Filing Timeline:** Jennifer stated that a draft filing of proposed program changes will be presented to the group before August 14th, with the new program year starting October 1st.
    - **Meeting and Feedback Process:** Participants agreed to schedule an off-cycle meeting to review structural changes, such as potential energy audit requirements for high-use customers, and invited feedback via email or future meetings.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Program Filing and Structural Changes:** Schedule an off-cycle meeting to review and discuss proposed structural changes to the CARES program, including potential energy audit requirements for high energy users, before filing by mid-August. (Jennifer, Dan)
- **Post-Enrollment Verification Communication:** Review and update the post-enrollment verification notification letter to improve clarity for customers regarding expectations and required actions, incorporating feedback from agency staff. (Dan)
- **Referral Report Enhancement:** Evaluate the feasibility of including phone number and email information for customers in the referral report sent to agencies to facilitate outreach. (Dan)

Cascade Natural Gas Corporation

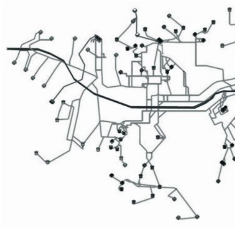
In the Community to Serve

2026 Washington Energy Burden Assessment

Summary and Recommendations

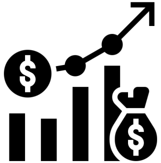
empower dataworks

What is an Energy Burden Assessment?



Data analysis (not a survey) that uses utility and third-party customer data.

Primary purpose is to estimate the energy assistance need based on customer-level geographic, demographic and building data.

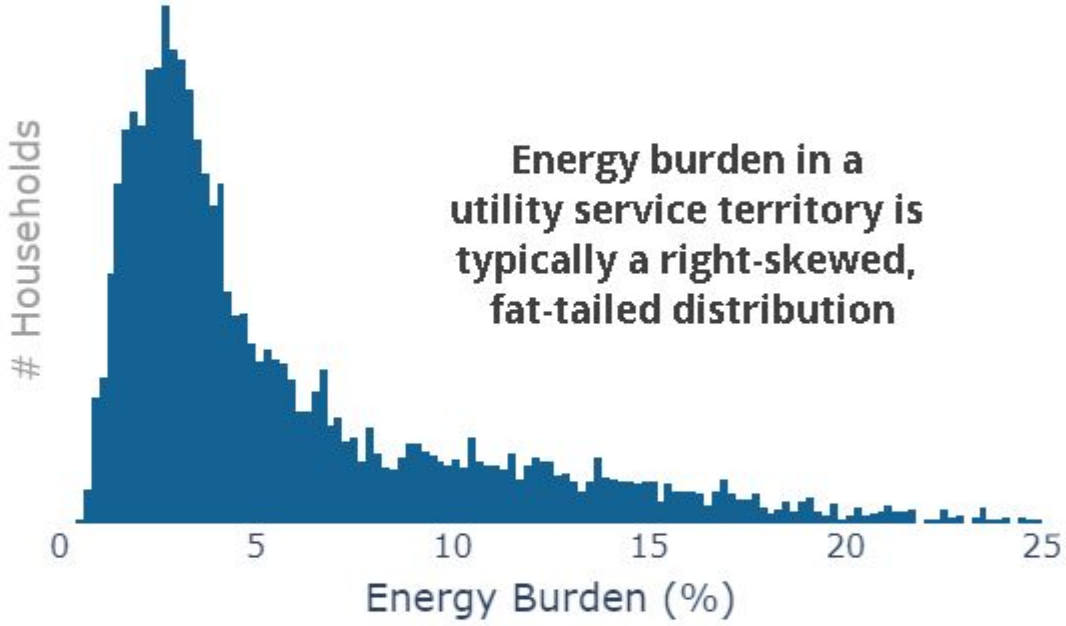


Comparing the need to actual program performance gives us an **actionable** path to improving our energy assistance programs

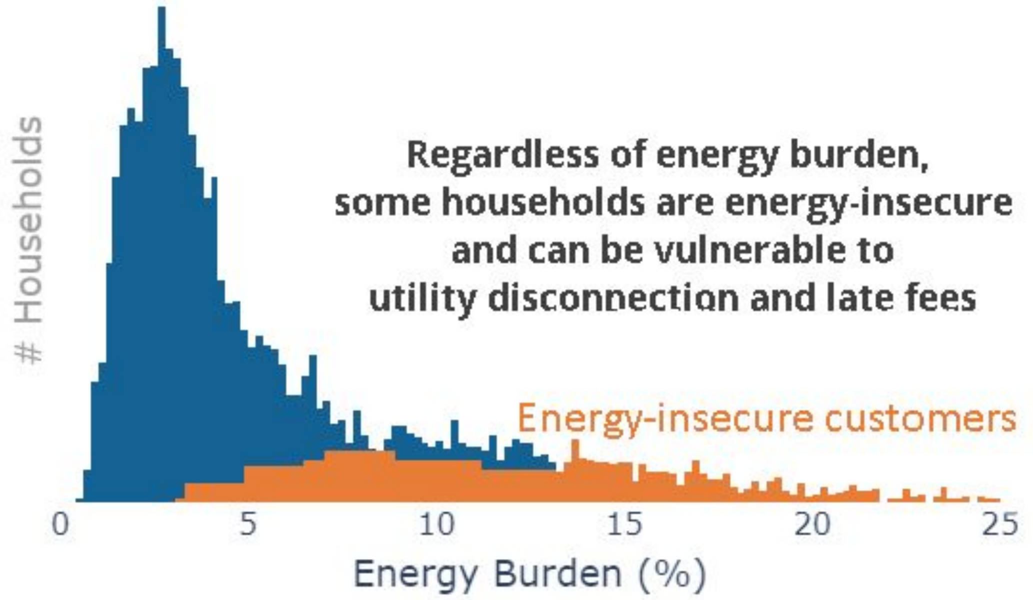
Energy Burden

The primary metric of success is reduction in energy insecurity (disconnections and late payments)

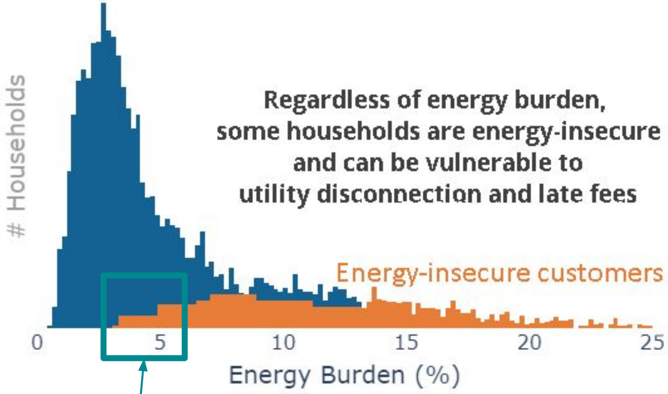
Energy Burden is a Distribution

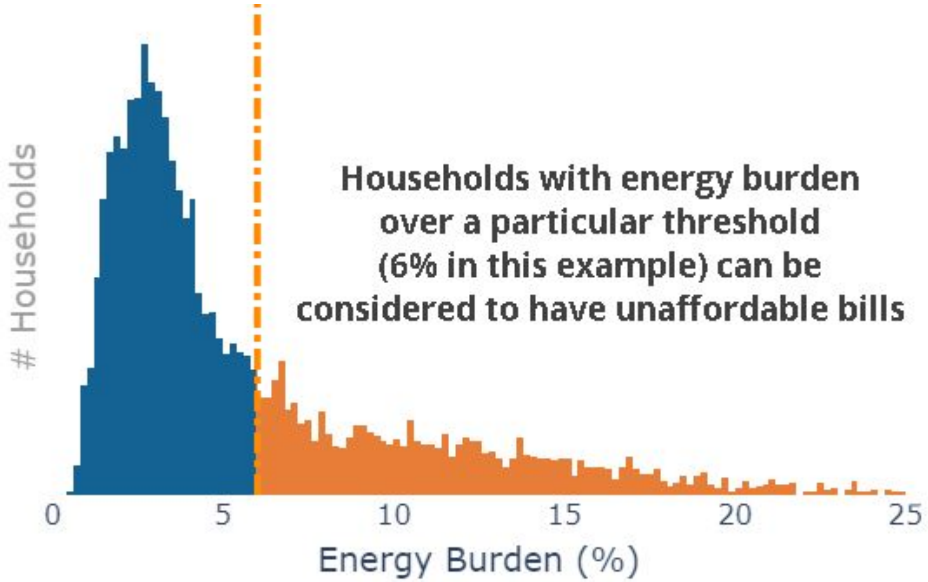


Energy Insecurity is Harder to Measure



Energy Burden is a Proxy for Energy Insecurity





Low burden but
energy -insecure

Definitions

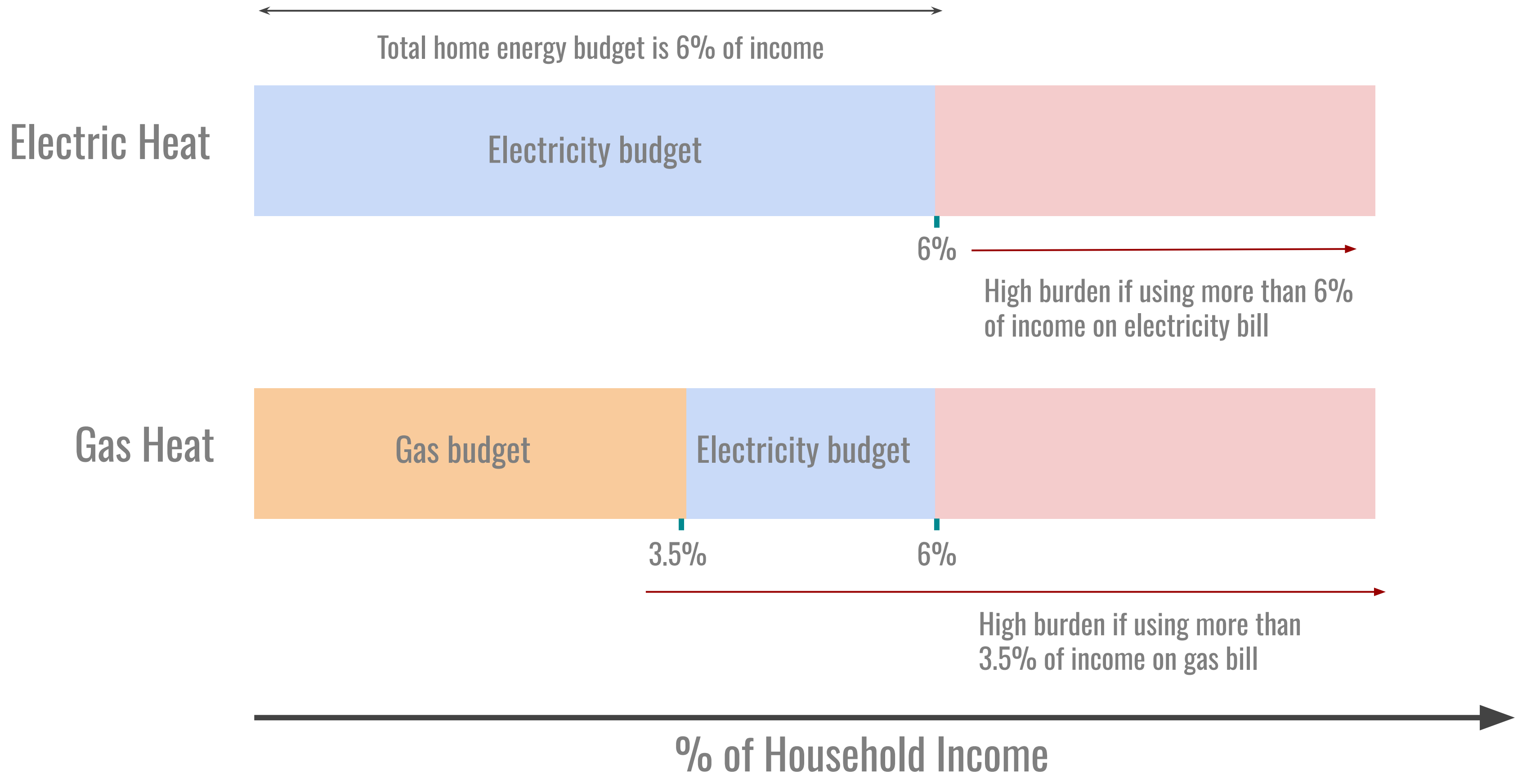
Low-income (Washington):

Households earning less than 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or 80% Area Median Income (AMI), whichever is greater

Household Size	200% FPL	Yakima County - 80% AMI	Whatcom County - 80% AMI
1	$31,300	$53,100	$60,700
2	$42,300	$60,700	$69,400
3	$53,300	$68,300	$78,050
4	$64,300	$75,850	$86,700

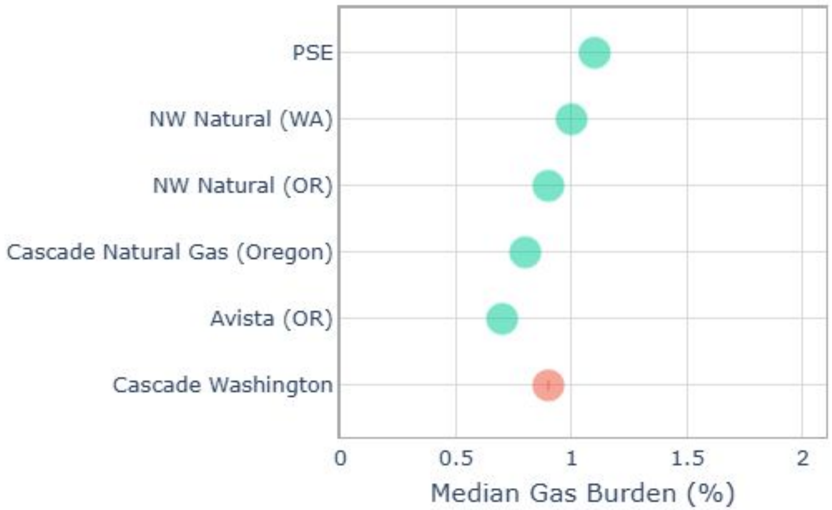
$4-6k/month after taxes for rent, groceries, transportation, childcare, healthcare and utilities

High burden thresholds for multiple fuel homes



Insights: **Energy Burden**

- ➔ Median gas energy burden (~0.9%) is comparable to other utility service areas in the Pacific Northwest.
- ➔ Cascade customers have relatively higher incomes than the general population. Homes in the service area are relatively newer and many are located in a mild climate resulting in lower gas usage.



Insights: **Energy Burden**

Number of Occupied Households

~197,000

Low Income Households Under 80% AMI:

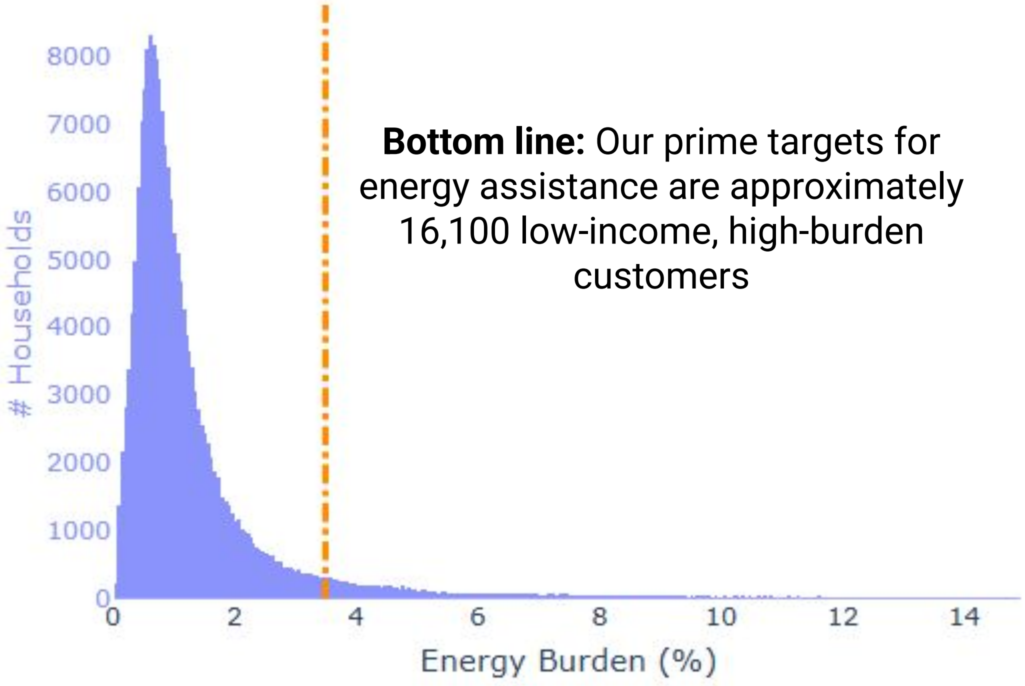
~60,700 ± 10%

High Burden Households*

~16,300 (all)

~16,100 (LI)

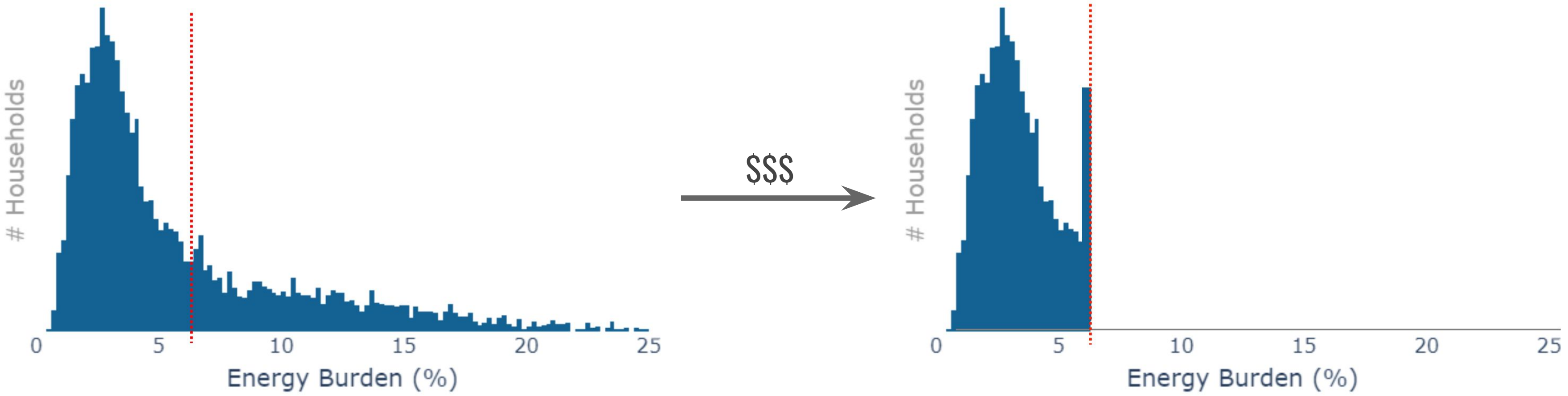
Median Gas Burden
~0.9% (all)
~2.1% (LI)



Bottom line: Our prime targets for energy assistance are approximately 16,100 low-income, high-burden customers

*Energy bills and burden are calculated without factoring in any forms of energy assistance

Energy Assistance Need



Insights: **High-level Assistance Gap (Washington)**

Low-Income, High Burden Households

~16,100

Energy Assistance Need:

$8.21 M

Income-eligible only

Direct Assistance Funding:

$9.77 M

(119% of need)

2026 Projection not including additional program participation.

~$5.6M CARES Discount, $4.2M other

➔ Currently, CNGC's programs appear to be over-serving participants (funding is 119% of total assistance need with only 32% program saturation)

➔ Program Participant energy burden in 2025 (approximate):

- Average: 6.9% (before assistance) > 1.8% (after assistance)
- Median: 3.4% (before assistance) > 1.8% (after assistance)

➔ Programs help many low-burden customers and combining programs drastically reduces gas burden below target of 3-3.5%

Insights: **Stratified Energy Burden**

Gas Burden	Number of LI Customers	Assistance Need	Program Funding	Participation Rate
A: 0 - 2% **(Very affordable)**	29,538	$0M	$0.9M	16%
B: 2 - 3.5% **(Somewhat affordable)**	15,071	$0M	$1.6M	33%
C: 3.5 - 5% **(Somewhat unaffordable)**	6,131	$1.0M	$1.6M	50%
D: 5 - 10% **(Very unaffordable)**	6,171	$3.5M	$2.9M	59%
E: 10%+ **(Extremely unaffordable)**	3,766	$3.6M	$2.7M	69%

Both funding and participation are concentrated among high-burden customers - the program is well-designed and doing well at directing funds to higher-burden customers

Rate Increase Impact

2025:

Low-Income, High Burden Households

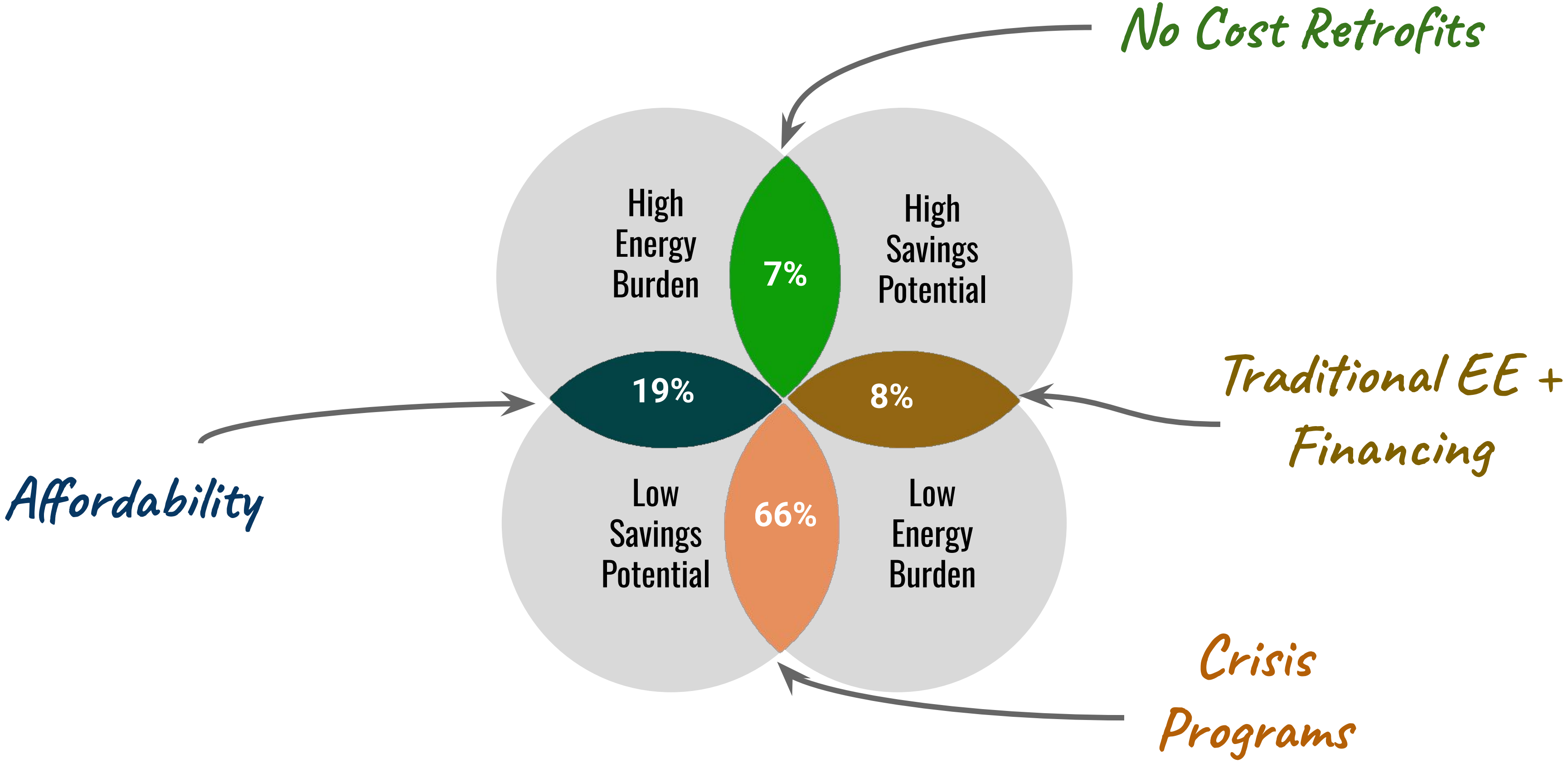
~16,100

Existing assistance covers 119% of need

Rate Increase	Low-income, high-burden households	Energy Assistance Need	Existing assistance as percent of need*	Estimated CARES Discount Spending
5%	16.5k (+2.4%)	$8.8M (+8%)	115%	$5.9M
10%	17.4k (+8.3%)	$9.8M (+20%)	106%	$6.2M
15%	18.4k (+15%)	$10.9M (+32%)	97%	$6.4M

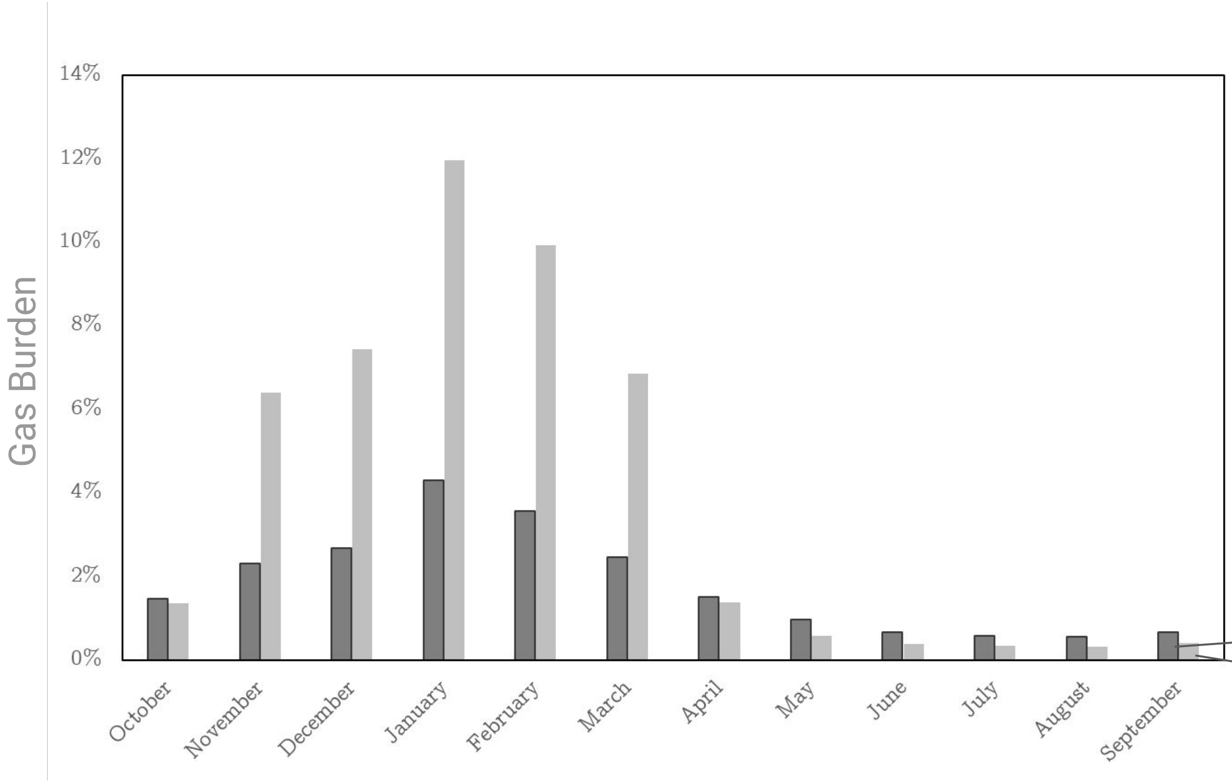
*Assumes 3% average annual household income increase and no change in program participation

Program Potential



Seasonal Energy Burden

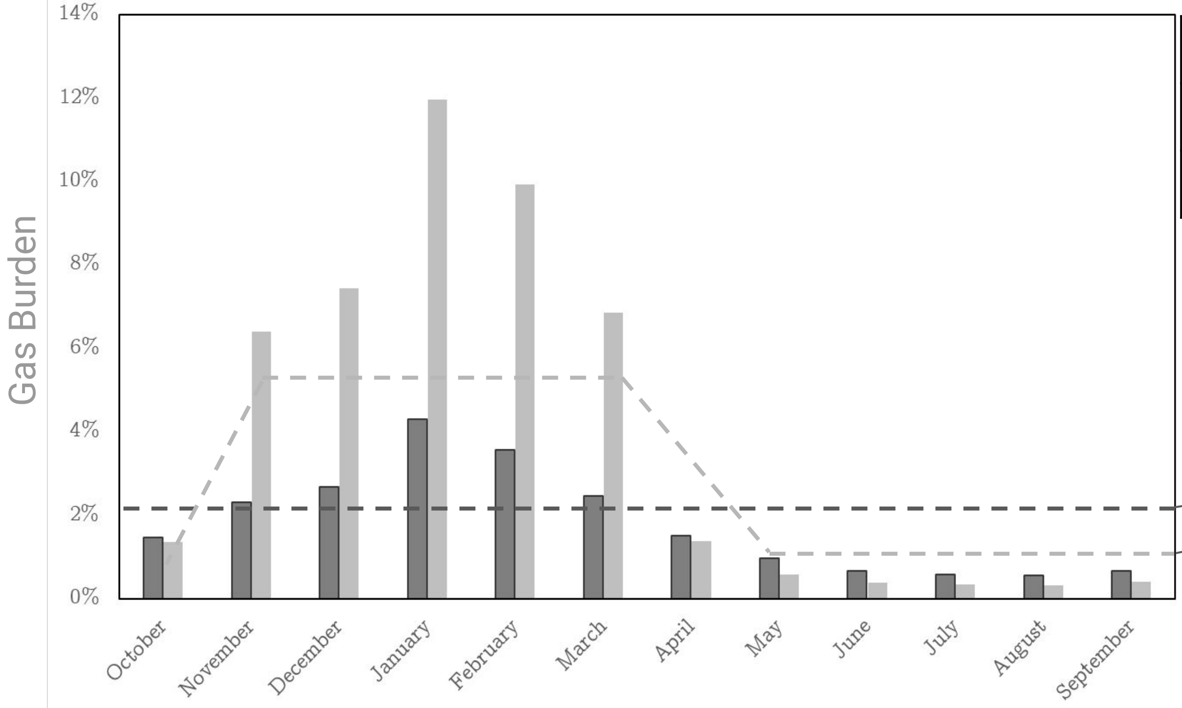
Energy Burden - Monthly Trends



Monthly Gas Burden (low-income)*:
Fixed year-round income
Seasonal income

***Hypothetical scenarios based on idealized income distributions**

Budget Pay Plan Statistics



% of all customers on Budget Pay Plan	14%
% of past due customers on Budget Pay Plan	9%
% of disconnected customers on Budget Pay Plan	5%

Gas Burden with Budget Pay:
Fixed year-round income
Seasonal income

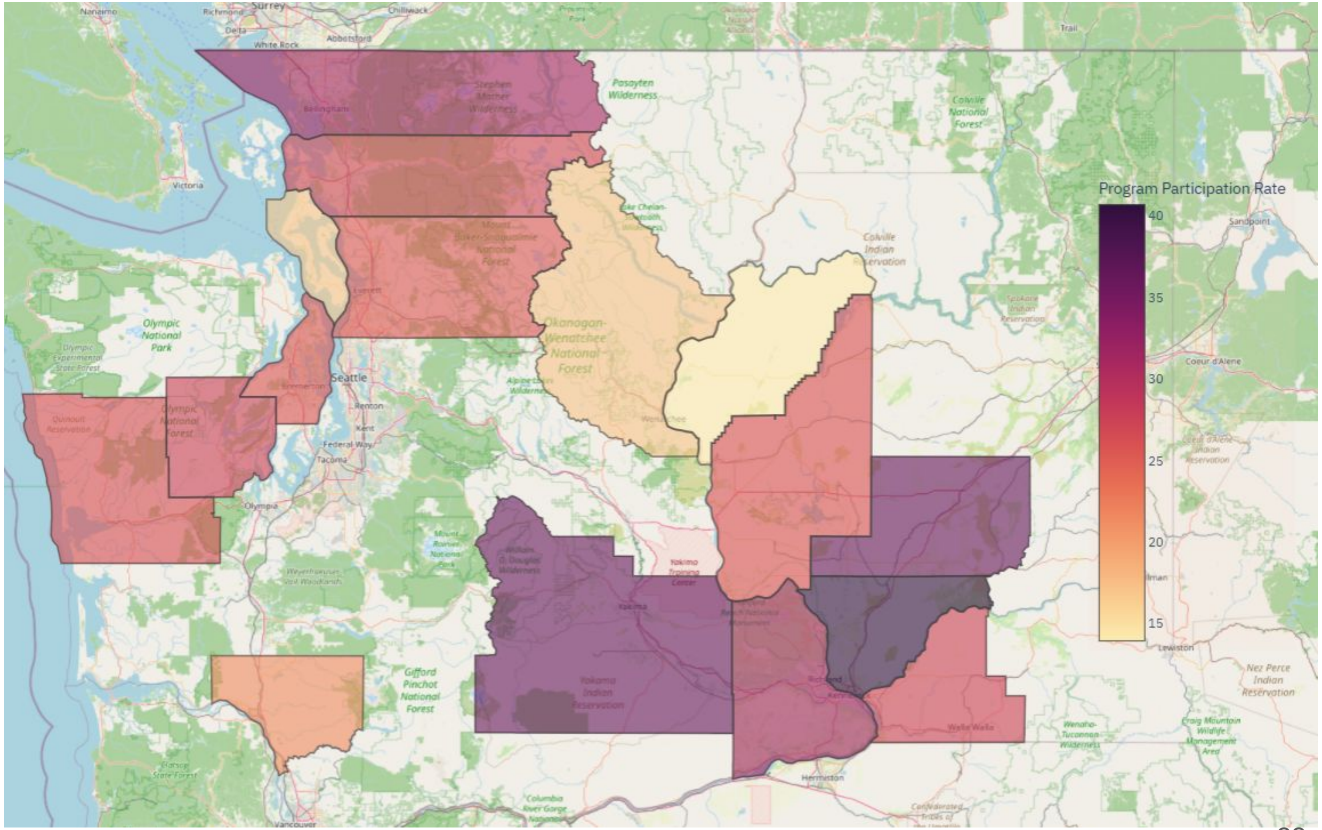
Addressing Seasonal Burden

- Clear spike in seasonal burden for both fixed income and seasonal workers who end up falling behind on bills.
- In our prior experience, budget billing can reduce disconnections and past due payments by 30-40%, with minimal program or administrative costs. Peer gas utilities have budget pay enrollment rates of 30%+.
- **Recommendation: Increase reliance on the Budget Pay Plan:**
  - **More aggressive multi-channel marketing, especially with the December and January bills.**
  - **Show customers their personalized projected budget pay bill compared to the current bill for high-bill months.**
  - **Consider offering an incentive for enrolling in the Budget Pay Plan.**
  - **Assess interaction between budget play and bill discount.**

CARES Discount Program

Program Participation Rate

Recommendation: Overall participation rate is approximately 30%. Good participation in Central Washington. Focus outreach on outlying and coastal areas.



Participation by County

Top 3

County	Participation Rate
Franklin	46%
Yakima	39%
Benton	35%

Bottom 3

County	Participation Rate
Kitsap	27%
Snohomish	27%
Island	17%

*Only including counties with more than 1,000 customers

Program Participation Rate by Tier

Income tier	Estimated number of households	% High-burden	Participation rate
Tier 1: 0-4% AMI	1,600	100%	73%
Tier 2: 5-12% AMI	2,100	97%	56%
Tier 3: 13-24% AMI	8,100	79%	55%
Tier 4: 25-36% AMI	8,300	46%	52%
Tier 5: 37-80% AMI	40,600	5%	18%

Maintain focused outreach efforts on these groups. Target 80% participation in Tiers 1-3 by 2027.

Discount Tier Analysis

Income tier	Current Discount Level	Average assistance need as a percent of bill
Tier 1: 0-4% AMI / 0-20% FPL	90%	91%
Tier 2: 5-12% AMI / 21-50% FPL	75%	73%
Tier 3: 13-24% AMI / 51-100% FPL	50%	43%
Tier 4: 25-36% AMI / 101-150% FPL	25%	19%
Tier 5: 37-80% AMI / 151-200% FPL	8%	3%

Recommendation: Discount levels appear to be appropriate at this time and can accommodate rate increases under 20% without requiring major adjustments (assuming incomes stay constant). These estimates assume only the CARES discount is used to address energy burden. In practice, most customers receive assistance from multiple programs (average post-program gas burden = 1.8%).

Discount Tiers: Washington Gas Utilities Comparison

Income tier	CARES Current Discounts	PSE	Income tier	Avista LIRAP
Tier 1: 0-20% FPL	90%	45%	Tier 1: 0-5% FPL	94%
Tier 2: 21-50% FPL	75%	40%	Tier 2: 6-50% FPL	75%
Tier 3: 51-100% FPL	50%	20%	Tier 3: 51-100% FPL	35%
Tier 4: 101-150% FPL	25%	15%	Tier 4: 101-150% FPL	20%
Tier 5: 151-200% FPL	8%	10%	Tier 5: 151 - 200% FPL or 80% AMI	15%
200% FPL - 80% AMI	8%	5%		

Arrearages / CARES Grant

Disconnected customers

- Cascade Washington generally has a very low service disconnection rate over 12 months (~0.7%) for unique households (some households may get disconnected multiple times a year)

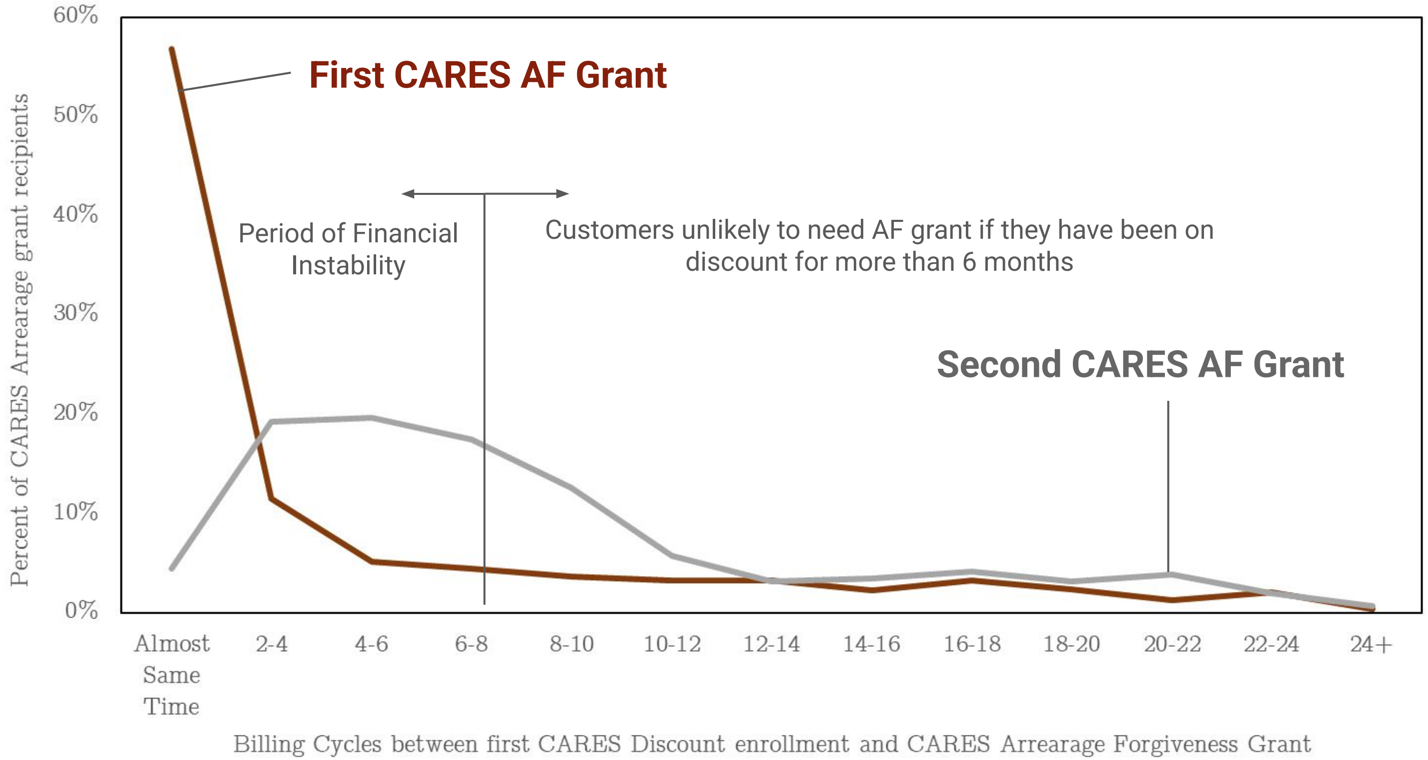
- Only 660 disconnected households in past year - mainly in Yakima County - were likely eligible for energy assistance but didn't participate. **Communication about CARES to customers at risk of disconnection is generally working well for at-risk customers.**

- **Service technicians have recently been retrained on communicating about CARES with customers being disconnected.**

Arrearage Grants Usage

Income Tier	No. of Customers	Funding	Percent of CARES AF Grant recipients needing a second AF Grant in 2024-25
Tier 1: 0-4% AMI / 0-20% FPL	553	$143k	12%
Tier 2: 5-12% AMI / 21-50% FPL	626	$151k	14%
Tier 3: 13-24% AMI / 51-100% FPL	2,373	$581k	17%
Tier 4: 25-36% AMI / 101-150% FPL	2,313	$484k	20%
Tier 5: 37-80% AMI / 151-200% FPL	2,466	$429k	21%

Interaction of Discount and Arrearage Grants



CARES Arrearage Grant review

CARES Arrearage Grant is well-designed - simple, easy to administer and explain to customers.

Arrearage relief levels appear to be appropriate for vast majority of customers.

Questions for discussion:

- Customers need additional resources beyond energy assistance in first 6-8 months after receiving the CARES grant. Application form already includes a referral process to community action agencies. **Do agencies actually follow up based on this information and are customers actually being connected to other assistance programs?**
- Consider modifying the weatherization question to: “Are you interested in learning about the following programs from your local Community Action agency?” - Free weatherization, furnace repair, housing support, food assistance, healthcare, language classes. **Would agencies use this information if it is forwarded to them?**

Post Enrollment Verification

Post-enrollment verification (PEV)

Main Takeaway:
~40-50% of PEV customers have their discount removed - primarily due to non-response.

Natural Attrition Rate	
After 2 months	6%
After 1 year	20%
After 2 years	32%

PEV status	**Percent of PEV requests** (from 10/1/2023 to 5/30/2025)
Discount removed due to non-response	45%
Discount removed because customer over-income or declined to verify	**5%**
Discount increased	**3%**
Discount reduced	**6%**
Existing discount maintained	**23%**
No outcome received from agency (existing discount maintained)	12%
Account closed	**4%**
Other - discount maintained	**2%**

Post-Enrollment Verification - **Improving Response Rate**

Reason for PEV non-response	**Mitigation Measure**
Did not receive PEV information	Ensure that communication is attempted multiple times and using multiple channels (SMS, email, mail)
Did not understand what action was needed	Review PEV notice for clarity - implement Language Access Plan recommendations for PEV notices. Add specific agency contact information for each customer.
Did not understand repercussion of non-response	Consider adding the personalized impact: “You will lose a monthly discount of X% if you do not respond within 90 days”
Verification not worth the effort to keep the discount	Cascade has recently streamlined the PEV process. Consider emphasizing the ease of the process: “The process should take 10-15 minutes once you have your documents ready and can be done remotely”
Does not trust that privacy will be respected	Consider letting customers know they were selected for PEV just after application process and mention their agency (so it is anticipated).
Customer needed help during a temporary hardship, but is now financially stable	No action needed
Documented income will disqualify customer from assistance	No action needed

Post-Enrollment Verification - **Respondent Statistics**

PEV can have one of two goals: **customer auditing** or **program auditing**.

- Customer auditing is best achieved through full verification or through targeted verification.
- If the goal is program auditing, then PEV is a <u>means to an end</u>. The PEV sample gives us an idea of how the overall program is doing.

Customer Auditing Perspective:
303 out of 540 customers failed the audit due to various reasons (mainly non-response) - 270 had their discount removed and 33 had their discount reduced

Program Auditing Perspective:

- 12% of PEV cases (34% of cases where tier is maintained) resulted in no outcome from the agencies. **Recommend following up with agencies to understand why.**

  Among customers with a known PEV outcome (43% of all PEV):
  - 12% of participants were over-income or declined to verify
  - 7% of participants receive a lower discount than they should
  - 14% of participants receive a higher discount than they should

  Are we okay with these numbers, assuming they apply to the whole program?
  If not, then program design needs to be tweaked.

The Energy Assistance Hole

The Energy Assistance Hole

~480 non-low-income households with a high energy burden >3%

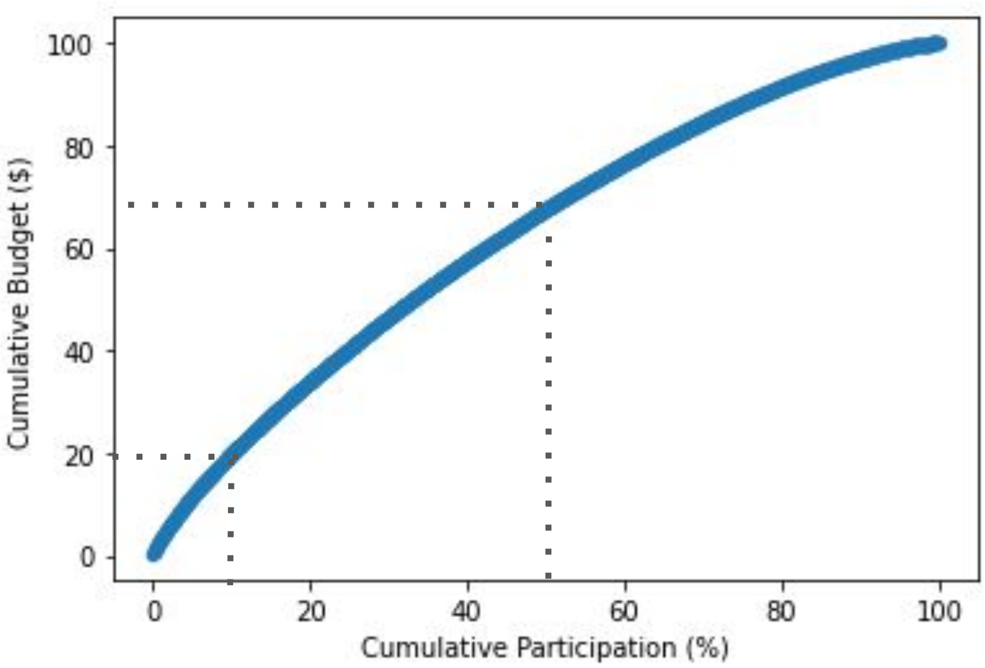
Moderate income, high gas users (1,900 Therms/yr on average)

Very few non-low-income customers (~380) disconnected from service in 2025.

Overall, this does not seem to be a major issue in Cascade's Washington service area.

Energy Efficiency

Bill Discount Program utilization



Within each income/discount tier:

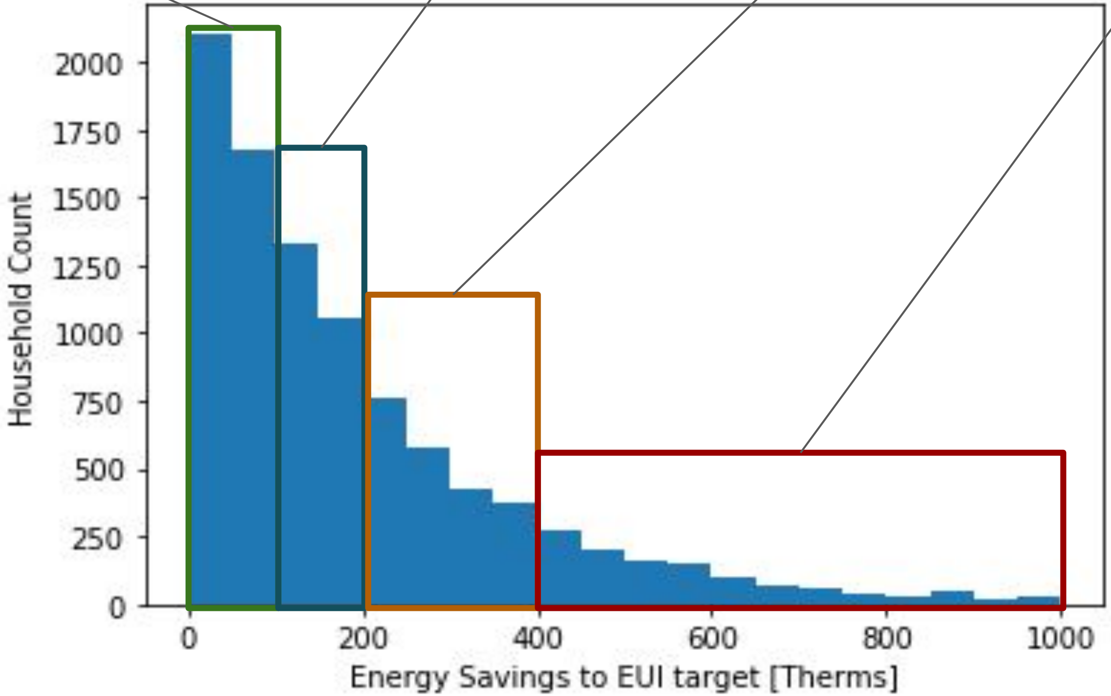
Top 10% of participants by energy use utilize 20% of budget. Their average energy use is 110% higher than the overall average energy use (1,180 therms/yr).

Top 50% of participants by energy use utilize 68% of budget. Their average energy use is 40% more than the overall average energy use (790 therms/yr).

Top 10 energy users will receive $2,000+ each in 2026

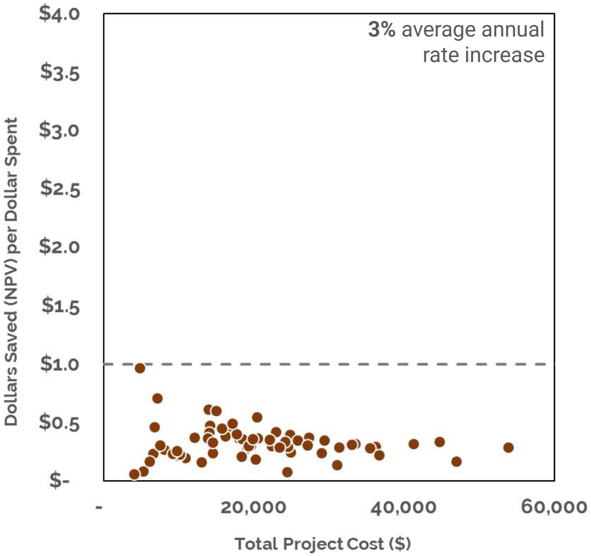
Energy Efficiency Potential (9,300 high potential, low-income households)

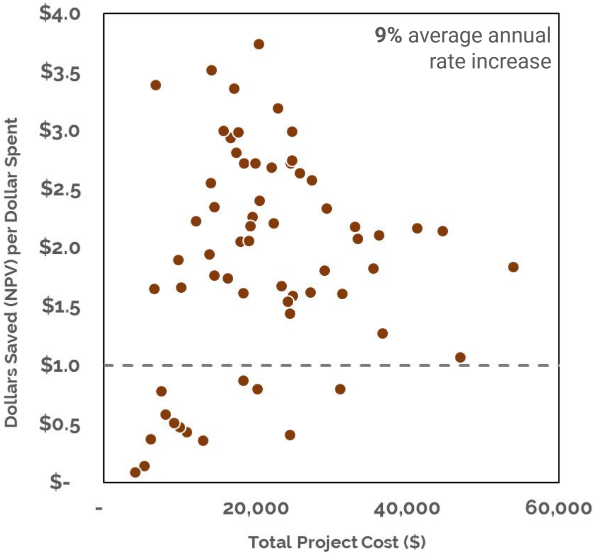
40% Smart thermostats, pipe insulation, furnace tuneups	**25%** HE water heater/furnace	**22%** Weatherization	**13%** Custom / Energy Audits



EUI target = 0.6 Therms/sq.ft

Impact of Weatherization on Bill Discounts





Average annual rate increase	Dollars saved (NPV) per dollar spent on energy efficiency
3%	$0.33
6%	$0.55
9%	$1.02
12%	$2.11

NPV assumes 6.09% discount rate
Dollars saved are split between CNGC and customer depending on their discount level

Main Takeaway: Most weatherization projects are not cost-effective (from a bill savings perspective) at current rates. The savings in energy assistance and bills resulting from energy efficiency done now, will depend on the trajectory of rates and inflation over the next 30+ years.

Energy Efficiency Potential

Challenge:
High energy users overutilize program funds while the root cause of their high energy burden remains unaddressed. There are 9,300 low-income customers (3,700 program participants) who would potentially be good candidates for energy efficiency measures, but existing low-income EE programs serve relatively few households.

Recommendations:

First step towards integrating energy efficiency with CARES is to identify and understand the high use participants.

- Consider requiring that high-use CARES participants to get an energy audit when they re-apply for the program after year 2. Cascade can reimburse the customer for the cost of the audit or work with an implementer who performs the energy audits. Consider how to incentivize customers to get an energy audit - for example, gift cards, or bill credits.

- Consider an assessment of cost-effectiveness from a bill savings perspective for weatherization in upcoming program evaluations. **Which types of homes/measures provide the most lifetime bill savings per dollar spent?**

Marketing and Outreach

Marketing Overview

Cascade currently has a very holistic broadcast marketing strategy, including emails, bill inserts, digital and streaming ads and more.

According to participant survey data, each of these channels has made a contribution to increasing program enrollments.

A Language Access Plan was completed in 2025 and many of its recommendations have been implemented.

Cascade has also been successful at auto-enrolling areas with large number of vulnerable populations (e.g. high burden customers, tribal areas)

No additional recommendations at this time.

Outreach

Challenge:
Cascade's service area is geographically expansive and customers have a variety of economic backgrounds, urban and rural households and more.

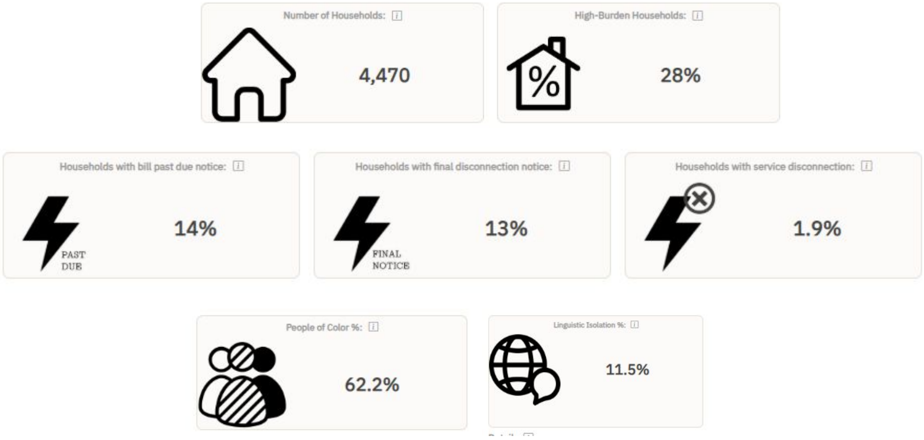
Working with local agencies is the best solution to reach customers who may be missed by current marketing efforts. But agencies in Cascade's service area are stretched thin and cannot take on additional outreach efforts on a piecemeal basis.

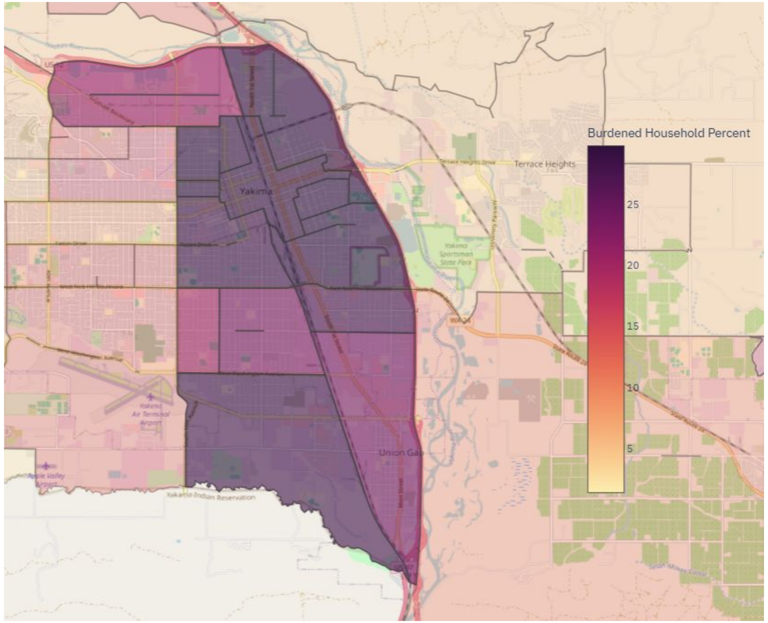
There needs to be a dedicated boots on the ground person/people who is responsible for initiating customer conversations and assisting customers with applying to Cascade's programs.

Recommendation: Establish a Low Income Outreach Specialist role. This job description would include outreach and tabling events, canvassing in low-income neighborhoods, connecting with community centers, senior centers and religious organizations, assisting customers with submitting CARES applications. This role could either be within Cascade, with agencies or with third party CBOs. The choice would depend on the appetite for having this position and relative costs.

Community Profiles

Yakima - Union Gap

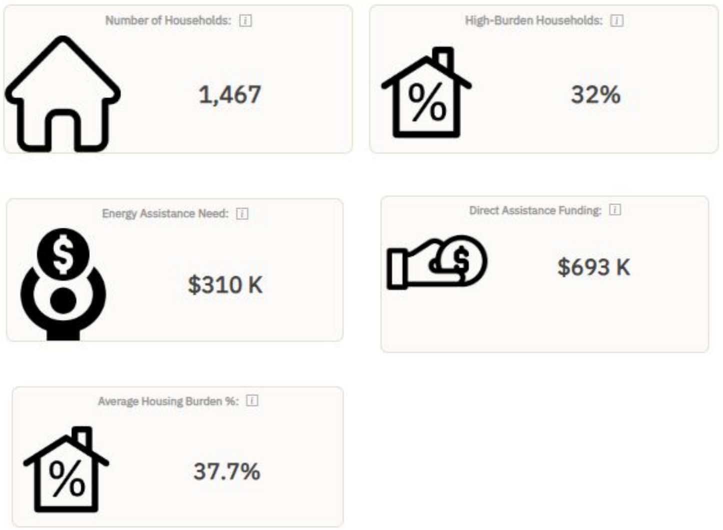


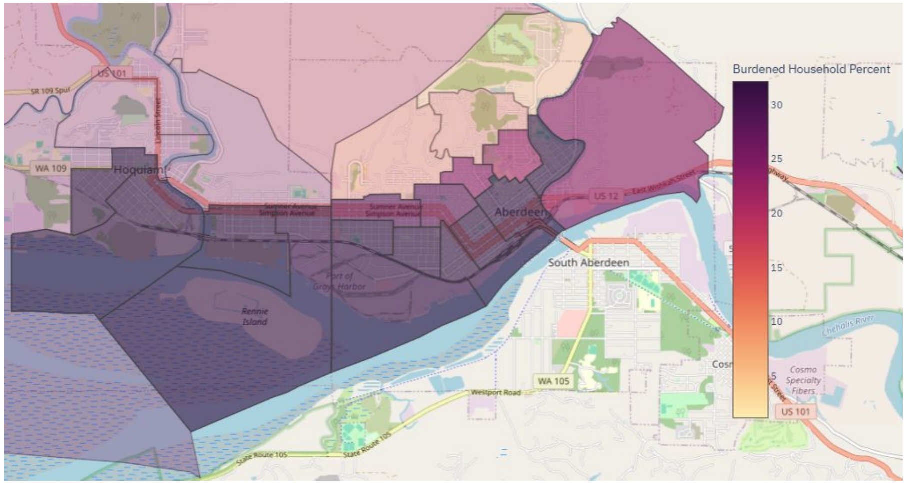


- Predominantly Latino community with large percentage of limited English speakers

- Consider outreach to local Latino-focused community organizations (like La Casa Hogar).

Hoquiam-Aberdeen Area (Grays Harbor county)



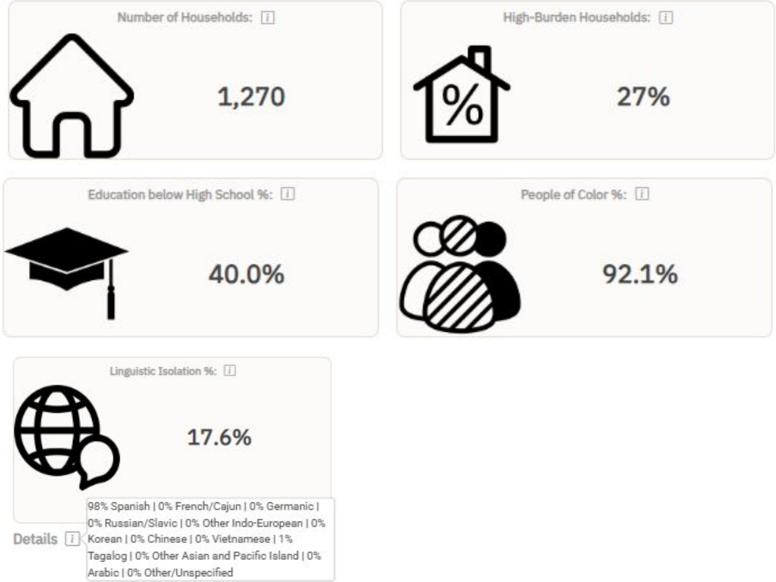


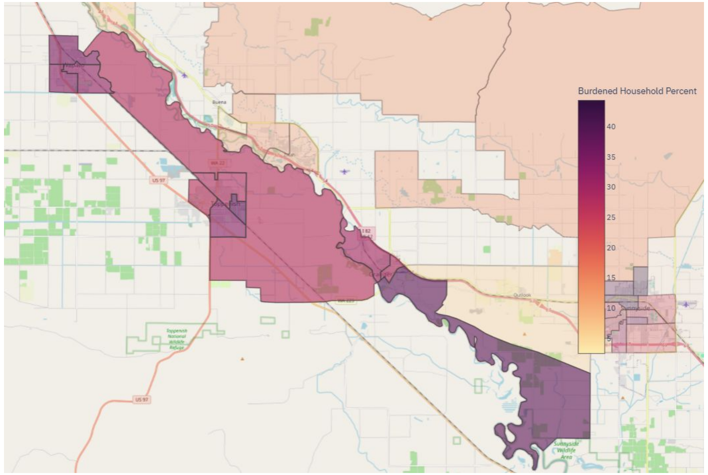
- Small town communities with high level of poverty

- Moderate participation rates - but well-served by funding

- Hoquiam and Aberdeen are compact towns and may be amenable to targeted marketing campaigns in local resource centers, movie theaters, restaurants etc.

Areas with large farmworker populations (Wapato-Toppenish)



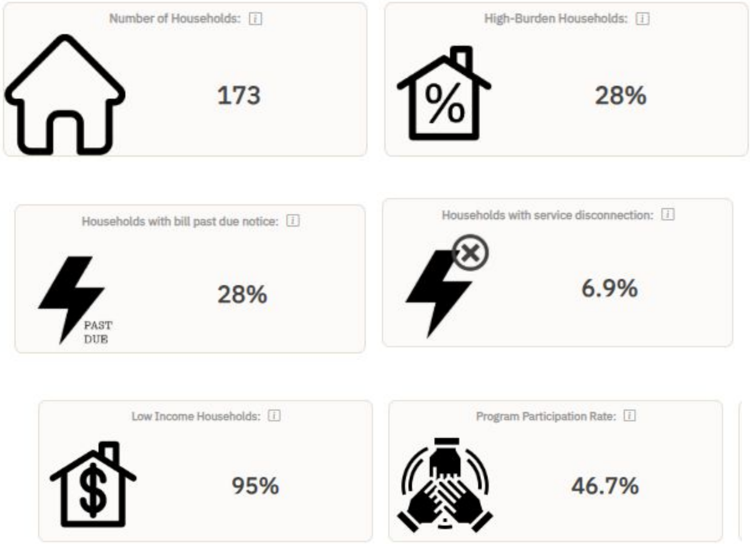


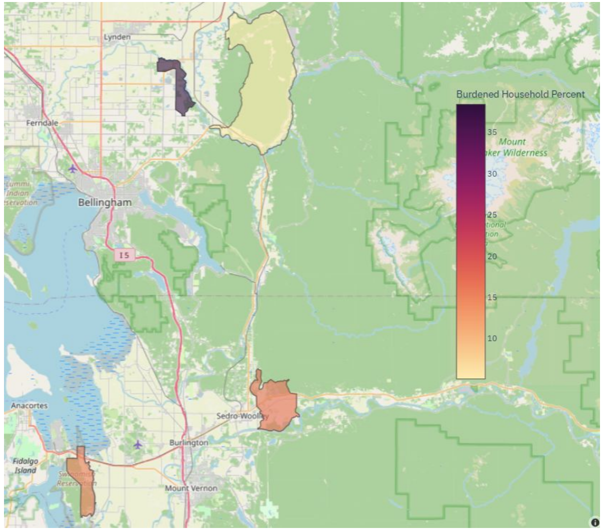
- Likely many customers with seasonal income - lowest monthly incomes coincide with highest gas bills

- High level of linguistic isolation - mainly Spanish. Wapato-Toppenish area is also a census-designated tribal area

- Appears well-served by programs in general, but potential for collaboration with local farmworker advocacy groups (Northwest Community Action Center and OIC could provide feedback on best approach)

Census-designated tribal areas





- Wapato-Toppenish area already described earlier.

- Tribal areas in NW Washington have highest burden and disconnection rates in service area

- 47% participation (higher than average). Consider auto-enrollment - most customers in these areas are income-eligible.

Main Takeaways - Energy Burden Assessment

- Cascade's Washington customers are relatively higher income with moderate gas usage. This is reflected in a generally low gas burden. Approximately **8% of Cascade's Washington customers suffer from a high gas burden** (gas bills exceed 3.5% of household income)
- The CARES Discount Program has been ramping up successfully and along with other assistance programs, will meet **119% of the energy assistance need** for Cascade's customers in 2025.
- High level recommendations in this assessment:
    - **CARES Discount:** Maintain current discount levels. Revisit discount levels when cumulative rate increases exceed 20%.
    - **Seasonal gas burden:** Market the Budget Pay Plan more aggressively and target higher enrollment to avoid winter bill shock.
    - **Arrearages/Disconnections:** Get feedback from agencies about the referral process and customer follow-ups.
    - **Energy Efficiency:** Leverage energy audits to identify the root cause of high gas burden.
    - **Post Enrollment Verification:** Consider changes to PEV communications to encourage higher response rates.
    - **Other:** Consider a dedicated low-income outreach role.