

# State of Wisconsin Department of Administration Division of Energy

Focus on Energy Statewide Evaluation  
Year 1 Low-income Program Evaluation  
Report: Volume 1

Revised: September 9, 2002

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# State of Wisconsin Department of Administration Division of Energy

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Year 1 Low-income Program Evaluation  
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## 1. REPORT SUMMARY

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This report summary highlights the research approach and the key findings of the first year evaluation efforts for Wisconsin's low-income programs and the Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star Program (Targeted HPWES). The first year findings are based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.<sup>1</sup> These Year 1 findings are being used as a baseline to identify issues in need of further exploration in Years 2 and 3.

### 1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMS

The low-income programs consist of three individual programs: The Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP), the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and the Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star Program (Targeted HPWES). While Targeted HPWES is technically a residential program, it is a logical extension of the low-income weatherization program and, as such, was evaluated along with the other low-income programs.

The WHEAP and WAP programs are administered by the Department of Administration (DOA) and local agencies. (Agencies can administer both programs or only one of the programs.) These two programs are long running programs (over 20 years) that serve low-income households up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level<sup>2</sup>. Targeted HPWES is a new program being offered through the residential administrator for Focus that seeks to expand weatherization services to low-income households that are just over the income eligibility requirements for WAP. Specifically, the program targets households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level.

### 1.2 EVALUATION PLAN SUMMARY

The evaluation will take a longitudinal approach to measuring program impacts and changes over the three-year evaluation timeframe. The evaluation will review the programs to reinforce areas of the programs that are working well, identify areas that could potentially be improved, and review other issues suggested to the evaluators by state and local agency staff. The four performance measures established by the 2000 Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group comprise the foundation of the evaluation research.

This first year of the evaluation consisted of a process evaluation of the programs, measurement of non-energy benefits, policy analysis, and tracking and database

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3 of this report for a more complete description of the limitations of the year 1 evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin statute s.16.385 limits eligibility for WHEAP and WAP to households at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Federal eligibility for LIHEAP and weatherization is households at or below 150 percent of federal poverty level or 60 percent of area median income, whichever is higher. In Wisconsin, 150 percent of federal poverty level is lower than 60 percent of area median income; so fewer households meet the Wisconsin income eligibility criterion than are eligible under federal rules. Certain other households may be considered eligible for LIHEAP by federal law and by Wisconsin statute s.16.384. These categorically eligible households amount to less than one percent of all households' eligibility determination in Wisconsin (*Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group Report*, December 2000. Prepared by Bobbi Tannenbaum, Energy Center of Wisconsin, for Steven Tryon, Energy Service Bureau, Division of Energy).

management. Since this is a three-year longitudinal evaluation, these efforts will be repeated in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation as well. In addition, other evaluation tasks to be completed in future years include a billing analysis for the weatherization program (Year 3), refrigerator metering and on-site visits (Year 2), an arrearage analysis (Year 3), and a market characterization and GIS mapping (Years 2 and 3).

### 1.3 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Chapters 4 and 5 of this report present in more detail key findings and results of the Year 1 evaluation activities. Specific key findings from Year 1 include:

- *The program administration is running efficiently.*
- *Participants are highly satisfied with the programs.* On a 5-point scale, with 1 being “not at all satisfied” and 5 being “very satisfied,” the average satisfaction rating with both WAP and WHEAP was over 4.
- *At least a quarter of program participants report both energy and non-energy benefits as a result of the program, as well as improvements in their quality of life.* These program benefits and improvements are realized fairly equally across the different income levels participating in the programs.
- *Compared to similar low-income households that did not participate in the programs, program benefits are helping lead participants toward greater sustainability.*
- *The programs are serving those most vulnerable, but areas of improvement were identified.* WHEAP is serving a higher percentage of vulnerable and high-energy burden households than is WAP. Evaluation findings also indicate that the newly implemented Targeted HPWES program represents an opportunity to help households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level, who face similar affordability issues as those below 150% of the federal poverty level.
- *The type and amount of energy education provided varies widely by local agencies.* A majority of participants who reported receiving education said they now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bill, and they are more likely to report taking low-cost, no-cost actions to reduce their bills.
- *The coordination between WHEAP and WAP agencies need improvements.* As found in an earlier study conducted by the Energy Center of Wisconsin<sup>3</sup>, our interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff indicate that the current level of integration between WHEAP and WAP varies throughout the state and ranges from close cooperation to minimal cooperation.
- *Public benefits are viewed positively by WHEAP and WAP providers, and have allowed WHEAP and WAP agencies to expand their level of service.*

Based on the qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts in Year 1 of the evaluation, we have identified five areas for further exploration and consideration. In Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation, we will continue to monitor these and other issues as they arise.

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<sup>3</sup> “Wisconsin Low-Income Energy Services,” publication # 167-1, Energy Center of Wisconsin, 1997.

## 1. Report Summary

1. *Encourage increased cooperation and communication between WHEAP and WAP throughout the state.* As discussed in Chapter 4, the qualitative interviews conducted in Year 1 of the evaluation identified three issues—lack of communication and consistency in the referral and prioritization of applications from WHEAP to WAP, disagreement about who should be providing emergency furnace replacements, and frustrations about the amount of money the other program receives. Because households participating in both WHEAP and WAP appear to be making the most progress toward self-sufficiency, the evaluation believes it is imperative that the programs work smoothly together in order to maximize the programs' benefits to low-income households and society.
2. *Improve the programs' targeting and servicing of the most vulnerable and high-energy burden households.* While the programs do provide service to a significant percentage of vulnerable households (households with a disabled person, person over the age of 60, or children under 6 years of age) and high-energy burden households, there is room for improvement. WHEAP is serving a higher percentage of these households than is WAP. In particular, WAP is providing services to a significantly lower percent of renters, who are generally less well off than homeowners. There is also substantial evidence that the 150% to 200% of poverty level category contains many vulnerable, high-energy burden households that are not eligible to participate in either WHEAP or WAP. However, the Targeted HPWES program should be able to partially remedy WAP and WHEAP's inability to reach households that are just over the income eligibility requirements.
3. *Explore methods for and the effectiveness of increasing energy education.* Interviews with WHEAP and WAP agencies found great variation in the amount of energy education provided by the local agencies. However, the participant surveys found that almost all respondents who reported receiving energy education believed that they now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bills and they have been able to use this knowledge to help reduce their utility bills. Furthermore, those receiving energy education reported implementing more no-cost or low-cost actions than those who did not report receiving education through the program. The evaluation recommends promoting specific education through the programs, exploring the possibility of state-sponsored documentation and specific monies to support this effort.
4. *Consider revising the way WHEAP direct payment benefits are delivered to households.* The analysis suggests methods of payment to increase clients' self-sustainability include proactive, co-payment arrangements (only about ten percent of WHEAP participants reported participating in this type of arrangement) and periodic program payments over the heating season, rather than one lump-sum payment.
5. *Address, as able, administrative and funding barriers limiting program performance.* Slightly more than a quarter of interviewed WHEAP agencies said that funding for administrative support was still a problem for them (though it has improved since Public Benefits). For WAP, the expansion of services through Public Benefits has resulted in increased waiting lists because of it taking longer to weatherize each home. Increased waiting lists affect customer satisfaction. Both WHEAP and WAP agencies also noted that they encounter funding barriers, limiting education efforts.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This Executive Summary provides an overview of the research approach and the key findings of the first year evaluation efforts for Wisconsin's low-income programs and the Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star Program (Targeted HPWES).

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS

The low-income programs consist of three individual programs: The Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP), the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and the Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star Program (Targeted HPWES). While Targeted HPWES is technically a residential program, it is a logical extension of the low-income weatherization program and, as such, was evaluated along with the other low-income programs.

The WHEAP and WAP programs are administered by the Department of Administration (DOA) and local agencies. (Agencies can administer both programs or only one of the programs.) These two programs are long running programs (over 20 years) that serve low-income households up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level<sup>4</sup>. WHEAP applications are used as the base application for the WAP program, even if a different local administrator oversees the WAP program. The WAP program also relies heavily on WHEAP outreach efforts. A primary goal of the low-income programs is to deliver services in a way that contributes to making households energy self-sufficient, within the constraints of state and federal eligibility limits. From the perspective of DOA management staff and the LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group, a long-term goal of the low-income programs is, as a result of the programs, to improve the energy sustainability of households.<sup>5</sup> As discussed later in Chapter 4, there is not complete agreement about this goal of improving energy sustainability among WHEAP and WAP agencies.

Targeted HPWES is a new program being offered through the residential administrator for Focus that seeks to expand weatherization services to low-income households that are just

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<sup>4</sup> Wisconsin statute s.16.385 limits eligibility for WHEAP and WAP to households at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Federal eligibility for LIHEAP and weatherization is households at or below 150 percent of federal poverty level or 60 percent of area median income, whichever is higher. In Wisconsin, 150 percent of federal poverty level is lower than 60 percent of area median income; so fewer households meet the Wisconsin income eligibility criterion than are eligible under federal rules. Certain other households may be considered eligible for LIHEAP by federal law and by Wisconsin statute s.16.384. These categorically eligible households amount to less than one percent of all households' eligibility determination in Wisconsin (Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group Report, December 2000. Prepared by Bobbi Tannenbaum, Energy Center of Wisconsin, for Steven Tryon, Energy Service Bureau, Division of Energy.).

<sup>5</sup> Sustainability—the ability of a household to make full and timely payments of energy bills over an extended period of time without resorting to actions that cannot be maintained or are otherwise undesirable. For example, paying energy bills and not purchasing necessary medicine is an example of an action that cannot be maintained for a long period of time without an undesirable consequence. Another way of thinking of sustainability is affordability over time. A bill or bills may be affordable in the short term but not over an extended period of time. Sustainability is meant to add the dimension of time to the concept of affordability. (Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group Report, December 2000. Prepared by Bobbi Tannenbaum, Energy Center of Wisconsin, for Steven Tryon, Energy Service Bureau, Division of Energy.)

over the income eligibility requirements for WAP. Specifically, the program targets households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level. The program was designed to build upon the existing infrastructure of state low-income services by using WAP agencies as the foundation for service delivery and WHEAP and WAP agencies as the primary source of referrals for the program.

## **2.2 EVALUATION PLAN SUMMARY**

The evaluation will take a longitudinal approach to measuring program impacts and changes over the three-year evaluation timeframe. The evaluation will review the programs to reinforce areas of the programs that are working well, identify areas that could potentially be improved, and review other issues suggested to the evaluators by state and local agency staff.

The four performance measures established by the 2000 Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group comprise the foundation of the evaluation research. These performance measures will assess the programs':

- Effectiveness in targeting and servicing those who are vulnerable or have a high energy burden
- Interactions with other programs
- Impact on a client's ability to sustain payment of home energy bills
- Impact on clients' lives, including non-energy benefits.

This first year of the evaluation consisted of a process evaluation of the programs, measurement of non-energy benefits, policy analysis, and tracking and database management. Since this is a three-year longitudinal evaluation, these efforts will be repeated in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation as well. In addition, other evaluation tasks to be completed in future years include a billing analysis for the weatherization program (Year 3), refrigerator metering and on-site visits (Year 2), an arrearage analysis (Year 3), and a market characterization and GIS mapping (Years 2 and 3).

## **2.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE YEAR 1 EVALUATION FINDINGS**

The findings presented in this report only reflect the evaluation activities conducted in Year 1 of the three-year longitudinal evaluation. These findings are being used as a baseline to identify issues in need of further exploration in Years 2 and 3.

The first year findings are based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Below we discuss the implications of each type of data collection method and the types of individuals surveyed using each method.

### **2.3.1 Qualitative Data Collection Activities**

Qualitative data collection is exploratory in nature and is useful for identifying the range of issues and views held by respondents, as well as reasons for these views. It is important to recognize that, because the data reflect opinions and perceptions of the groups interviewed, statements made by respondents may not always be factually correct. We note these instances in the report whenever factual discrepancies are known. Also, findings from qualitative data cannot be generalized to the population, since a small number of in-depth

## 2. Executive Summary

interviews were conducted. Therefore, the sample design does not represent the population of interest in a statistical sense.

Qualitative data collection activities for Year 1 included:

- Interviews with Division staff.
- Interviews with 18 local WHEAP agency staff.
- Interviews with 9 local WAP agency staff, 10 WAP subcontractors, and all 5 WAP regional coordinators.
- Interviews with 5 utility representatives and 6 bulk fuel vendors.

### 2.3.2 Quantitative Data Collection Activities

Quantitative results can be used to estimate the percentage of the population that engages in some behavior, has certain characteristics, or holds certain opinions. Unlike qualitative data, quantitative data should be gathered from a sample of respondents that represents the population of interest in a statistical sense.

Quantitative data collection for the first year of the evaluation was conducted with six different groups—three participant groups and three non-participants groups. In order to capture the effects of participation in the different low-income program combinations, a participant survey was conducted with a sample of customers who have only participated in WHEAP (referred to as WHEAP-only), a sample of customers who have participated in both WHEAP and WAP (referred to as WHEAP and WAP), and a sample of customers who have only participated in WAP (referred to as WAP-only). (Please see *Volume II, Appendix D-H* for a more complete description of the sample design and data collection methodology. *Volume III, Appendix I* presents the response rates to the quantitative surveys.) Quantitative data collection activities for Year 1 included:

- Statewide telephone survey of WHEAP-only participants (n=400).
- Statewide telephone survey of WAP-only participants (n=198).
- Statewide telephone survey of households participating in both WHEAP and WAP (n=399).
- Statewide telephone survey of households that had applied for but had not received WAP services (n=153). Most of these households had already participated in WHEAP. Therefore, the main purpose of the WAP-waitlisted results was to provide a true baseline of household conditions prior to receiving WAP services in order to measure the incremental benefits over the longitudinal study of WAP over WHEAP.
- Statewide telephone survey of eligible non-participating households of either WHEAP or WAP (n=209).
- Statewide telephone survey of households potentially eligible for Targeted with Home Performance with Energy Star, within the 150-200% poverty level (n=254).

The evaluation will attempt to interview these same participants and non-participants in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation.

## 2.4 KEY FINDINGS

The key findings primarily focus on WHEAP and WAP, since little activity occurred during the Year 1 evaluation time period for Targeted HPWES. Chapters 4 and 5 of this report present in more detail key findings and results of the Year 1 evaluation activities. The reader is referred to *Volume II* for detailed results of all data collection activities referred to in the key findings. Specific key findings from Year 1 include:

- *The program administration is running efficiently.* Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, utility and bulk fuel vendors indicate that the programs run efficiently and without significant administrative difficulties. At the same time, areas were identified where administration could be improved, including consistency in WHEAP program administration between counties (i.e., administering non-emergency crisis funds), and closer cooperation and communication between WHEAP and WAP to improve the targeting of vulnerable and high-energy burden households.
- *Participants are highly satisfied with the programs.* On a 5-point scale, with 1 being “not at all satisfied” and 5 being “very satisfied,” the average satisfaction rating with WAP was 4.8. On this same scale, the average satisfaction ratings given to different components of WHEAP ranged from 4.2 to 4.9.
- *Program participants report both energy and non-energy benefits as a result of the program.* As a result of their participation in the programs, at least a quarter of low-income participants reported improved control of their household’s energy use and the size of their energy bill; a decrease in their utility bills (WAP participants only); a decrease in the number of times they have set up a bill payment plan or experienced a disconnect; paying more bills on time; lower levels of concern with meeting energy and non-energy bills; and a decrease in heating system and water heater problems and appliances not working (WAP participants only).
- *Program participants report improvements in their quality of life as a result of the program.* Improvements in quality of life include greater comfort and health through heating the home sufficiently in the winter; a decrease in the number of drafts (WAP participants only); fewer problems with inconsistent room temperatures or indoor air quality problems (WAP participants only); increased safety through decreased use of portable heaters, cooking stoves, and fireplaces; more money for other necessities such as food and medicine that they did without prior to participating in the program; and improved health in the form of decreased number of colds, flues or other sicknesses.
- *Program benefits and improvements are similarly realized across poverty levels.* A breakdown of participant benefits/improvements by poverty categories (below 75% and above 100% of federal poverty level) indicate that the programs’ energy and non-energy benefits are realized fairly equally across the different income levels participating in the programs.
- *Program benefits are helping lead participants toward greater sustainability.* While benefits were measured for both WHEAP and WAP, the reported impacts on sustainability are greatest among those who participated in both WHEAP and WAP (or at least WAP). The improved situation of participants compared to those households that have not participated in the low-income programs further substantiates that the low-income programs are resulting in benefits that help sustain the ability of some

households to meet their energy and non-energy bills, although external factors will always be a barrier for some households in achieving sustainability.

- *The programs are serving those most vulnerable, but areas of improvement were identified.* Of all households receiving WHEAP benefits in Federal Fiscal Year 2 (FFY02), 35% have an individual over the age of 60, 39% report a disabled member, 23% have a child under the age of 6, and 57% have an energy burden of greater than 10%. WHEAP is serving a higher percentage of vulnerable and high-energy burden households than is WAP. In FFY02, WAP served significantly fewer households with individuals over 60 years of age, households with disabled persons, those below 75% of the poverty level, and those with an energy burden greater than 10% than what were served through WHEAP. Furthermore, WAP is delivered to a much higher proportion of homeowners than renters, who are more likely than homeowners to report having difficulty meeting bills and controlling their energy use.

In addition, WHEAP and WAP agency staff and utility and bulk fuel vendors were vocal in their belief that WHEAP and WAP are not serving many households with incomes just over 150% of the federal poverty level who are not eligible for the programs. The baseline survey for Targeted HPWES supports this assertion, showing that households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level face high-energy burdens, bill payment problems, and home comfort and safety problems similar to those experienced by households below 150% of the poverty level.

- *The type and amount of energy education provided varies widely by local agencies.* Fewer than 50% of local WHEAP agency staff noted in the interviews that they provide any energy education due to reported time and budget constraints. While all WAP providers reported providing energy education, the extent of this effort also varied. A majority of participants who reported receiving education said they now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bill, and they are more likely to report taking low-cost, no-cost actions to reduce their bills.
- *The coordination between WHEAP and WAP agencies need improvements.* As found in an earlier study conducted by the Energy Center of Wisconsin<sup>6</sup>, our interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff indicate that the current level of integration between WHEAP and WAP varies throughout the state and ranges from close cooperation to minimal cooperation. Increased coordination and communication between the programs is suggested to increase efficiencies, better target the most vulnerable households, and to increase their understanding of each other's objectives.
- *Public benefits are viewed positively by those who know and understand it.* Interviews with WHEAP staff revealed that those who understand Public Benefits view it as a strength, allowing them to expand services and to target additional clients, such as electric heating households. While slightly more than a quarter of the local WHEAP agency staff interviewed said that funding for administrative support is still a problem for them, this situation has improved since Public Benefits. However, almost half of WHEAP staff were unclear about the impact Public Benefits has had on their operation.

All WAP providers interviewed and regional coordinators feel Public Benefits has increased their ability to adequately address a home's needs by providing services in

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<sup>6</sup> "Wisconsin Low-Income Energy Services," publication # 167-1, Energy Center of Wisconsin, 1997.

a more comprehensive manner. However, this has resulted in additional time and money to weatherize each home, which has had other staffing implications and resulted in fewer homes being weatherized.

## 2.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION/CONSIDERATION

Based on the qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts in Year 1 of the evaluation, we have identified five areas for further exploration and consideration. In Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation, we will continue to monitor these and other issues as they arise.

1. *Encourage increased cooperation and communication between WHEAP and WAP throughout the state.* As discussed in Chapter 4, the qualitative interviews conducted in Year 1 of the evaluation identified three issues—lack of communication and consistency in the referral and prioritization of applications from WHEAP to WAP, disagreement about who should be providing emergency furnace replacements, and frustrations about the amount of money the other program receives. Because households participating in both WHEAP and WAP appear to be making the most progress toward self-sufficiency, the evaluation believes it is imperative that the programs work smoothly together in order to maximize the programs' benefits to low-income households and society. For FFY03, the Division is asking local WHEAP and WAP agencies in each county to develop a local coordination plan. In upcoming years, the evaluation will determine what impact this plan is having on improving communication and coordination.
2. *Improve the programs' targeting and servicing of the most vulnerable and high-energy burden households.* While the programs provide service to a significant percentage of vulnerable and high-energy burden households (households with an excessively high energy burden or a vulnerable household defined as having a disabled member, member over 60, or child under 6 years of age), there is room for improvement. WHEAP is serving a higher percentage of these households than is WAP. Since WHEAP serves as the primary referral mechanism for WAP, the types of households targeted and served by WHEAP, and referred to WAP could impact the level of participation in WAP by the most vulnerable households.

One of the most frequently reported barriers to program participation found in the WHEAP/WAP non-participant survey is that a significant percent of the households interviewed are not aware of the programs (45% and 65% reported unawareness of WHEAP and WAP programs, respectively). Participant surveys indicate that the main avenue for participants learning about the programs is through word-of-mouth. Because many vulnerable households such as those that are disabled or elderly may not be connected into personal networks as well as other low-income households, the program may only be able to reach many of these most vulnerable households by more proactive outreach activities such as on-site visits (i.e., visits to the Center on Aging, meal sites, senior citizen centers, subsidized housing areas, etc.), which are an infrequently implemented outreach practice.

In addition, local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, and utility and bulk fuel providers commented on their concern for not serving ineligible households just over 150% of the federal poverty level that are vulnerable and have high energy burdens. The baseline survey for Targeted HPWES supports that households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level are vulnerable and face high-energy burdens, bill

payment problems, and home comfort and safety problems similar to those experienced by households below 150% of the federal poverty level. The Targeted HPWES program should partially remedy the programs' not reaching vulnerable, high-energy burden households just over income eligibility requirements, although the annual number of households to be weatherized under Targeted HPWES is relatively small (425 units in FFY03). Another possibility for allowing these households to receive WHEAP and/or WAP services is to consider allowing more program deductions such as medical and health care and child care expenses or changing income requirements to median income as allowed by Federal law, which in Wisconsin is higher than the statutory limit of 150% of the federal poverty level.

3. *Explore methods for and the effectiveness of increasing energy education.* Interviews with WHEAP and WAP agencies found great variation in the amount of energy education provided by the local agencies. However, the participant surveys found that almost all respondents who reported receiving information on how to reduce energy use in their home—or properly maintain their heating, cooling, or other equipment—believed that they now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bills and they have been able to use this knowledge to help reduce their utility bills. Furthermore, those receiving energy education reported implementing more no-cost or low-cost actions than those who did not report receiving education through the program.

Because WHEAP reaches significantly more households a year than WAP, but appears to be providing less education to participants, increased coverage for WHEAP participants is especially in need of improvement. The evaluation recommends promoting specific education through the programs, exploring the possibility of state-sponsored documentation, and the possible allocation of specific monies to support these efforts as some providers mentioned money as a barrier to providing customer education. The evaluation will continue to explore the extent of education offered and its impact over time.

4. *Explore different methods for WHEAP direct payment and expansion of service benefits.* Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff and utility and bulk fuel providers suggest that the main way the low-income programs as currently offered could be revised to increase their impact on sustaining payment is through a revision in the way WHEAP program payments are made. Most utility and bulk fuel providers and almost a fifth of WHEAP providers identified that one way the program could increase its impact on a client's ability to sustain payment of bills is through more consistent implementation of non-emergency crisis funds and a proactive, co-payment arrangement. Another aspect of the direct payment that one WHEAP agency and three utilities suggested is limiting the program's impact on sustaining payment is that the direct payment through WHEAP is placed on a client's account once a heating season. These respondents feel that this does not promote clients' ability to sustain payment because clients then do not think about their energy bill or make any payments until they are in arrears again at the end of the season. Another difficulty expressed in the interviews with the direct lump sum payment and minimal use of proactive, co-payment arrangements is that in the opinion of providers, many households rely completely on energy assistance to meet their energy bill and do not think they have any additional responsibility toward paying their bill.

## 2. Executive Summary

5. *Address, as able, administrative and funding barriers limiting program performance.* Slightly more than a quarter of interviewed WHEAP agencies said that funding for administrative support was a problem for them. It is important to note that this was more of a problem prior to the addition of Public Benefit funds. Most interviewed WAP agencies said that funding for weatherization had not been sufficient in the past, but the advent of Public Benefits changed that. However, the expansion of services through Public Benefits has staffing implications for agencies. Most agencies are meeting increased staffing needs through expanding their use of subcontractors or using subcontractors for the first time. Agencies and Coordinators also noted that Public Benefits has resulted in increased waiting lists because of it taking longer to weatherize each home. Increased waiting lists affect customer satisfaction. Both WHEAP and WAP agencies also noted that they encounter funding barriers, limiting education efforts.

### 3. INTRODUCTION

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This report presents the results of the first year evaluation efforts for the Wisconsin's low-income programs and the Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star Program (Targeted HPWES). This first year of the evaluation consisted of a process evaluation of the programs, measurement of non-energy benefits, policy analysis, and tracking and database management. Since this is a three-year longitudinal evaluation, these efforts will be repeated in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation as well. In addition, other evaluation tasks to be completed in future years include a billing analysis for the weatherization program (Year 3), refrigerator metering and on-site visits (Year 2), an arrearage analysis (Year 3), and a market characterization and GIS mapping (Years 2 and 3).

This chapter provides an overview of the Focus low-income programs, a summary of the evaluation effort, limitations of the first year evaluation findings, and the organization of the remainder of this report.

#### 3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE LOW-INCOME PROGRAMS

The low-income programs consist of three individual programs: The Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP), the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and the Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star Program (Targeted HPWES).

The WHEAP and WAP programs are administered by the Department of Administration (DOA) and local agencies. (Agencies can administer both programs or only one of the programs.) These two programs are long running programs (over 20 years) that serve low-income households up to 150% of the federal poverty level<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of DOA management staff, the WHEAP and WAP programs share the common goal of improving the energy sustainability<sup>8</sup> of low-income households and are designed to address similar barriers. As discussed later in Chapter 4, there is disagreement about the goal of improving energy sustainability among a few of the local WHEAP and WAP agencies.

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<sup>7</sup> Wisconsin statute s.16.385 limits eligibility for WHEAP and WAP to households at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Federal eligibility for LIHEAP and weatherization is households at or below 150 percent of federal poverty level or 60 percent of area median income, whichever is higher. In Wisconsin, 150 percent of federal poverty level is lower than 60 percent of area median income; so fewer households meet the Wisconsin income eligibility criterion than are eligible under federal rules. Certain other households may be considered eligible for LIHEAP by federal law and by Wisconsin statute s.16.384. These categorically eligible households amount to less than one percent of all households' eligibility determination in Wisconsin (Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures, Working Group Report, December 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Sustainability—the ability of a household to make full and timely payments of energy bills over an extended period of time without resorting to actions that cannot be maintained or are otherwise undesirable. For example, paying energy bills and not purchasing necessary medicine is an example of an action that cannot be maintained for a long period of time without an undesirable consequence. Another way of thinking of sustainability is affordability over time. A bill or bills may be affordable in the short term but not over an extended period of time. Sustainability is meant to add the dimension of time to the concept of affordability. (Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures, Working Group Report, December 2000).

### 3. Introduction

WHEAP applications are used as the base application for the WAP program, even if a different local administrator oversees the WAP program. The WAP program also relies heavily on WHEAP outreach efforts.

Targeted HPWES is a new program being offered through the residential administrator for Focus that seeks to expand weatherization services to low-income households that are just over the income eligibility requirements for WAP. Specifically, the program targets households between 150 and 200% of the federal poverty level. The program was designed to build upon the existing infrastructure of state low-income services by using WAP agencies as the foundation for service delivery and WHEAP and WAP agencies as the primary source of referrals for the program. Following is a more detailed description of each program.

#### 3.1.1 WHEAP

The Wisconsin Department of Administration Energy Services Bureau oversees the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP). This includes the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and other related programs. WHEAP provides energy assistance services to households with income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. WHEAP offers three main avenues of assistance. Ideally, each avenue is to be complimented with customer education to help customers understand how to use their energy resources more efficiently.

1. The first is direct payment to fuel providers for participating families. These benefits are structured to provide greater amounts of assistance as the level of income decreases and the energy burden increases. Payments are made directly to the fuel provider in the name of the recipient, except where there is no registered fuel provider.
2. The second intervention is crisis assistance. The two types of crisis assistance are emergency and non-emergency crisis assistance. The specific crisis services include: emergency fuel assistance to aid households facing “no-heat” situations; emergency furnace repair and replacement; counseling for energy conservation and energy budgets; and pro-active co-payment plans.
3. The third intervention is referring clients to the Weatherization Assistance Program intended to decrease the energy use in the dwelling. Typical measures include insulation of attics and sidewalls, infiltration reduction, furnace assessment, and, if necessary, furnace repair or replacement. A set percentage of 15 percent of total WHEAP funds are designated for use in weatherization.

Services are administered locally through county social services offices, tribal governments, and private non-profit or other government agencies. These local WHEAP agencies oversee client outreach and contact, and collect applicant data for the program. Once an application is entered into the WHEAP system, the Department of Administration processes the information electronically and issues payments to energy providers and notices to customers about the assistance provided. Local WHEAP agencies also handle crisis assistance applications and refer eligible households to the weatherization program.

Clients may be eligible for electric benefits as well. To be eligible, the client must have a relationship with an electric vendor that is participating in the State Public Benefits Program.

### **3.1.2 WAP**

The Division of Energy contracts with 21 agencies throughout the state to provide weatherization services. Agencies include community action agencies, housing authorities, tribes, local governments and other non-profit organizations. Weatherization benefits are available to households at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. Structures served include one- and two-story single-family homes, multi-family rental buildings, and mobile homes or trailers.

The array of energy conservation measures installed are prescriptive in the sense that if a measure is needed, it is selected for installation. With the exception of refrigerators, windows, or door replacement, the measures are installed without choices being offered to the resident. For owner-occupied dwellings, most measures are installed at no cost to the low-income family. Replacement of windows and doors are cost-shared with the owner. For rental dwellings, there may be a cost-share arrangement with the landlord for all measures. Local WAP agency staff work out this arrangement on a case-by-case basis with landlords.

The local WAP agencies deal with structural eligibility, sometimes financial eligibility (in most cases, client financial eligibility is determined by WHEAP), building assessment for energy conservation measures, and installation of the energy conservation measures. These agencies may use their own crews to perform the measures, sub-contract with contractors, or some combination of these two.

The program consists of two parts—a base program and additional services. The base program offers the same services to all eligible dwellings in the state. These basic whole-house weatherization services include insulation, infiltration reduction, furnace tune-up or replacement, compact fluorescent lamps, and some health and safety measures. The additional services are only available to dwellings located in areas served by Class A electric utilities and the service areas of cooperative and municipal utilities who have “opted in” to the Low-Income Public Benefits program. The additional measures include such items as refrigerators and air conditioning replacement.

### **3.1.3 Targeted HPWES**

Targeted HPWES provides Wisconsin residents with limited income and resources who do not qualify for assistance under WHEAP or WAP with an opportunity to increase the energy efficiency, affordability, safety, durability, and comfort of their homes. The program is targeting energy savings opportunities in existing one to four unit owner-occupied homes and one to two unit non-owner occupied rental units. Eligibility for participation is, at least initially, limited to households with income levels between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level.

Targeted HPWES is a new program being offered through the residential administrator, Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation (WECC). While this program is technically a residential program, it is a logical extension of the low-income weatherization program. As such, it was designed to build upon the existing infrastructure of state low-income services by using WAP agencies as the foundation for service delivery and WHEAP and WAP agencies as the primary source of referrals for the program.

### 3. Introduction

In order to ensure statewide allocation of the funds, WECC has divided the state into four regions. The amount allocated to each of the regions is based on the distribution of the total population in the four regions.

Initially, the primary source of program referrals is expected to come from WHEAP and WAP local agencies who have the opportunity to identify potentially eligible households. Outreach will also be made through the network of state, county, and local community organizations that serve this customer segment, as well as participating utilities. In addition, private contractors working with WECC will be able to identify and serve these customers solely or in cooperation with local agencies and groups.

Targeted HPWES will deliver this program using a whole-house approach. Low-income weatherization providers and/or whole-house providers (such as Home Performance Energy Star providers) shall deliver the whole-house energy assessment. This energy assessment will examine building shell; heating, cooling and water heating equipment; appliances; and lighting for savings opportunities. For major measures such as heating system replacements, a limited contribution shall be required from each participant. The level of contribution will depend on the income level of the participant. Health and safety testing will be provided as part of the whole-house energy assessment. The whole-house energy assessment also includes an energy educational component. The educational component consists of information on life style change options and appropriate maintenance of building shell and equipment, especially to maximize persistence of savings. Similar to the WAP program, participants are required to install all major measures.

### 3.2 EVALUATION PLAN SUMMARY

The evaluation will take a longitudinal approach to measuring program impacts and changes over the three-year evaluation timeframe. The evaluation will review the programs to reinforce areas of the programs that are working well, identify areas that could potentially be improved, and review other issues suggested to the evaluators by state and local agency staff.

A primary goal of the low-income programs is to deliver services in a manner that contributes to making households' energy self-sufficient within the constraints of state and federal limits for eligibility. A long-term goal of low-income programs is for households, as a result of these programs, to be able to better meet their energy costs on an ongoing basis without sacrificing other necessities.<sup>9</sup> The four performance measures established by the 2000 Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group are being used as the foundation of the evaluation research. These performance measures assess the programs':

- Effectiveness in targeting and servicing those who are vulnerable or have a high energy burden
- Interactions with other programs
- Impact on a client's ability to sustain payment of home energy bills
- Impact on clients' lives, including non-energy benefits.

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<sup>9</sup> Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group Report, December 2000. Prepared by Bobbi Tannenbaum, Energy Center of Wisconsin, for Steven Tryon, Energy Service Bureau, Division of Energy.

### 3. Introduction

The 2000 Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures Working Group Report also states, “The group believes that there are many households that are not income eligible for LIHEAP but still have difficulty sustaining energy payments...Performance measures should address those who need the program, not just those considered eligible.” This has been further substantiated by interviews with local program and utility/fuel providers conducted as part of the evaluation. Over a quarter of local WHEAP agency staff and a third of local WAP agency staff reported they see many applicants who are over the 150% poverty level, but are still greatly in need of assistance. The Targeted HPWES program is designed to meet the needs of those low-income households that do not meet WHEAP and WAP income eligibility requirements.

We have identified some functions or portions of functions of the evaluation that are best addressed at the program-area level because they cut across the low-income programs and focus on the low-income sector as a whole. These program-area level functions include a market characterization and GIS mapping of the low-income population (Years 2 and 3), an arrearage assessment for low-income customers (Year 3), policy analysis, and process evaluation of how the programs are working together.

In addition to the program-area-level evaluation tasks, the following evaluation tasks are being conducted for each of the programs:

1. Tracking and Database Management
  - a. Review and analysis of participant databases
2. Energy and Demand Savings (WAP program)
  - a. Billing analysis of weatherization participants
  - b. Refrigerator metering and on-site verification
3. Process Evaluation
  - a. Interviews with Division staff, local WHEAP/WAP agency staff, WECC, WAP regional coordinators
  - b. Interviews with utility representatives and bulk fuel providers
  - c. Statewide participant surveys
  - d. Statewide non-participant surveys (up to 150% and between 150-200% of the federal poverty level)
4. Measurement of Non-energy Benefits
  - a. Statewide participant and non-participant surveys.

### 3.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE YEAR 1 EVALUATION FINDINGS

The findings presented in this report only reflect the evaluation activities conducted in Year 1 of the three-year longitudinal evaluation. These Year 1 findings are being used as a baseline to identify issues in need of further exploration in Years 2 and 3.

The first year findings are based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Below we discuss the implications of each type of data collection method and the types of individuals surveyed using each method.

#### 3.3.1 Qualitative Data Collection Activities

Qualitative data collection is exploratory in nature and is useful for identifying the range of issues and views held by respondents, as well as reasons for these views. It is important to recognize that, because the data reflect opinions and perceptions of the groups interviewed, statements made by respondents may not always be factually correct. We note these instances in the report whenever factual discrepancies are known. Also, findings from qualitative data cannot be generalized to the population, since a small number of in-depth interviews were conducted. Therefore, the sample design does not represent the population of interest in a statistical sense.

Qualitative data collection activities for Year 1 included:

- Interviews with Division staff.
- Interviews with 18 local WHEAP agency staff.
- Interviews with 9 local WAP agency staff, 10 WAP subcontractors, and all 5 WAP regional coordinators.
- Interviews with 5 utility representatives and 6 bulk fuel vendors.

#### 3.3.2 Quantitative Data Collection Activities

Quantitative results can be used to estimate the percentage of the population that engages in some behavior, has certain characteristics, or holds certain opinions. Unlike qualitative data, quantitative data should be gathered from a sample of respondents that represents the population of interest in a statistical sense.

Quantitative data collection for Year 1 was conducted with six different groups—three participant groups and three non-participants groups. In order to capture the effects of participation in the different low-income program combinations, a participant survey was conducted with a sample of customers who have only participated in WHEAP (referred to as WHEAP-only), a sample of customers who have participated in both WHEAP and WAP (referred to as WHEAP and WAP), and a sample of customers who have only participated in WAP (referred to as WAP-only). (Please see *Volume II, Appendix D-H* for a description of the sample design and data collection methodology. *Volume III, Appendix I* presents the response rates to the quantitative surveys.)

### 3. Introduction

Quantitative data collection activities for Year 1 included:

- Statewide telephone survey of WHEAP-only participants (n=400).
- Statewide telephone survey of WAP-only participants (n=198).
- Statewide telephone survey of households participating in both WHEAP and WAP (n=399).
- Statewide telephone survey of households that had applied for but had not received WAP services (n=153). Most of these households had already participated in WHEAP. Therefore, the main purpose of the WAP-waitlisted results is to provide a true baseline of household conditions prior to receiving WAP services in order to measure the incremental benefits over the longitudinal study of WAP over WHEAP.
- Statewide telephone survey of eligible non-participating households of either WHEAP or WAP (n=209).
- Statewide telephone survey of households potentially eligible for Targeted with Home Performance with Energy Star, within the 150-200% poverty level (n=254).

#### 3.4 REPORT ORGANIZATION

This is *Volume I* of the *Year 1 Low-income Evaluation Report*. *Volume I* contains the Report Summary, Executive Summary, this introductory chapter, and two additional chapters. Chapter 4 summarizes the key findings of the first year evaluation activities organized by researchable question for the low-income program area, WHEAP, WAP, and Targeted HPWES programs. Chapter 5 highlights conclusions and recommendations based on first year evaluation efforts. *Volume II: Appendix A – H* presents the detailed evaluation results from the primary data collection efforts the evaluation has conducted. Findings presented in Chapter 4 are based on the detailed results presented in *Volume II*. *Volume III: Appendix I – J* provides the survey response rate tables and data collection instruments used in the first year evaluation efforts.

## 4. KEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

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This chapter presents key findings and results of the Year 1 evaluation activities. The results are organized by the following four sections: (1) Low-income program area, (2) WHEAP, (3) WAP, and (4) Targeted HPWES. In each section, results are organized by, but not limited to, the researchable questions that were presented in the Low-income and Targeted HPWES Detailed Evaluation Plans (DEP). This section summarizes and synthesizes the detailed results of Year 1 evaluation activities found in *Volume II*. The reader is referred to *Volume II* for detailed results of all data collection activities referred to in this chapter.

### 4.1 LOW-INCOME PROGRAM AREA

The low-income evaluation explicitly planned for program-area level activities because there are several issues that need to be explored not at the program-specific level, but across the entire low-income program area. The entire low-income program area includes both WHEAP and WAP and to some extent Targeted HPWES. Because Targeted HPWES was just beginning in the first year evaluation period, results for this program and its coordination with the existing low-income programs are minimal. However, the role of Targeted HPWES in serving low-income households and coordinating with the existing low-income programs will be explored in depth in the second and third years of the evaluation.

As mentioned above, key findings at the low-income program area are organized by the researchable questions. This low-income program area section first presents the researchable questions and findings related to process issues, followed by policy analysis issues.

#### 4.1.1 Year 1 Process Evaluation

This section presents researchable questions and findings related to process evaluation issues from Year 1. The researchable questions addressed are:

- How effective are the programs in targeting and servicing those who are vulnerable or have a high-energy burden?
- What is the current level of integration between WHEAP and WAP, and how does this level of integration impact the program?
- How do low-income households who are participating in the low-income programs differ from low-income households who are not participating in the programs?
- How do the programs, working together and separately, affect customers' ability to sustain payment of energy and non-energy bills?
- How do the programs, working together and separately, influence customers' quality of life?
- How has Public Benefits affected the low-income programs' services and delivery?
- Are there differences in realized program benefits by poverty level of respondents?

4. Key Findings and Results

**How effective are the programs in targeting and servicing those who are vulnerable<sup>10</sup> or have a high-energy burden?**

Among households at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, the programs are serving a sizeable percentage of the households who are vulnerable or have a high-energy burden. WHEAP is serving a higher percentage of these households than WAP.

As shown in Table 4-1, in Federal Fiscal Year 1 (FFY01), WHEAP was doing a better job at targeting and servicing households with a high-energy burden, and households with elderly or disabled person. It was not doing as well targeting and servicing households with children under the age of 6 years old.

**Table 4-1 Wisconsin WHEAP Participation Statistics by Vulnerable Groups**

	<b>Federal Fiscal Year 2001 (number of households)</b>	<b>Percent of households served (2001)</b>
Overall	117,769	
Elderly	38,336	32.5%
Disabled*	40,593	34.5%
Children < 6 years of age	28,005	23.8%
Energy burden >10%	58,617	50.0%

Source: Department of Administration, FFY 2001 Year-end Report, and FFY01 WHEAP database

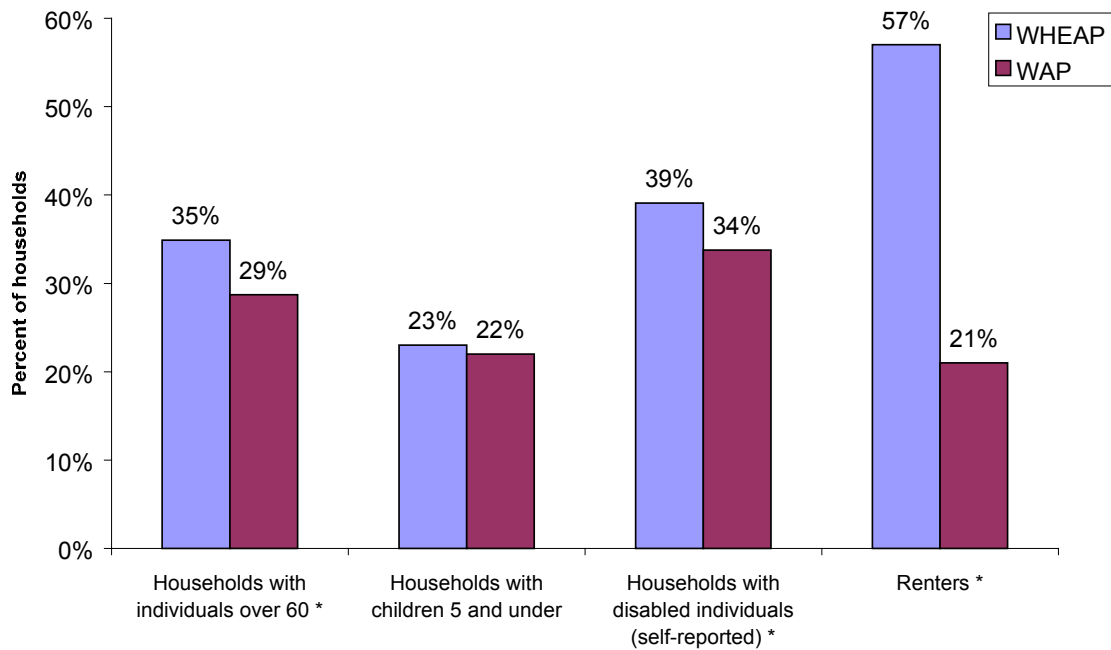
\* This category is self-reported as there is no formal definition of disable.

Since WHEAP serves as the primary referral mechanism for WAP, the types of households targeted and served by WHEAP, and referred to WAP could impact the level of participation in WAP by the most vulnerable households. As shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, this is the case. Through March of FFY 02, WAP served fewer households with individuals over 60 years of age, households with disabled persons, those below 75% of the poverty level, and those with an energy burden greater than 10% than what were served through WHEAP.

Furthermore, WAP is delivered to a much higher proportion of homeowners than renters, who are more likely than homeowners to report having difficulty meeting bills. The dynamic driving the difference in the proportion of renters participating in WAP may be that there are fewer obstacles to weatherizing the homes for homeowners than renters. As found in our interviews with local WAP agency staff and Department of Administration Regional Coordinators, these staff did express some concern that WAP is under-servicing rental units because of barriers they face in weatherizing multi-family housing such as reluctance of landlords to contribute the requested co-payment. The evaluation will focus on barriers to serving renters in the second year of the evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> Vulnerable person—Three groups of people are defined as vulnerable: households with persons who are elderly (60 years or over), households with children under six, and households with a disabled person. (Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures, Working Group Report, December 2000).

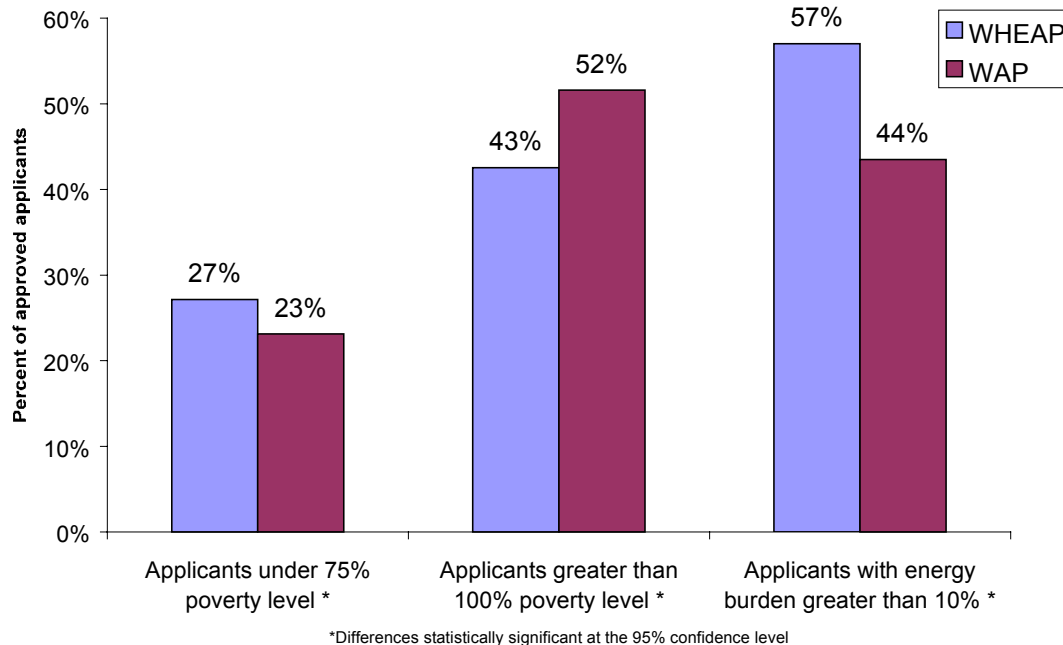
**Figure 1. Target Groups Serviced by Program (FFY 02)**



\*Differences statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

Source: WHEAP and WisWAP databases, FFY02 through March 02

Figure 2. Applicant Poverty Level and Burden by Program (FFY 02)



Source: WHEAP and WisWAP databases, FFY02 through March 02

The small percentage of total WHEAP households that can be weatherized a year stresses the importance of the referral process between WHEAP and WAP, especially because interviewed WAP agencies reported minimal to nonexistent outreach efforts, relying on the outreach efforts of WHEAP agencies. In interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, no consistent referral and prioritization of applications process was identified, although it was indicated that vulnerable households are given prioritization for weatherization. These findings suggest that there is room for the programs to work closer together in order to make sure the households weatherized each year are maximizing program benefits by identifying the most vulnerable, high energy burden households that are most in need of energy efficiency improvements.<sup>11</sup>

Another vulnerable group identified through interviews are those income ineligible households just over the 150% poverty level. Local WHEAP and WAP agency staff and utility and fuel providers were very vocal about their belief that the programs are also not serving many vulnerable and high energy burden households who are just over 150% of the federal poverty

<sup>11</sup> For FFY03 WHEAP and WAP agencies are being required to devise a coordination plan at the local level. Some areas, such as Milwaukee County, had already begun this process as of the end of FFY02. In the remaining evaluation years, the evaluation will assess the effectiveness of these plans in improving communication and coordination between agencies.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

level<sup>12</sup> and, therefore, are not eligible for the programs. Agency staff reported the income eligibility limit is very difficult for them because they see many customers who are in need of assistance, but not income eligible.

*“When you look at their situation, they should be eligible. Two people working, but don’t bring home enough after taxes. They’re normally just barely over”* (WHEAP provider).

There were two suggested solutions to the income eligibility guidelines: increase the number of deductions that can be taken into account when determining income (i.e., include deductions such as medical expenses and child care); and increase the eligibility requirement to 200% of the poverty level, which is the income eligibility requirement for many other social programs.

The baseline survey for Targeted HPWES supports the evaluation findings that households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level are vulnerable and face high-energy burdens, bill payment problems, and home comfort and safety problems similar to those faced by households below 150% of the federal poverty level. A large percentage of baseline Targeted HPWES respondents reported high levels of concern with meeting winter heating costs (76%) and monthly electric costs (66%). Two-thirds reported paying 25% or more of their bills late. Ten percent reported being disconnected in the last two years (this is about twice the rate of disconnections as found among low-income program participants). Ten percent reported moving in the last five years in order to lower their utility bills. The baseline Targeted HPWES respondents were also found to be experiencing unfavorable quality of life situations and uncomfortable or unsafe housing conditions. Examples of these situations include:

- Temperature variations by room (81%)
- Drafts in the home (73%)
- Limiting the purchase of food or other necessities in order to pay utility or fuel bills (50%)
- Being uncomfortable in their home because they kept the heat lower to reduce heating costs (46%).

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<sup>12</sup> Wisconsin statute s.16.385 limits eligibility for WHEAP and WAP to households at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Federal eligibility for LIHEAP and weatherization is households at or below 150 percent of federal poverty level or 60 percent of area median income, whichever is higher. In Wisconsin, 150 percent of federal poverty level is lower than 60 percent of area median income; so fewer households meet the Wisconsin income eligibility criterion than are eligible under federal rules. Certain other households may be considered eligible for LIHEAP by federal law and by Wisconsin statute s.16.384. These categorically eligible households amount to less than one percent of all households’ eligibility determination in Wisconsin (Wisconsin LIHEAP Performance Measures, Working Group Report, December 2000).

***What is the current level of integration between WHEAP and WAP, and how does this level of integration impact the programs?***

As found in an earlier study conducted by the Energy Center of Wisconsin<sup>13</sup>, our interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff indicate that the current level of integration between WHEAP and WAP varies throughout the state and ranges from close cooperation to minimal cooperation. The qualitative interviews conducted in Year 1 of the evaluation identified three issues—lack of communication and consistency in the referral and prioritization of applications from WHEAP to WAP, disagreement about who should be providing emergency furnace replacements, and frustrations about the amount of money the other program receives. Each of these is discussed in more detail below.

One-fourth of the WHEAP agency staff and one-half of the WAP agency staff thought the communication and coordination of these programs should be improved. As currently functioning, WHEAP serves as the base application program through which the majority of WAP applicants are referred, and WAP agencies conduct little to no outreach. Two local WHEAP agency staff said they have no ability to see how WAP serves the clients they identify for weatherization and one WHEAP staff member felt this limits their ability to do proactive case management. Likewise, two local WAP agency staff believe they are not given the necessary assistance from WHEAP in identifying and referring those households that could most benefit from weatherization services. As one WAP provider suggested:

*“Program coordination needs to be improved. It should really be two sides of the same coin. They should be combined into one program if possible because the way it is now, everyone is watching out for their own programs” (WAP provider).*

While the communication between the two programs is very limited in many counties, we discovered some areas where communication is quite high and has increased the performance of the programs in the providers’ opinions. For example, one local WAP agency staff person attends weekly meetings at the local WHEAP agency and has worked with them closely to help establish guidelines of WHEAP applicants that should be referred to WAP. In turn, this WHEAP agency knows more about the WAP process, how customers are served, and has input into the prioritization of WAP applications.

Interviews with utility companies also found that the utility low-income managers believe WHEAP and WAP need to work more closely together. In the opinion of the majority of these utility staff, this is the largest area of improvement they recommended for the low-income programs. The utility representatives believe that the current inconsistency of communication and cooperation between the two programs is limiting the programs from optimally helping customers toward self-sufficiency.

*“Both WHEAP and WAP are doing well, but the goal needs to be getting these programs working better together...” (utility company).*

*“The real problem is that there isn’t much coordination between energy assistance and weatherization. There is a big gap there that needs to be corrected. We need to take a holistic approach to meeting customer needs” (utility company).*

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<sup>13</sup> “Wisconsin Low-Income Energy Services,” publication # 167-1, Energy Center of Wisconsin, 1997.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

Fuel vendors also perceived some lack of cooperation between WHEAP and WAP. All of the fuel vendors interviewed work closely with WHEAP representatives, but over half were not aware of the services available through WAP. One provider said that he approached the WHEAP agency with homes that he felt were in need of energy efficiency improvements and was told that there was nothing that could be done about it. The majority of the fuel vendors said that they believe making these homes more energy-efficient could increase the benefits they receive through WHEAP and help these households have a better chance of maintaining energy bills. At a minimum, bulk fuel providers said they would like the residents to be educated on how to make homes that are in need of weatherization as energy efficient as possible, such as putting plastic wrap on windows during the winter and adjusting thermostats when the home is unoccupied.

*“It is wasted money when a house is in such disrepair. It is taxpayer money at use and I just hate pumping in fuel to see it fly out the roof” (bulk fuel provider).*

A second issue reported by some WAP agencies regarded emergency furnace replacements. Without any specific questions regarding emergency furnace replacements, four of the nine WAP agencies brought this up as a discussion point with the interviewers. Agencies commented that in the past, they were able to do emergency furnace replacements with utility funds, but currently Public Benefits mandates that WHEAP oversee furnace replacements. These agencies believe furnace replacement services have been, *“taken away through Public Benefits.”* These agencies believe WAP is in a better position to do furnace replacements than WHEAP, although one agency expressed he did not want to have to be-on call 24 hours a day. *“It would be better for customers if we did emergency replacements because we could do a better job, but I don’t want to have to be available 24 hours a day.”* However, as one WAP agency pointed out, WAP is not an emergency program. If the program is not an emergency program, but does intervene in crises situations, this could cause some confusion for customers. No WHEAP agencies raised this specific issue in interviews. This will be investigated in the Year 2 interviews with WHEAP and WAP agencies.

In interviews, a few WHEAP and WAP agency staff mentioned that they think the other program is receiving too much funding and their own program should receive more. One WHEAP agency thought weatherization was getting too much additional funding at the expense of energy assistance. Two WAP agencies thought all the funding should go to WAP, since weatherization makes a home more energy-efficient and thus enables households to maintain their energy bills. It was not clear to these WAP agency staff how WHEAP helps customers maintain their energy bills.

#### ***How do low-income households who are participating in the low-income programs differ from low-income households who are not participating in the programs?***

While all eligible households are at or below 150% of the federal poverty level and face common issues of affordability, there do appear to be systematic differences between households that are participating in the low-income programs and those who are not.

Table 4-2 shows that in several ways, those not participating in the program appear to be slightly better off than those participating in the program. More non-participants than participants own their own home, have obtained at least a high school education or the equivalent, are married, report better physical health, and worked for pay. In terms of actual income, non-participants appear similar to participants with approximately a quarter of respondents falling below 75% of the poverty level.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

However, non-participants are not as well off concerning their self-reported energy burden, which is significantly higher than that of participants. Participants' lower energy burden may be somewhat a result of the program as the majority of WAP participants report having lower energy bills as a result of the program and some WHEAP participants report taking actions to lower their energy bill as a result of education received through the program.

Finally, while participants represent slightly higher percentages of vulnerable households in terms of those with disabled members, elderly members, or children under the age of 6, there is still a significant percent of non-participant households that fall into these categories as well.

The more distinct difference between participants and non-participants appears to be in their attitudes and behaviors. As shown later in Table 4-6, higher percents of non-participants than participants are reporting unsustainable behavior to meet energy bills such as keeping their heat lower than desired, doing without some necessities to pay energy bills, and moving in with others because they could not pay their bills. Furthermore, WHEAP/WAP non-participants report a lower level of concern with meeting bills (Table 4-4) than participants, which may be a result of their 'doing without' behavior. This attitude and behavior difference is reinforced by responses to a question on the non-participant survey where respondents were asked how much they agreed with the statement, *"If people could just do without a few things, they should be able to have enough to pay their electric and fuel without getting help from government-run programs."* Half of the WHEAP/WAP non-participants agreed with this statement.

**Table 4-2. Comparison of Low-income Participants and Low-income Non-participants**

	<b>Low-income Participants (WHEAP-only, WHEAP and WAP, WAP-only) (n=997)</b>	<b>Low-income WHEAP and WAP Non-participants (n=209)</b>
Rent*	56%	43%
At or below 75%	27%	28%
At least a high school graduate*	67%	81%
Energy burden greater than 10%*	46%	66%
Living in home older than 1950	36%	42%
Married*	27%	43%
Report their physical health as poor*	20%	7%
Did <u>not</u> work for pay last month*	42%	16%
Percent of households with a disabled member*	39%	16%
Percent of households with children under 6	23%	20%
Percent of households with member over 60*	35%	16%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant and non-participant surveys

\* Differences statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

##### ***How do the programs, working together and separately, affect customers' ability to sustain payment of energy and non-energy bills?***

In the participant surveys, households reported experiencing energy and non-energy bill benefits as a result of their participation in the program(s).<sup>14</sup> Survey results presented in Table 4-3 and Table 4-4 indicate that households participating in WAP (and WHEAP) have experienced the greatest improvements toward sustainability of energy and non-energy bills.

Participant surveys asked households several questions regarding their dealings with energy and non-energy bills and how the program has affected their situation with these bills. Table 4-3 summarizes participants' perceptions of how the program has influenced their behavior and attitude toward energy and non-energy bills. Participants across all program combinations reported improved control of their household's energy use and the size of their energy bill as a result of the program; a decrease in the number of times they have set up a bill payment plan or experienced a disconnect since participating in the program; a decrease in the payment of bills late; and higher levels of concern with meeting energy and non-energy bills prior to participating in the program(s). In addition, the majority of participants receiving WAP services said that these services had decreased their utility bills. This decrease in utility bills would also indicate that participation in WAP is an important step in reaching self-sufficiency in energy bills.

A breakdown of program benefits by poverty category (see Volume II) also indicates that the energy and non-energy benefits of the programs are realized across the different income levels participating in the program fairly equally. For example, those households above 100% of the poverty level reporting energy and non-energy bill benefits resulting from the program are similar to the percent at or below 75% of the poverty level reporting energy and non-energy bill benefits.

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<sup>14</sup> The longitudinal study of customers will allow the evaluation to track these benefits over the three-year evaluation period.

Table 4-3. Program Effect on Payment of Energy and Non-energy Bills

Energy and non-energy bill indicator (as a result of participation)	WHEAP and WAP	WHEAP- only	WAP-only
<i>CONTROL</i>			
Since participation, increased control over household energy use since participating in program(s)	52% (n=389)	30% (n=391)	56% (n=196)
Since participation, increased control over size of energy bill since participating in program(s)	46% (n=384)	32% (n=381)	53% (n=191)
<i>IMPACT ON BILL PAYMENT</i>			
<i>(If discussed bill payment plans in past)</i> Experienced a decrease in the number of times they discussed bill payment plans or options with someone at utility or fuel company	46% (n=125)	29% (n=121)	49% (n=61)
<i>(If experienced disconnection in past)</i> Experienced a decrease in the number of times their fuel/energy was disconnected	64% (n=23)	24% (n=27)	71% (n=10)
Would pay fewer bills on time if they had not participated in program(s)	45% (n=389)	48% (n=385)	36% (n=190)
Utility bill lower due to weatherization services	64% (n=353)		77% (n=168)
<i>CONCERN</i>			
More concerned with meeting winter heating costs <u>before</u> participating in program(s)	40% (n=388)	47% (n=390)	41% (n=194)
More concerned with meeting monthly electric costs <u>before</u> participating in the program(s)	35% (n=387)	41% (n=394)	33% (n=195)
More concerned with meeting mortgage or rent costs <u>before</u> participating in program(s)	21% (n=298)	29% (n=310)	21% (n=169)
More concerned with meeting food costs <u>before</u> participating in program(s)	18% (n=388)	26% (n=393)	18% (n=197)
More concerned with meeting medical and health expenses <u>before</u> participating in program(s)	23% (n=371)	31% (n=371)	23% (n=190)

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey

The non-participant survey (which serves as a control group for participants in the programs) also asked households about their dealings with energy and non-energy bills. Table 4-4 compares participants' self-reported current behavior and attitudes toward energy and non-energy bills with non-participants' self-reported current behavior and attitudes. A higher percent of participants report having control over their household energy use and the size of their energy bill, and are experiencing fewer disconnects than non-participants.

**Table 4-4. Participant Bill Behavior and Attitudes Compared to Non-Participants**

Energy and non-energy bill indicators	Participants			Non-participants	
	WHEAP and WAP (n=399)	WHEAP-only (n=400)	WAP-only (n=198)	WAP-waitlisted (n=153)	WHEAP and WAP (n=200)
<i>CONTROL</i>					
Have control over energy use	84%	71%	79%	60%	62%
Have control over energy bill	59%	51%	60%	35%	37%
<i>IMPACT ON BILL PAYMENT</i>					
Discussed bill payment plans or options with someone at utility or fuel company	31%	34%	37%	49%	22%
Experienced utility or fuel disconnection	5%	6%	5%	9%	7%
Pay 25% or more bills late	32%	43%	42%	47%	30%
<i>CONCERN</i>					
Concerned with meeting winter heating costs	67%	73%	59%	78%	51%
Concerned with meeting monthly electric costs	60%	69%	59%	71%	43%
Concerned with meeting mortgage or rent costs	60%	69%	65%	71%	53%
Concerned with meeting food costs	57%	63%	53%	61%	44%
Concerned with meeting medical and health expenses	61%	69%	60%	70%	57%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant and non-participant surveys

***How do the programs, working together and separately, influence customers’ quality of life?***

Surveys with participants validate the opinions expressed by WHEAP and WAP agency staff in interviews that households are experiencing improved quality of life as a result of their participation in the program(s).<sup>15</sup> Households participating in both WHEAP and WAP reported the greatest improvements in their quality of life resulting from the program, although improvements are seen for all program combinations.

Table 4-5 summarizes customers’ perceptions of how the program has influenced their households’ quality of life. Reported improvements in participants’ quality of life include

<sup>15</sup> The longitudinal study of customers will allow the evaluation to track these benefits over the three-year evaluation period.

greater comfort and health through heating the home sufficiently in the winter; increased safety through decreased use of portable heaters, cooking stoves and fireplaces; more money for other necessities such as food and medicine that they did without prior to the program; fewer participants living without a telephone; fewer participants reporting a temporary housing situation or being homeless; and improved health in the form of decreased number of colds, flues or other sicknesses. Furthermore, the majority of participants who reported a decrease in these unfavorable condition(s) in the last two years said that their situation had improved because of the program(s).

**Table 4-5. Program Effect on Quality of Life**

Quality of Life Indicator	WHEAP and WAP (n=399)	WHEAP-only (n=400)	WAP-only (n=198)
Percent improvement <sup>16</sup> since program among those being uncomfortable in home because they kept the heat lower	48%	26%	44%
Percent improvement since program among those using portable kerosene heaters or portable electric heaters for heat	28%	17%	16%
Percent improvement since program among those using a cooking stove or fireplace for heat	15%	9%	11%
Percent improvement since program among those limiting their purchase of food, medicine or other necessities	33%	25%	25%
Percent improvement since program among those that did not have a telephone	13%	20%	14%
Percent improvement since program among those who had to move in with other people because they could not pay the rent or mortgage or utility bills	2%	6%	1%
Percent improvement since program among those living in an emergency shelter or similar housing situation	1%	2%	1%
Percent improvement since program in those homeless	3%	1%	2%
Those experiencing unfavorable condition that said their participation in program(s) improved the situation	83%	78%	69%
Percent reporting decreased colds, flues or other sicknesses since participating in the program	27%	13%	24%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey

The non-participant survey also asked households about their quality of life. Table 4-6 compares the current quality of life indicators of participants with non-participants. The improved situation of participants compared to non-participants further substantiates that the low-income programs are resulting in improved quality of life for participants. More non-participants report being uncomfortable in their home because they keep the heat lower than

<sup>16</sup> Percent improvement is defined as the change in the overall percent who reported having a problem before participating in the program(s), but do not report having the problem since participating in the program

they would like. More non-participants are also heating less safely with portable heaters or fireplaces, are doing without a telephone, and have experienced an unfavorable housing condition such as having to move in with others.

**Table 4-6. Participant Quality of Life Compared to Non-Participants**

<b>Current Quality of Life Indicator</b>	<b>Participants</b>			<b>Non-participants</b>	
	<b>WHEAP and WAP (n=399)</b>	<b>WHEAP-only (n=400)</b>	<b>WAP-only (n=198)</b>	<b>WAP-waitlisted (n=153)</b>	<b>WHEAP and WAP (n=209)</b>
Uncomfortable in home because they kept the heat lower	12%	20%	16%	57%	30%
Of those uncomfortable in home, use portable kerosene heaters or portable electric heaters for heat	8% (n=247)	13% (n=199)	11% (n=116)	37% (n=81)	29% (n=63)
Of those uncomfortable in home, use a cooking stove or fireplace for heat	6% (n=246)	7% (n=199)	7% (n=118)	31% (n=81)	21% (n=63)
Limit their purchase of food, medicine or other necessities	22%	25%	18%	54%	22%
Without or disconnected from telephone service	2%	8%	3%	28%	15%
Moved in with other people because they could not pay the rent or mortgage or utility bills	0%	2%	1%	10%	5%
Lived in an emergency shelter or similar housing situation	0%	1%	1%	3%	1%
Homeless	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant and non-participant surveys

#### ***How has Public Benefits affected the low-income programs' services and delivery?***

Those local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, WAP subcontractors and utility and bulk fuel vendors who are familiar with Public Benefits view the addition of Public Benefits as a strength, allowing them to expand services and target additional clients, such as electric heating customers.

Almost two-fifths of the local WHEAP agency staff interviewed think that funds made available through Public Benefits has helped WHEAP funding limitations and provided them with more resources to do customer education, proactive case management, and help customers move toward self-sufficiency through assistance with electric bills. However, slightly over one-half of the interviewed WHEAP agency staff appeared confused about Public Benefits as a source of additional funds and how to take advantage of and administer Public Benefit funds. This misunderstanding or lack of awareness of available Public Benefits funds could be hampering the use of these additional funds and their effectiveness in WHEAP.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

*“I haven’t made adequate use of Public Benefits because I find it confusing...It is hard for me to get used to it and easy to forget about it. It’s also confusing how some utilities are participating and some aren’t. It would be helpful to have a training discussing available options and what other counties are doing.” (WHEAP agency)*

WAP agencies, their managing Regional Coordinators, and WAP subcontractors view the expansion of the program through Public Benefits funds positively. There is a consensus that Public Benefits funds allow homes to be served in a more comprehensive, whole-house manner and that this results in safer, more comfortable homes with larger energy savings.<sup>17</sup> Agencies also think the more comprehensive approach makes a larger difference in customers’ ability to pay energy and non-energy bills.

*“In the past the program was just a band-aid, but now we are making houses more comfortable, safe and saving energy. Now we are doing the full package. It is so much better. In the past, we could only do minor repairs, but now we are really improving houses” (WAP agency).*

*“Our grantees love it despite the change. Public Benefits makes it totally different than doing other Federal Grants. It allows us to pay a tremendous amount of attention to providing appropriate support, training, and services. It also serves as the cornerstone for the agencies’ other housing programs” (WAP Regional Coordinator).*

*“I am very pleased with how the program runs. There is always room for improvement, but really the program is definitely headed in the right direction. Not that it was ever bad, but it is really delivering better services to customer now more than ever” (WAP subcontractor).*

At the same time, all WAP agencies with the exception of one who had an expanded service territory since Public Benefits said they are weatherizing fewer homes as a result of Public Benefits. Six of these respondents also noted that per unit costs since Public Benefits had approximately doubled. A researchable issue for Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation will be this trade-off between weatherizing fewer homes more completely versus weatherizing more homes.

Despite the benefits of Public Benefits, WAP agencies and Regional Coordinators reported several difficulties they are encountering as a result of the expansion in funding and measures. These include difficulties in hiring adequate staff, longer waiting lists (waiting lists range from 1 month to 1 year and average 5-6 months at interviewed agencies), the inability to serve more homes because more time is spent on each home, and a slight increase in

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<sup>17</sup> Public Benefits has increased a whole-house approach in terms of a greater ability to address electrical measures through WAP (although some prior utility weatherization programs did install some electrical measures). While some providers reported that the program has allowed a more whole-house approach to diagnosing homes through blower door and pressure diagnostic testing, program managers report that WAP was using blower doors prior to Public Benefits and pressure diagnostic testing is an outgrowth of blower door work and has been in development in Wisconsin for several years. At the same time, program managers note that the sophistication and thoroughness with which WAP agencies have used these tools has been inconsistent. Public Benefits may or may not be furthering the natural development of these techniques (there is evidence that it is from the provider interviews). The evaluation will continue to assess this issue throughout the evaluation period.

4. Key Findings and Results

customer complaints because of waiting lists and new staff that are delivering weatherization services. In order to meet much of the program expansion resulting from Public Benefits, WAP agencies report either using subcontractors for the first time or increasing their use of subcontractors. Interviews with subcontractors found that there are many private sector firms specializing in some of the installation measures that are willing to meet the increased workload of Public Benefits.

In interviews with utility and fuel vendors, most bulk fuel vendors were not aware of and did not perceive any changes due to Public Benefits. The utility companies interviewed were aware and knowledgeable about Public Benefits. Utility companies acknowledged that the extra electric assistance was nice for their customers, but was not of an amount to make a significant difference in their opinion.

One utility was essentially happy with Public Benefits as a service, but was dissatisfied with how it was distributed across the regions. This utility said they contribute a fair amount more than they are able to apply back into their community. This individual was specifically referring to the amount of money another region receives compared to his region. This individual understood the fact that the concentration on households in need was significantly higher in this other region, but still felt the money put in from their community should come back to their community.

*“We’ve contributed close to \$\_\_ Million and only get \$\_\_ Million back. I would like to see the money coming back to the folks in our service territory.” (Utility)*

Last, Targeted HPWES is made possible through Public Benefits. As discussed above, there is substantial evidence that households between 150% and 200% of the poverty level are in need of weatherization services that are now available to them through Public Benefits.

***Are there differences in realized program benefits by poverty level of respondents?***

The participant survey results were analyzed for respondents above and below 75% of the poverty level and above and below 100% of the poverty level. This break-down was conducted to test two hypotheses relating to the program goal of sustainability: 1) those below 75% of the poverty level are too poor to move toward sustainable behavior; and 2) those above 100% of the poverty level will make the greatest progress toward sustainability because of their higher income.

Table 4-7 presents some of the benefits reported by respondents below 75% of the poverty level and above 100% of the poverty level. The most striking finding is that the program benefits appear to be fairly similarly realized by participants below 75% of the poverty level and participants above 100% of the poverty level. In fact, for many of the benefits asked about, a higher percent of those below 75% of poverty level reported the benefit. This indicates that households both at the lower and upper ends of the eligible income scale face similar affordability and energy issues and the program has delivered benefits to households at all income levels to help them move toward self-sustainability.

Table 4-7. Program Benefits by Poverty Category

Self-reported Benefits After Program Participation	Participants below 75% of the poverty level	Participants above 100% of the poverty level
<i>CONTROL</i>		
More control over energy use *	25% (n=448)	34% (n=295)
More control over size of energy bill	28% (n=440)	32% (n=286)
<i>IMPACT ON BILL PAYMENT</i>		
Pay more bills on time due to the program *	58% (n=438)	41% (n=296)
Now less likely to limit food and other necessities in order to pay bills *	30% (n=444)	25% (n=294)
<i>CONCERN</i>		
Now less concerned with winter heating costs *	54% (n=445)	41% (n=298)
Now less concerned with monthly electric costs *	51% (n=426)	34% (n=283)
Now less concerned with medical costs **	35% (n=378)	28% (n=219)
Now less concerned with mortgage or rent *	37% (n=448)	23% (n=303)
<i>COMFORT</i>		
Increased comfort in winter after participation	29% (n=446)	31% (n=303)
<i>CHANGES AMONG WAP PARTICIPANTS</i>		
Lower utility bills from WAP after participation *	71% (n=225)	64% (n=152)
Fewer drafts *	55% (n=248)	48% (n=169)
More consistent room temperatures **	53% (n=245)	46% (n=167)
Fewer mildew problems	15% (n=243)	12% (n=169)
Fewer heating system problems	47% (n=250)	41% (n=167)

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey

\* Differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

\*\* Differences are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level

## 4. Key Findings and Results

### 4.1.2 Year 1 Policy Analysis

This section presents researchable questions and findings related to policy analysis issues from Year 1. The researchable questions addressed are:

- As currently offered, can the programs have a positive impact on sustaining payment and at what level can they be sustained?
- How effective is the current level of customer education in reducing energy consumption and should additional customer education be pursued?
- What is the proper interplay and interaction between weatherization and energy assistance benefits?

***As currently offered, can the programs have a positive impact on sustaining payment and at what level can they be sustained?<sup>18</sup>***

Customer survey results show the low-income programs as currently offered are having some positive impact on participants' ability to meet energy and non-energy bills. Furthermore, these impacts appear to be occurring at all income levels. Although recipients claim fewer disconnects and more control over energy bills, there is still room for improvement to move more participating households toward sustaining payment of energy and non-energy bills. For example, between 32% and 43% of program participants are still reporting paying 25% or more of their bills late. Over half of all program participants are still reporting high level of concerns with meeting winter heating bills, monthly electric costs, mortgage or rent, and other necessities such as housing, food, and medical expenses. These issues will be further examined in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation.

Interviews with WHEAP and WAP providers and utility and fuel providers suggest that the main way the programs as currently offered could be revised to increase their impact on sustaining payment is through a revision of the way WHEAP program payments are made. WHEAP agencies are allowed flexibility with how they choose to administer non-emergency crisis assistance funds. Interviews with local WHEAP agency staff found that some local agencies use crisis assistance funds to offer proactive co-payment plans to their customers and some do not. Participant surveys found that only a small percent of WHEAP participants—just over ten percent—report having participated in a proactive, co-payment arrangement plan. Of those that had, satisfaction with the arrangement plan was high (above a 4 on a 5-point scale).

Many of the WHEAP staff interviewed that discussed proactive, co-payment arrangements expressed the belief that this type of arrangement helps people get into the habit of paying their bills and taking responsibility for meeting bills on an on-going basis.

*“The goal is to reduce the arrearage to zero before the next fuel season. This can really help families not get behind the game so they have a better chance of sustaining*

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<sup>18</sup> Our interviews with DOA staff revealed there is some disagreement among local agencies that a realistic goal of the programs is to improve the energy sustainability of low-income households. One weatherization agency interviewed clarified their understanding of their goal, saying it was to “provide services in a cost-effective and efficient manner.” Understanding of program goals will be examined in more depth in years 2 and 3 of the evaluation.

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*themselves. What it also does is gets them in the habit of making monthly payments” (WHEAP provider).*

Another aspect of the direct payment that one WHEAP agency and three utilities suggested is limiting the program’s impact on sustaining payment is that the direct payment through WHEAP is placed on a client’s account once a heating season. These respondents feel this payment schedule does not promote clients’ ability to sustain payment because they then do not think about their energy bill or make any payments until they are in arrears again at the end of the season.

*“Now we receive the Energy Assistance payment in a lump sum. Depending on the timing of the payment, there is a tendency on the part of low-income households to see a credit on their account and then not worry about their utility bill again for the next couple of months...What happens is they end up not paying their bills October to December and then they are back in arrears by the end of the heating season sometime between January and April. I would like to see the payment spread out over the year” (utility company).*

However, one utility company strongly objected to a spread out payment because of the increased administrative burden of multiple payments.

Two other program modifications WHEAP and WAP agency staff suggested to promote sustainability were closer integration of WHEAP and WAP (discussed above) and increased education efforts (discussed below).

It is important to note that most providers (agencies and fuel providers) acknowledged, even with the above suggested program delivery modifications, that for some households the program can have a positive impact on moving them toward self-sufficiency, while others will need continued subsidy. Furthermore, providers believe that there is no magical approach to improving self-sufficiency and each individual household’s needs have to be considered. What was important to the providers is that it is not the households’ attitude that is the main driver of whether or not they move toward self-sufficiency, but the household’s situation. For example, a few providers are concerned that there is a segment of the population that wants to ‘exploit’ social programs and not move toward self-sufficiency even though they are able. For this type of household, providers advocate benefit delivery modification in order to promote able households toward self-sufficiency. Providers also said they believe that there is also a large segment that wants to move toward self-sufficiency and just needs some extra assistance to reach it. For this sector, providers also think a different benefit delivery mechanism can be helpful as it makes this type of household feel better about themselves and helps them develop good habits.

***How effective is the current level of customer education in reducing energy consumption and should additional customer education be pursued to reduce low-income customers’ energy consumption and control their utility costs?***

Interviews with WHEAP and WAP agencies found great variation in the amount of customer education provided by the local agencies. While they see value in providing energy education, less than half of the local WHEAP agency staff said that they provide customer education because of time and budget constraints. These agencies explained that the intake of applications tends to be frenzied during the winter heating seasons, leaving administrators very little time to spend on extended education. Also, several agency staff said their budgets

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only allow a certain amount for administrative costs, thereby limiting the amount of staff time that can be spent on education.

Two of the WHEAP agencies that were interviewed said they make education enough of a priority that they have found ways around time or budget constraints. One prepares education materials for clients during the summer (although some agencies are not open during the summer). Another said they just put in longer hours to ensure that clients are properly educated.

While all interviewed WAP agencies reported providing some customer education, the extent of this effort varied widely despite the fact that 4 of the 5 WAP regional coordinators believe education is very important. In fact, three of these WAP regional coordinators felt education is one of the areas most in need of improvement. Some WAP agencies specifically said that they provide limited educational materials, and no written documents, because they are not reimbursed by the state for education efforts. In addition, interviewed WAP subcontractors who deliver many of the weatherization services to customers throughout the state also reported providing some, but limited, education to customers.

Participant surveys found that a higher percent of WAP participants reported receiving information to reduce energy use in their home than respondents who only participated in WHEAP (less than half of WHEAP-only participants compared to almost three-quarters of WAP participants). The most important finding from participant surveys is that almost all respondents who reported receiving information on how to reduce energy use in their home or properly maintain their heating, cooling or other equipment reported that they now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bill. The majority also reported they have been able to use this knowledge to help reduce their utility bill. In addition, all participants were asked if they had taken several no-cost/low-cost actions to reduce their energy consumption. When the reports of low-cost actions is compared for those who said they received education and those who did not, for every action but one, a higher percentage of respondents who received energy education said they had taken an action than those who did not receive energy education.

**Table 4-8. Comparison of Energy Efficiency Actions Taken by Participants Who Reported Receiving and Not Receiving Energy Education**

Energy Efficiency Actions	Participants Receiving Education (n=585)	Participants Not Receiving Education (n=366)	Percent Difference Between Groups
Lowered water heater temperature *	48%	28%	20%
Lowered heating thermostat *	69%	51%	18%
Use AC less/fans more *	69%	56%	13%
Use drapes *	84%	72%	12%
Turn off appliances when not in use *	96%	91%	5%
Wash laundry in cold water	64%	60%	4%
Turn off lights when not in use	99%	99%	0%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey

\* Differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

##### ***What is the proper interplay and interaction between weatherization and fuel assistance benefits?***

The proper interplay and interaction between weatherization and fuel assistance benefits is a coordinated WHEAP and WAP effort that:

- Makes low-income homes as energy-efficient as possible,
- Educates households how to maintain energy efficiency,
- Helps households catch-up on arrears, and
- Promotes households maintaining regular energy bill payments.

In an arena of limited funding and administrative barriers, the path for the programs to accomplish the above is challenging. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter and in the recommendations chapter, the programs can increase their progress toward the above through optimizing the referral process between WHEAP and WAP, improving the level of coordination and cooperation between the programs, increasing the level and consistency of energy education, exploring innovative use of WHEAP funds to promote households paying off arrears and maintaining bill payments on a regular basis, and providing a follow-up to weatherization services to ensure participants are properly maintaining equipment.

#### **4.2 WISCONSIN HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

This section presents researchable questions and findings specific to the WHEAP program, including:

- How is WHEAP administered by local agencies?
- What is the level of participant satisfaction with WHEAP services?
- How effective are WHEAP outreach efforts?
- How does WHEAP work with other low-income programs and services?
- Does WHEAP face any administrative, program or funding barriers?
- What other services are being offered through WHEAP besides direct payment assistance and what is the correct role of these services?
- How do WHEAP participants differ from repeat WHEAP participants?
- What barriers to participation does WHEAP face?

##### ***How is WHEAP administered by local agencies?***

Based on interviews with local WHEAP agency staff, WHEAP participants, and utility and fuel vendors, the first year evaluation findings indicate that WHEAP is a well-run program. As discussed later, program participants report a very high level of satisfaction. Utility and fuel vendors also indicated that they believe WHEAP runs efficiently and without significant administrative difficulties. In fact, one multi-state utility representative, who deals with other low-income programs, uses Wisconsin's system as an example to evaluate other programs.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

*“I consider Wisconsin an example of a very good program and hold it up as an example. Their use of technology and administration make it extremely effective. They are very forward thinking and aggressive in getting the program technically and administratively streamlined. They are very efficient and this results in fewer customers getting disconnected” (utility company).*

At the same time, areas were identified where WHEAP administration could be improved including consistency in WHEAP program administration between counties, services offered and coordination and communication with WAP.

Interviews with WHEAP providers found great variation in the way that WHEAP is administered by local agencies. Differences across WHEAP agencies include the simple mechanics of administering the program such as the number of applications processed; number of employees working with the program; how employees work with the program (whether they exclusively administer WHEAP or administer other social programs as well); and whether they are open during the summer months.

The main difference in WHEAP administration appears to be driven by how the agency staff view the program. Interviews indicate that the agencies use three main approaches to administering the program. The first approach views the main goal of the program as administering as much direct payment assistance as possible. These agencies see the program as only a financial assistance program. A second approach views the program's main goal as increasing client self-sufficiency. For these agencies, direct payments are viewed as only one way to achieve that goal. This group tends to be more proactive in education, budgetary counseling, and co-payment plans. A third group, while believing self-sustainability is the optimum result of the program, report being disillusioned and frustrated by their clients and administer the program primarily as a monetary program. This third group often provides some additional services, but not to the extent of the second group.

Agency attitudes also affect how they administer crisis funds. Agencies that tend to view the program as primarily a monetary program use the majority of their crisis funds to serve those that run completely out of fuel or are threatened with a disconnect. Those who see self-sufficiency as a program goal tend to use their crisis assistance to promote co-payment arrangements for customers to reduce their arrearages and budgetary and education services to help them maintain payment of bills.

Differences in program administration across agencies is also seen in the participant surveys as different percentages of respondents report receiving varying levels of services. For example, only a third of WHEAP participants living in the Southeastern region reported receiving energy education compared to over half of respondents living in the Northern, Southern and Western regions. The issue that must be addressed is whether the different approaches distribute program benefits disproportionately across the state. For example, the majority of customers receiving energy education said this information helped them better manage their energy bills. Because fewer Southeastern participants reported receiving energy education than participants in other regions, it is possible that the difference in agency administration is resulting in Southeastern respondents not gaining as much control of their energy use as other respondents. In fact, the smallest percent of WHEAP-only respondents reporting increased control of their household energy use as a result of the program were found to be from the Southeastern region. The percent of respondents that reported receiving more assertive WHEAP benefits – particularly budget counseling and proactive crisis assistance co-payment arrangements also varied by region.

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Utility and fuel vendors also noted differences in administration and suggested that while some flexibility is good, added consistency to the program could increase its benefits. Two utility and fuel vendors feel that the program should be enforced uniformly between counties. These vendors said that while there are benefits to the flexibility the state allows counties, the state should provides more guidance and rules for administration. One utility feels that “community planning” should be more enforced so that county agencies are more uniform in their administration of the program.

*“It’s good to have flexibility, but they need to have a plan. The state needs to make sure they sit down and think about their resources and how they are going to best use them.”*

The issues above are not all-inclusive but illustrate the differences across local WHEAP agencies and raise the issue of whether the state should increase standardization. While one utility, one fuel vendor and one WHEAP agency believe standardization could help agencies in administering crisis funds, Public Benefits funds, and customer education efforts to best achieve program goals of self-sufficiency, others believe that their clientele are distinct enough that they need flexibility to best meet their clients’ needs and administer the program effectively within their agency. The evaluation will continue to explore the issue of standardization versus flexibility in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation.

**What is the level of participant satisfaction with WHEAP services?**

Participant surveys show that customer satisfaction with all services offered through WHEAP is very high. Table 4-9 shows that average satisfaction with all WHEAP services is over a 4 on a 5-point scale (1=not at all satisfied, 5=very satisfied). Furthermore, there was no significant difference in satisfaction by renters versus homeowners or by geographic region.

**Table 4-9. Satisfaction with WHEAP Services Received**

<b>Service(s) Received</b>	<b>WHEAP-only participants Satisfaction rating</b>	<b>WHEAP and WAP participants Satisfaction rating</b>
Direct Payment—Fuel	4.7 (n=341)	4.8 (n=369)
Direct Payment—Electric	4.6 (n=332)	4.7 (n=341)
Budget Counseling	4.4 (n=36)	4.5 (n=42)
Co-payment Arrangement	4.2 (n=34)	4.5 (n=44)
Emergency Heating System	4.9 (n=13)	4.7 (n=67)
Emergency Fuel Fill	4.9 (n=19)	4.7 (n=32)
Other Crisis	4.6 (n=12)	4.2 (n=12)
WAP Referral	4.4 (n=45)	4.8 (n=231)

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey (Satisfaction is rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 being not at all satisfied and 5 being very satisfied.)

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If a respondent reported a level of satisfaction of 3 or less with any of the services received, they were asked what could have made them more satisfied with the service. The main improvement noted was to increase the payment amount. Other improvements mentioned by a few respondents were more helpful service provider staff and more accessible service provider staff.

##### ***How effective are WHEAP outreach efforts?***

In their annual outreach plans and in interviews, local WHEAP agency staff reported conducting multiple outreach efforts for the program including running newspaper advertisements, radio and television public serving announcements, posting posters through their service territories, working with school and senior citizen centers, and going to meal sites. Participant surveys found that the main avenue that the majority of low-income households (35% of WHEAP participants) first learned about WHEAP was through personal relationships such as friends, neighbors, or relatives. This was followed by social agencies and programs, showing that the program's cooperation with other social agencies and programs are increasing eligible households' awareness of the program. Very few, if any, respondents reported learning about the program through mass media or flyers. Of all the mass media avenues, only newspaper ads appear to be somewhat effective in reaching participants. No participants reported learning about the program through an on-site visit (i.e., visits to the Center on Aging, senior citizen centers, schools), indicating that this method is not frequently used, although WHEAP providers in interviews said that this method was the only way to reach some of the less connected segments of the population.

Surveys conducted with non-participants showed that over a third of WHEAP and WAP non-participants are not aware of the program, again showing awareness as a primary barrier.

*"It seems to me that most people don't know about these programs. I didn't know. A friend told me about WIC when I was left with my ex-husband's debts... They should advertise these programs more so that eligible people know about them" (WHEAP and WAP non-participant).*

Utility representatives, fuel vendors, and local WHEAP agency staff reported in interviews that they feel there are three groups of the low-income population that the program needs to more effectively reach:

- *Elderly.* Although there are various reasons why this group is not being reached, one utility company identified the difficulty in reaching this population as resulting from a lack of exposure to some of the mediums WHEAP is advertised through, such as the Internet and newspapers. *"There are customers they don't reach because they don't have access to the media they use. They have a great website and use the newspaper, but they need a more realistic outreach program to address the needs of the communities...the elderly in particular are homebound and tend to be the type to pay their bills first so many of them are eligible and aren't identified."* Local WHEAP agency staff also believe this segment is difficult to reach because the elderly do not feel comfortable taking government money and would rather do without something else in order to pay their utility bill. For example, while approximately 36% of the participating households contained an elderly member in FFY 2000, this represented only about 15% of the eligible households in the state of Wisconsin with an elderly person.

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- *Mentally challenged or disabled*<sup>19</sup>. This group, again, does not necessarily use the mediums that WHEAP is advertised through. Local WHEAP agency staff said in interviews that they find it difficult to target disabled clients as vigorously as elderly and children. *“The disabled are harder to get at because there is no particular place where they live or work. Also, many times a family member is in charge of paying their bills.”* Approximately 22% of the participating households contained a disabled member in FFY 2000, representing 35% of the eligible households in the state of Wisconsin with a disabled person.
- *The working population*. This segment often has difficulty visiting energy assistance sites during normal business hours. As one utility company commented, *“You can’t lock up for 2 hours at lunch, you can’t close your doors at 4:00 in the afternoon. They do work, getting into the office isn’t real easy. I think that’s part of why we don’t have as many people applying in our area.”* Two utilities stated they would like to see local WHEAP agencies open during more convenient hours for potential recipients, such as evenings and Saturdays. In interviews, several WHEAP providers said they were trying to have more evening and weekend application dates. However, the use of alternate hours was found to be inconsistent across agencies and rather limited. The non-participant survey strongly supports that the program is not reaching the working population that fall in the eligible income categories. The majority of WHEAP/WAP non-participants (73%) reported doing work for pay last month compared to about a third of low-income participants.

The interviews suggested another reason why outreach may not be as effective as it should be — the negative connotation associated with WHEAP deters some individuals from applying. As seen in the non-participant surveys, over a third of the WHEAP and WAP non-participants said they would rather ask a friend or family relative for help than apply to a government program. As one utility spokesperson estimated, only 20% of their eligible low-income customers receive assistance. This utility feels the negative connotation associated with energy assistance as a welfare program deters participation. WHEAP and WAP agency staff agreed, stating that they think people are more open to participating in WAP than WHEAP because they view WAP as a ‘housing’ program, not a ‘welfare’ program. Providers advocated more positive advertising of the program to this population on the part of the state. It was also expressed that changing the title of the program from Low-Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to WHEAP was a positive step toward removing the negative connotation.

Last, a potential barrier suggested by a utility company most commonly present in rural communities, is the fear that someone will recognize an applicant at the community agency.

*“People won’t apply because they know people down accepting applications. They’re afraid someone is going to see them walking in, and it’s going to be all over town. It goes back to they don’t want the whole community to know.”* (utility company)

This utility suggested having an 800 number and accepting applications over the phone at a confidential center. *“I think you’d see more people applying.”* While it is possible that this could be a barrier, only 1% of non-participants said they are too embarrassed to apply.

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<sup>19</sup> Disabled status is self-declared during the application process. There is no formal, federal definition of disabled individuals.

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##### ***How does WHEAP work with other low-income programs and services?***

Local WHEAP agencies report working with several different low-income programs and services and said this is an important part of their outreach strategy. About a quarter of participants reported first learning of WHEAP through another social agency or program — the second most frequently reported reason after personal networks — indicating that WHEAP’s coordination with other low-income programs and services is an important way to reach eligible households and appears to be working fairly well.

Almost half of interviewed WHEAP staff said they work for other social programs in addition to WHEAP. Two of the agencies said they specifically train their employees to administer services for multiples social programs, including WHEAP. These agencies said they prefer clients to have the benefit of working with one person for all social programs, rather than a different person for each social program.

*“Instead of sending the clients everywhere, we administer benefits all in one place. There are good things and bad things about this. It’s good for the client that they don’t have to go to different people, but it’s hard for the staff to be experts in all the programs.” (WHEAP agency)*

Commonly reported programs and agencies WHEAP works with are: Elderly Homes/Commission on Aging; meal sites; job centers; Housing and Urban Development; Badger Care; Child Protection Department; Head Start; Women, Infants and Children; Food Stamps; Medial Assistance; W-2; Section 8 Rental Assistance; and Evenstart.

Local WHEAP agencies said that staff also work with other programs in order to reach vulnerable households such as those with children under 6 and elderly. Providers said that WIC and Head Start programs are good programs to work with to reach families with young children. For elderly, they report visiting meal sites and elder care homes. Agencies said it was much harder to target households with disabled members because there are not as many organizations or programs they can work with.

##### ***Does WHEAP face any administrative, program or funding barriers?***

Interviews with WHEAP providers and customer surveys indicate the program does face some administrative, program, and funding barriers. Slightly more than a quarter of the local WHEAP agency staff said that funding for administrative support was a problem for them, although this situation has improved since Public Benefits. Due to the seasonal nature of the program and the limited funds they have for administrative support, agencies reported that they often lose high-quality, trained individuals in the summer months. These agencies need to hire administrative staff again in the fall to replace those they lost. These agencies believe the cost for re-hiring and training new administrative staff each season costs their department more time and money than would be expended by maintaining the support personnel year-round.

Another reported administrative problem by one agency is that they cannot hire enough people to process all of the applications during the heating season. As a result, this agency can only meet with clients for 15 minutes at a time, and clients often have to wait several weeks before they can get an appointment. Although most participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, those suggesting improvements mentioned that more helpful service provider staff and more accessible service provider staff would have increased their

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satisfaction with the program. This indicates that for some participants, funding barriers that affect staff quality are also affecting their program experience.

A couple local WHEAP agency staff also said they do not offer more client education because they do not have the budget or staff resources to expand education efforts. Participant surveys show that about half of WHEAP-only participants said they did not receive energy education through the program.

The majority of WHEAP providers said the amount of funding they received to provide benefits to customers is sufficient and they were satisfied with the current formula used to calculate participant benefits. These agencies reported that they received enough funding for crisis assistance and direct payment throughout the year to provide services to their clients. Participant survey results support the amount of the assistance received is sufficient for the majority of participants as the average satisfaction with the amount of payment received was very high (over a 4 on a 5-point scale where 5 is very satisfied).

However, just under a quarter of interviewed agencies do not feel their WHEAP budget is sufficient. Two interviewed agencies said they ran out of direct payment and crisis money before the 2001 heating season was over (agencies did not differentiate between emergency and non-emergency crisis funding). One agency reported they only have enough direct payment funding to serve a small percent of homes that need assistance.

*“We are only able to meet the needs of 1 out of 5 households that needs assistance.”  
(WHEAP agency)*

A northern agency said they are not able to adequately help all households that come in because the WHEAP benefit formula does not accurately calculate the benefit for northern participants. This respondent said the heating season lasts an average of 2 months longer in the north than in southern parts of the state, and felt that the use of state heating averages hinders their ability to sufficiently help customers in their territory. Customer surveys indicate that while the majority of participants are satisfied with their benefit amount, some were not. Several respondents said that a higher payment amount would have increased their satisfaction with the program.

The most frequently reported program barrier by local WHEAP agencies is that they see many households they believe need assistance, but they are unable to serve them because they are just over 150% of the federal poverty level. As discussed above, this is a large source of frustration for many agencies. Also, as discussed above, the Targeted HPWES baseline study shows that households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level face the same affordability issues as those under 150% of the federal poverty level.

#### ***What other services are being offered through WHEAP besides direct payment assistance and what is the correct role of these services?***

The main component of WHEAP is direct payment assistance. Almost all of WHEAP participants receive fuel direct payment assistance. Those participants whose electric utility is participating in Public Benefits also receive electric direct payment assistance. The majority of WHEAP participants surveyed reported receiving electric direct payment assistance as well as fuel assistance. Most crisis assistance participants also receive direct payment assistance, but there are a few who only receive crisis assistance. WHEAP also offers emergency furnace replacements and refers eligible households to WAP (about 10% of WHEAP

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participants reported receiving a referral to WAP). The variability in local WHEAP agencies is most prominent in crisis assistance where agencies are given flexibility in how they administer these funds.

Energy education is offered by some WHEAP agencies, although the extent of these education efforts varies. Participant surveys indicate that only about half of the participants are receiving customer education through the program, and this education is limited.

Because the low-income population appears to be especially receptive to energy education as indicated on customer surveys, increasing the quality and distribution of energy education to participants can also move the program closer to the goal of helping as many households as possible become self-sufficient. Interviewed utility and fuel providers and three WHEAP providers advocate proactive, co-payment arrangements as a means to help people achieve self-sufficiency. Because self-sufficiency is a program goal and a low percent of participants reported participating in a co-payment plan, increased encouragement and support of agencies using co-payment plans may be called for.

In addition, participant surveys indicate that WAP referrals are an extremely important component of WHEAP as the additional weatherization services are allowing households to enjoy more energy and non-energy benefits. As discussed earlier, increased coordination between WHEAP and WAP could improve the programs' identification and servicing of households. The evaluation will investigate the referral process between WHEAP and WAP in-depth in Year 2.

Emergency furnace replacements are also provided through WHEAP. Two WAP agencies commented that in the past, WAP agencies were responsible for emergency furnace replacements and these agencies view this service as being taken away by Public Benefits, which now mandates that WHEAP oversee furnace replacements. These WAP agencies believe that WAP is in a better position to do furnace replacements than WHEAP because housing improvements are their expertise. However, interviews with WAP subcontractors found that many of the subcontractors doing non-emergency furnace replacements through WAP are also doing emergency furnace replacements for many WHEAP agencies. This would suggest that in many cases, the 'experts' used to install the furnace are the same whether the replacement is made through WHEAP or WAP. However, the quality control process is most likely not the same since WAP agencies routinely inspect furnace contractors' work (as well as ensuring that the replaced furnace is part of a whole-house approach that does not present any other health or safety issues). Average customer satisfaction with furnace replacements made through both WHEAP and WAP were very high (above a 4 on a 5-point scale where 5 is very satisfied), which does not indicate better furnace replacement service through one program. However, quality control issues would be difficult to identify within this survey year, as we spoke to participants shortly after their furnaces were replaced. The evaluation will continue to explore the issue of which program is the best administrator of emergency fuel replacements in Year 2 of the evaluation.

#### ***How do first year WHEAP participants differ from repeat WHEAP participants?***

WHEAP providers reported in interviews that the majority (about 75%) of their customers apply for WHEAP year after year. An analysis of the 2001 and 2002 WHEAP database found the majority of 2002 WHEAP applicants had applied in 2001 as well. The evaluation thought it would be useful to look at what differences, if any, exist between repeat WHEAP participants and first year WHEAP participants identified in customer surveys (summarized in Table 4-10).

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Demographically, the two groups only differed significantly in the percentage of renters. About twice as many first year participants are renters than repeat participants (49% compared to 24%). Both first year and repeat participants were very satisfied with the program.

The main finding from a comparison of first year and repeat participants is that repeat participants appear to enjoy slightly better conditions than first year participants. For example, a slightly higher percent of repeat participants reported having control over their household energy use and the size of their energy bill, fewer repeat respondents pay their bills late, fewer repeat respondents have experienced a disconnect in the last two years, and the average concern with energy and non-energy expenses is slightly lower for repeat participants than first year participants. While these differences are not statistically significant, they could be indicating the programs' impact on increasing the energy and non-energy benefits of participants over time. The longitudinal study of participants will allow the evaluation to continue to investigate this throughout the three-year contract period.

**Table 4-10. WHEAP Repeat and WHEAP First Year Participant Comparison**

Self-reported benefits after participation	Repeat Participant (n=647)	First Year Participant (n=152)
<i>CONTROL</i>		
Report control over household energy use <sup>20</sup>	78%	72%
Report control over the size of their energy bill	53%	52%
<i>BILL PAYMENT</i>		
Pay 25% or more bills late	38%	43%
Experienced energy disconnect in last 2 years	6%	7%
<i>DEMOGRAPHICS</i>		
Renters *	24%	49%
Below 75% poverty level	47%	41%
Worked for pay last month	38%	34%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey

\* Differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

**What barriers to participation does WHEAP face?**

The evaluation conducted surveys with two different types of customers to help identify what participation barriers WHEAP faces. The two different types of customers were: (1) those who are participating in WAP, but not WHEAP (referred to as WAP-only) and (2) customers who are not participating in either WHEAP or WAP (referred to as WHEAP/WAP non-participants). Table 4-11 summarizes the barriers identified in customer surveys to WHEAP participation by eligible households. The most frequently cited barrier by WHEAP non-participants was a lack

<sup>20</sup> Reported 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale where 1=no control and 5=a great deal of control

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of awareness of the program<sup>21</sup>—over a third of WAP-only participants and WHEAP/WAP non-participants said they were not aware of the program.

After being read a description of the program, a fifth of WAP-only participants and over half of all WHEAP and WAP non-participants expressed little to no interest in WHEAP (a 1–3 ranking on a 5-point scale where 1 is not at all interested and 5 is very interested). One of the striking things about this finding is the large percent of WAP-only participants who report being interested in WHEAP, but not participating. Since they share the same income eligibility requirements, we know these interested households are eligible to participate in WHEAP. This may be a breakdown in the referral process of WAP to WHEAP (the referral process of WHEAP to WAP is discussed above). To the extent this is the case, the advocated increased communication between the programs can partially solve this.

The primary reason given for lack of interest is that households do not want help paying their energy bills.

*“I like to be independent and there are probably needy people who need this more” (WHEAP and WAP non-participant).*

*“When I’ve got money I like to pay my bills myself” (WHEAP and WAP non-participant).*

Another strong barrier to the program identified in the WHEAP/WAP non-participant survey is the sentiment that people can make it without programs like WHEAP if they do without some things. Half (50%) of WHEAP and WAP non-participants agreed with the statement, *“If people could just do without a few things, they should be able to have enough to pay their electric and fuel without getting help from government-run programs.”* As seen in Table 4-6, WHEAP and WAP non-participants do appear to be living without many things in order to meet their bills without participating in the program.

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<sup>21</sup> Note: Customers, when asked about the program, were probed to make sure they had not heard of the program by a different name such as LIHEAP or energy assistance.

Table 4-11. Barriers to WHEAP Participation

Participation Barrier	WAP-only	WHEAP/WAP non-participant
Not aware of WHEAP	38% (n=193)	45% (n=177)
Not interested in participating in program *	21% (n=192)	57% (n=204)
Not interested because do not want help paying energy bill **	24% (n=52)	39% (n=122)
Not interested because think they are able to pay bill themselves	19% (n=52)	14% (n=122)
Not interested because do not want government money	0% (n=52)	4% (n=122)
Not interested because too embarrassed to apply	1% (n=52)	1% (n=122)

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant and non-participant surveys

\* Differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

\*\* Differences are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level

### 4.3 WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

This section presents researchable questions and findings specific to the WAP program, including:

- How is WAP administered by local agencies?
- What is the level of participant satisfaction with WAP services?
- How effective are WAP outreach efforts?
- How does WAP work with other low-income programs and services?
- Does WAP offer customer education or other types of customer services?
- Does WAP face any administrative, program or funding barriers?
- What barriers to participation does WAP face?
- How is WAP improving the safety, health, and comfort of participants' homes?

#### ***How is WAP administered by local agencies?***

Evaluation findings indicate that WAP is an effectively administered program both at the local and statewide levels. This is supported by the high level of satisfaction with WAP reported in participant surveys and interviews with local WAP agency staff, Department of Administration Regional Coordinators, and WAP subcontractors. At the same time, the effectiveness of the program's administration could be increased by closer cooperation and communication with WHEAP since the program primarily relies upon WHEAP for referrals.

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Local agencies administering WAP include both housing-related non-profit organizations such as a city planning office and a housing authority agency and community action program (CAP) agencies. CAP agencies administer many social programs including childcare, job training, health, senior citizen, and food and nutrition programs. WAP agencies vary in the extent to which they conduct the actual weatherization of homes. Some complete jobs with in-house staff members (although some special services such as heating or window replacement require using outside contractors). Other agencies do not conduct any actual weatherization, but instead manage teams of subcontractors that conduct all of the weatherization.

Regardless of the extent to which they themselves conduct the weatherization, all of the agencies have on-staff inspectors and auditors that conduct the final inspection of the weatherized homes. Therefore, all agencies oversee the entire process and account for the end result. Interviewed WAP subcontractors confirmed that the WAP agency oversaw their work and inspected jobs completed for the program. These subcontractors felt the audit process between themselves and the agency was a positive one that generally assured the quality of work:

*“They really do it right and it’s nice to see. In other government programs we’ve worked with in the past, they didn’t check after the work was done. As a result, some companies would put in a furnace that is twice as big as needed or not do good ductwork. They would slap in whatever they had” (WAP subcontractor).*

Department of Administration Regional Coordinators report overseeing three to six WAP agencies each. All of the Coordinators said that they have good relationships with the agencies and have established relationships built on trust.

*“I will tell them what to do and cite them, but generally I respect them and they respect me back. It hasn’t always been that way and it has been a learning process. But we have built a good system and in general we are comfortable with one another.” (WAP regional coordinator)*

All of the Coordinators also discussed their interactive relationship with the agencies. One Coordinator felt that WAP was set apart from other federal programs by how closely the Coordinators work with the agencies.

*“With most federal contracts, government work with agencies may be one time a year. We do it differently. We spend a lot of time out there. We see the agencies every week. I basically live at their offices. We help them in everything from technical training to financial management. We know each other well. Because we’ve built a good relationship, they appreciate our input. I think the way we have it set-up is a good, strong way to manage a contract.” (WAP regional coordinator)*

It was found in interviews with WAP agency staff and subcontractors, as well as in participant surveys that there is little to no follow-up to weatherization services (other than the final inspection) to reinforce customer education provided initially and ensure that measures are being maintained properly to maximize energy savings. Although this could put an extra funding demand on WAP, there may be other ways to promote customer follow-up. For example, one WAP subcontractor interviewed is now providing this service as part of their furnace replacements because they believe it distinguishes them from other subcontractors and is resulting in their being awarded more work through WAP.

**What is the level of participant satisfaction with WAP services?**

Participant surveys show high levels of satisfaction with WAP services. Table 4-12 shows that for all aspects of the program asked about, average satisfaction was above a 4 on a 5-point scale (1=not at all satisfied, 5=very satisfied). The lowest level of satisfaction was with the amount of time it took to receive services. This is most likely a result of the longer waiting lists reported by local WAP agency staff. According to these staff, WAP has longer waiting lists because with Public Benefits they can do more to a house, but consequently each house takes longer to weatherize.

Customers who reported a satisfaction level of 3 or less were asked what could have increased their satisfaction with the program. The most commonly reported suggestion, cited by a quarter of those not satisfied with an aspect of the program, was a shorter waiting period, again indicating some of the new administrative issues the program is dealing with as part of Public Benefits. As to be expected given the different ranges of waiting lists reported by agencies, the request for shorter waiting periods varied by region. The largest percent of respondents reporting they would like a shorter waiting period were from the Western and Northern regions.

**Table 4-12. Average Satisfaction with WAP Services Received by Type of Participant**

	<b>WAP-only (n=197) Satisfaction Rating</b>	<b>WHEAP and WAP (n=399) Satisfaction Rating</b>
Overall program	4.8	4.7
Types of improvements made	4.6	4.7
Knowledge of WAP staff	4.7	4.7
Quality of work performed	4.5	4.6
Amount of time it took to receive services	4.3	4.4

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant survey (Satisfaction is rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 being not at all satisfied and 5 being very satisfied.)

Other ways suggested by participants for increasing their satisfaction are: more helpful service provider staff; less disruptive installation process; more measures available; service provider follow-ups; less tedious application process; and more information about ways to control energy use.

**How effective are WAP outreach efforts?**

Because the main outreach strategy for WAP is to rely on WHEAP outreach, all of the issues discussed above about the effectiveness of WHEAP’s outreach also apply to WAP.

Outreach efforts for the WAP program are minimal to non-existent according to interviewed WAP agencies. All but one of the agencies said they do not do any formal outreach, “because we don’t have to.” The one agency that does do outreach reported that their territory is more

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affluent and, therefore, there are fewer low-income customers so a greater effort needs to be made to contact the eligible customers that do live in their territory. This agency does have a staff person dedicated to outreach. Besides this one agency, only one other agency showed receptiveness to future outreach efforts. This agency reported that they might hire an outreach staff person in the future if the funding continues to grow for the program.

The agencies' general attitude that outreach is not needed is supported by the fact that all agencies—but the one agency doing active outreach—reported waiting lists. The reported waiting lists ranged from 1 month up to 1 year, but the most common reported waiting period was 5-6 months. Many respondents expressed that their waiting lists have increased as a result of Public Benefits because homes take longer to complete.

Regional Coordinators varied in their opinions concerning whether or not they think the WAP agencies should do outreach. Two of the Coordinators said that their agencies have long waiting lists and it would not be a good use of time to do program outreach.

*“Agencies would spend out their money if they added more staff. The waiting lists show that it is a successful program. It is most effective to have waiting lists and there doesn't need to be outreach beyond WHEAP.” (WAP regional coordinator)*

One Coordinator said that all of their agencies have long-waiting lists except for one that serves a rural county. The Coordinator thought this agency could benefit from doing some outreach. Two of the Coordinators thought WAP agencies should do outreach, despite waiting lists, in order to reach more applicants that need the program that WHEAP may not be reaching.

*“The same people sign up for WHEAP year and year. We need a new influx of people and need to beat them out of the bushes and market the program better. We should have intake sites and meal sites to identify those who need the program.” (WAP regional coordinator)*

While the coordination of WHEAP and WAP outreach efforts appears to be working efficiently as WAP is fully subscribed, increased communication and coordination between the two programs could increase the effectiveness of outreach for both programs, even if WHEAP remains the main provider of outreach activities. For example, half of the WHEAP-only respondents were not aware of WAP. Also, one of the barriers to WHEAP participation that has been identified is that eligible households view it as a 'welfare' program. Therefore, some eligible households that could realize significant energy savings through WAP and would participate in WAP because they view it as a 'housing' program are not aware of the program because WHEAP is the base program that then refers customers to WAP. WAP's reliance on WHEAP also brings up the importance of the referral process in targeting those most in need. The evaluation will focus on this referral process in Year 2.

#### ***How does WAP work with other low-income programs and services, and how effective is this coordination?***

As mentioned earlier, there are two main types of agencies administering WAP: housing-related agencies and CAP agencies. Both types of agencies report coordinating the WAP program with WHEAP—the main source of their participants—and the other programs they administer or with which they work closely. Interview results suggest that the type of agency administering the program—housing-related or CAP agency—does have some implications

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regarding the other programs that they are best able to coordinate with. Housing organizations appear to enjoy an advantage working with other programs that can help address 'house' needs whereas CAP agencies appear to enjoy the benefit of referrals to and from other social programs that can assist customers in other areas than housing. WAP's coordination with other programs and social agencies is, like WHEAP, an important source for reaching eligible households. Approximately a fifth of WAP participants reported on customer surveys learning of the program through another program or agency besides WHEAP.

##### ***Does WAP offer customer education or other types of customer services?***

All agencies reported providing some customer education, although their descriptions of the education provided suggest that the customer education efforts are not extensive. All interviewed WAP subcontractors also reported providing energy education, but this was again minimal. Two agencies specifically mentioned they do not provide a written document because they are not reimbursed by the state for educational efforts.

As mentioned earlier, the extent of customer follow-up and assessing customer satisfaction varied by agency, but was reported as minimal by most. Only two agencies reported doing any follow-up. One of these agencies said the energy auditor often does a follow-up and the other agency said that their door is always open to customer needs.

*"Our service doesn't stop when we leave the home. In recent contracts with suppliers, we get a five-year contract on service and labor." (WAP agency)*

Several agencies expressed that they would like to do more customer follow-up, but there currently is not sufficient funding or resources to do so.

*"We should do more than the final inspection, but we would need more funding." (WAP agency)*

Two agencies did not think that customer follow-up was necessary.

*"They shouldn't need to be checked up on. Once we're done, we're done." (WAP agency)*

Despite the fact that they do not currently do this, four interviewed agencies and subcontractors said they are proponents of customer follow-up. They felt follow-ups would provide an opportunity to reinforce how customers should maintain measures. This suggests that a component of customer follow-up could be customer education and the reported lack of follow-up could be missed educational opportunities. One HVAC subcontractor said they are now doing follow-up 12-36 months after a furnace replacement and they believe that will increase the life of the furnace as it gives them another opportunity to educate households about proper maintenance including changing furnace filters.

In addition to minimal customer follow-up, only two agencies said they actively solicit customer feedback to assess their satisfaction, although neither specified exactly how they use this feedback. One agency said they do this as part of the audit process. The other said that they send a survey at the end of each job to assess client satisfaction.

***Does WAP face any administrative, program or funding barriers?***

Although Public Benefits appears to have largely offset funding limitations faced by the program, the program now appears to be facing new administrative and program barriers. Most interviewed WAP agencies said that funding for weatherization had not been sufficient in the past, but the advent of Public Benefits had changed that.

*“Before it was shoestring, but Public Benefits has changed that and made it manageable.” “This year the budget is finally sufficient.” (WAP agency)*

Interviewed WAP subcontractors also said that their workload through WAP has become more consistent since Public Benefits because the funding is less variable. Other WAP agencies acknowledged that their budgets had increased, but they would still welcome additional funding<sup>22</sup>. Three of the four said additional funding would allow them to increase the number of units served.

*“Without Public Benefits we would be severely deficient in funding, but we could use more so that we can weatherize more homes.” (WAP agency)*

The expansion of services through Public Benefits has staffing implications for agencies.

*“Staffing is a real barrier. Hiring people that can actually get the work done well has been a problem. Now that there is four times the money and there is so much more that needs to be done, this will be even more difficult” (Regional Coordinator).*

Most agencies are meeting increased staffing needs through expanding their use of subcontractors or using subcontractors for the first time. Some Regional Coordinators thought the increased use of subcontractors and need for new staff could increase quality control issues. In fact, two Coordinators reported that they have seen an increase in customer complaints as a result of the program having to hire new staff because they are not as experienced and well trained as the staff who have been delivering services for a considerable length of time. However, both Coordinators feel that with time to adjust and train those delivering weatherization services, the rise in customer complaints will not persist.

*“With the new influx of money, we have a few more complaints because there are newer crews out there with lots of work to do so the quality may not be as good as it was. It takes time to train new crews, but this will happen.” (WAP regional coordinator)*

Agencies and Coordinators also noted that Public Benefits has resulted in increased waiting lists because of it taking longer to weatherize each home and this affects customer satisfaction.

*“With additional money we will be able to solve a lot of problems, but new problems will also appear. As a result, there have been long waiting lists and this adversely impacts client satisfaction.”*

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<sup>22</sup> Three of these four agencies have service territories where cooperatives and municipal electric providers have opted out of participating in Public Benefits. It is possible that this may be affecting their satisfaction with the additional funding available through Public Benefits.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

Customer surveys did find that the primary suggestion for improving satisfaction was a shorter waiting period.

Both WAP agencies and subcontractors also mentioned that in the past they worked with utility programs, which gave them greater flexibility than they now have with Public Benefits. Several agencies and subcontractors expressed that some of that flexibility has now been taken away, *“Public Benefits has opened a lot of things up, but at the same time it has tied our hands somewhat.”*

Another problem mentioned by some agencies is that not all customers in their territories are eligible for Public Benefits (some territories are not 100% Public Benefits because some municipal and cooperative utilities had chosen not to participate in the State Public Benefits program). These providers said that this causes a great deal of confusion and resentment from customers who do not understand why they are not able to receive the same service as their neighbor. Two providers also reported fielding angry calls from customers who had been weatherized before Public Benefits and wanted the measures that are now available.

Interviewees also mentioned difficulties with the expanded measures under Public Benefits, particularly with window replacement options. Several agencies reported that windows were difficult to install under the program because they were detailed and took several weeks to deliver, delaying job completion. This sentiment is summarized by an interviewed subcontractor who replaces windows through Public Benefits and brought up how difficult these jobs are.

*“The window jobs under Public Benefits are complicated because of the disrepair and age of the windows being replaced. The jobs are really advanced and involved. We have to rip out the frame and replace them because the frames are so old.” (WAP subcontractor)*

On the other hand, some agencies assert that new windows significantly increase customer esteem and comfort because many low-income homes have windows that do not open or close or are boarded up. The Regional Coordinators believe that the correct offering of measures under Public Benefits will take time to work out. Several of the Coordinators did not know if windows with the co-payment would be an effective measure. Customer surveys show, however, that the majority of participants would like the program to continue offering windows, even with a co-payment stipulation.

#### **What barriers to participation does WAP face?**

The evaluation conducted surveys with two different types of customers to help identify what participation barriers WAP faces. The two different types of customers were: (1) those who are participating in WHEAP, but have not participated in WAP since 1995 (referred to as WHEAP-only) and (2) customers who are not participating in either WHEAP or WAP (referred to as WHEAP/WAP non-participants).

Table 4-13 shows barriers to WAP participation by these two groups of eligible households. The most frequently cited barriers cited by WAP non-participants were a lack of awareness of and lack of interest in the program—almost half of WHEAP-only participants and almost two-thirds of WHEAP/WAP non-participants said they were not aware of the program. Half of WHEAP-only participants and WHEAP/WAP non-participants also said they were not interested in participating in the program after they were read a description of the program.

4. Key Findings and Results

The main reason given for not being interested is that they feel their home is already energy-efficient (conditions of the home reported on the survey indicate that this is not the case for the majority of the respondents).

Another major barrier found in the WHEAP/WAP non-participant survey is that many households do not feel comfortable with having a home inspection or audit as part of the program. Forty one percent of WHEAP/WAP non-participants agreed with the statement, *“I would not feel comfortable agreeing to a home inspection required by programs like the Weatherization Assistance Program.”*

**Table 4-13. Barriers to WAP Participation**

Participation Barrier	WHEAP-only	WHEAP/WAP non-participant
Not aware of WAP *	46% (n=395)	65% (n=208)
Not interested in participating in program *	42% (n=397)	51% (n=203)
Not interested because think house already energy-efficient *	21% (n=186)	36% (n=110)
Not interested because they don't know enough about the program	11% (n=186)	6% (n=110)

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant and non-participant surveys

\* Differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

Other barriers reported by several respondents are that they rent; they can do the work themselves; and they are moving in the near future.

The evaluation will investigate closely the barriers for renters in Year 2. In addition to the difficulty in getting landlords to participate in the program, there also appears to be some reluctance on the part of renters to have their home weatherized because they do not believe the program will really benefit them:

*“I live in an apartment and so it really wouldn't benefit me” (WHEAP/WAP non-participant).*

Finally, because WHEAP is the primary intake method for WAP, the referral procedures between WHEAP and WAP could also pose a significant barrier to WAP participation.

***How is WAP improving the safety, health, and comfort of participants' homes?***

Reports of household conditions experienced before and after weatherization by participants and a comparison of participants' households situations to non-participants show that WAP is

improving the safety, health and comfort of participants' homes. These findings are consistent with benefits measured for other low-income programs.<sup>23</sup>

WAP participants were asked several questions about their home's safety, health, and comfort both before and after their home was weatherized. Table 4-14 shows that significant percents of participants reported a decrease in drafts, inconsistent temperatures, heating system and water heater problems, appliances not working and indoor air quality problems. While the majority of WAP participants reported that the program lowered their utility bill, when asked what was the most important benefit to them from the program, the most commonly reported benefit was increased comfort (reported by 43% of participants as the most important benefit), followed by lowering their energy bill (reported by 28% of participants as the most important benefit). The majority of WAP-waitlisted and WHEAP/WAP non-participants reported noticing drafts and having some rooms colder than others compared to about a third of participants after weatherization.

**Table 4-14. Household Situations Experienced Before and After Program Participation**

Household Situation	Participants				Non-participants	
	WHEAP/WAP (n=399)		WAP-only (n=198)		WAP- waitlisted (n=153)	WHEAP/ WAP (n=209)
	Before participated in WAP	After participated in WAP	Before participated in WAP	After participated in WAP	Percent experiencing situation	Percent experiencing situation
Notice drafts *	86%	33%	91%	39%	88%	53%
Some rooms colder than others *	84%	33%	89%	38%	87%	67%
Heating system problems *	52%	5%	45%	5%	35%	10%
Water heater problems *	35%	5%	33%	4%	22%	9%
Appliances not working *	38%	10%	41%	6%	42%	13%
Indoor air quality problems *	32%	9%	30%	8%	42%	19%
Notice mold or mildew *	26%	13%	26%	16%	35%	14%

Source: 2002 (Yr. 1) participant and non-participant surveys

\* Differences between before and after comparisons are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level

<sup>23</sup> Martin Schweitzer and Bruce Tonn, "Non-energy Benefits from the Weatherization Assistance Program: A Summary of Findings from the Recent Literature", ORNL/CON-484, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, April 2002.

## 4. Key Findings and Results

### 4.4 TARGETED HOME PERFORMANCE WITH ENERGY STAR

Because Targeted HPWES is a new program under Public Benefits, the program was just ramping up during the first year of the evaluation. Consequently, primary data collection activities for Targeted HPWES were limited to a baseline survey of 254 eligible households (See *Appendix H* for detailed results). The evaluation agreed with program managers to delay all process evaluation issues for Targeted HPWES until the second year of the evaluation, once the program had time to get up and running. As a result, the section for Targeted HPWES is limited for this first evaluation report.

The researchable questions and findings specific to Targeted HPWES in Year 1 include:

- How is Targeted HPWES being administered?
- What participation barriers does Targeted HPWES face?
- How can Targeted HPWES improve customers' situations?

#### ***How is Targeted Home Performance with Energy Star being administered?***

Targeted HPWES is administered by Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation (WECC), the Focus on Energy Residential Program Administrator. The Targeted HPWES program is designed to extend low-income services offered through WHEAP and WAP to Wisconsin residents with limited income and resources who do not qualify for assistance under WHEAP or WAP. Participation is, at least initially, limited to households with income levels between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty guideline. In the first year of the program, Targeted HPWES focused on building upon the existing low-income program infrastructure and relying on referrals from the existing low-income programs, who often come into contact with those between 150% and 200% of the poverty level as discussed previously in this report.

In the evaluation, one question to be addressed in future years is whether WAP agencies will have difficulty finding the resources to weatherize additional homes through Targeted HPWES. The evaluation found in interviews with WAP providers that most WAP agencies are already fully subscribed, have long waiting lists, and are having staffing problems because of the expansion of WAP through Public Benefits. Therefore, most agencies would not have the resources to weatherize additional homes through Targeted HPWES. Discussions with the Targeted HPWES program manager have verified that this was largely the case in Year 1. To deal with this issue, Targeted HPWES began to work with private contractors to weatherize homes and is planning to expand the use of private contractors in Year 2.

In interviews conducted with WAP subcontractors, the evaluation talked with some private contractors who are planning on weatherizing homes for Targeted HPWES and do not anticipate any problems with meeting the additional work generated by the Targeted HPWES program. In Year 2, the evaluation will investigate how the current infrastructure for weatherizing homes is functioning. In addition, the evaluation will focus on Targeted HPWES' coordination with WHEAP and WAP. The Year 2 and 3 evaluations will pay special attention to investigating whether WHEAP and WAP are the best source of referrals or if the program is missing vulnerable segments of the targeted low-income population by relying mostly upon WHEAP and WAP for referrals.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

##### **What participation barriers does Targeted HPWES face?**

Almost two-thirds of respondents interviewed in the baseline survey reported high levels of interest in participating in Targeted HPWES after they were read a description of the program. The level of interest in the program varied by poverty level, geographic region, and home ownership. Respondents from 176% to 200% of the federal poverty level had a higher level of interest in the program than those from 151% to 175% of the federal poverty level. Respondents in Southeast Wisconsin were the most interested in the program and respondents in Northwest Wisconsin were the least interested in the program. Renters were more interested in participating in the program than homeowners.

The main participation barrier Targeted HPWES faces is reaching eligible households. Less than five percent of respondents to the baseline survey reported having heard of Targeted HPWES. This is not surprising given the program's purposive limited marketing strategy in order to avoid oversubscribing the program. However, it does indicate that most eligible households do not know about the program and reaching those who are most vulnerable and have the highest energy burden may be difficult.

The primary barrier to participation cited by households not interested in the program was because they think their house is already energy-efficient. This was also the most commonly reported reason in the WAP non-participant customer surveys of why households were not interested in participating in WAP. The issue that this brings up is whether these houses are really energy-efficient or whether respondents have just gotten used to their house's environment and do not think their home needs any changes. To the extent that households are just used to their current environment, many households may not be participating in weatherization programs even though they could greatly benefit from them. Based on survey responses about home conditions (i.e., household comfort and safety issues), it does appear that many households are in need of weatherization.

Another barrier to participation in Targeted HPWES is that the program includes a co-payment, scaled to income, for homeowners. A fifth of baseline respondents said that they were not interested in the program because of the co-payment:

*"I live from paycheck to paycheck and get laid off so the co-payment would be difficult."*

*"I just don't know how much it would be that I would have to pay."*

*"I just can't spend any money right now."*

Homeowners who reported the co-payment as a barrier were asked if they would be more interested in the program if the state gave them the following options: 1) add co-payment amount to their mortgage, (2) set up a payment plan, (3) set-up a low-interest, short-term loan to pay off the co-payment, or (4) have the respondent pay the co-payment when they sell their home. All but one of the respondents who reported co-payment as a barrier said that one of these options would increase their interest in the program. Five of them said they would be more interested if they could pay it off when they sold their home, 3 said they would be more interested in the program if they could pay their co-payment with a low-interest, short-term loan, two said they would be more interested if the program set up a payment plan, and one said they would be more interested if the co-payment was added to their mortgage. This indicates that payment options could help offset the co-payment barrier.

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

Two other significant barriers that will need to be addressed for renters are that because they do not own their own home they are either: (1) not interested in weatherizing the home, or (2) think it would be too difficult to get the landlord, who has the authority, to agree to having the home weatherized.

*“If I was a homeowner, I would be interested.” “It’s up to the landlord, not me.”*

As mentioned above, the evaluation in Year 2 will be specifically investigating barriers to weatherization for renters and multi-family units.

#### **How can Targeted HPWES improve customers’ situations?**

The Targeted HPWES baseline survey shows that households between 150% and 200% of the poverty level face many of the same affordability and home comfort, safety and energy efficiency barriers as households below 150% of the poverty level. Baseline results highlight several areas where Targeted HPWES could increase households’ ability to meet energy and non-energy bills and increase their home’s comfort, safety, and energy efficiency. Specific examples include:

- *There is a large percentage of the Targeted population that is not currently receiving assistance with their utility bills or participating in other social service programs.* About three-quarters of the respondents reported not receiving any financial assistance with their utility bills within the last 12 months. Although a third of respondents reported participating in Medicaid, small percentages of respondents — around ten percent or less — reported participating in other programs such as W-2, Food Stamps, WIC, Head Start, etc.
- *Almost two-thirds of survey respondents reported paying 25% or more of their bills late.* Only a third of all respondents reported paying most all utility or fuel bills on time. This bill payment behavior was found across all income levels eligible for the program. To the extent that weatherization makes energy bills more manageable for respondents, better bill payment could result.
- *Utility bills are affecting households’ movement behaviors, especially for those at the lower poverty levels.* About ten percent of all respondents reported moving in the last 5 years in order to lower their utility bills. Households from 151% to 175% of the federal poverty level are more likely to have moved within the last 5 years to find a place with lower utility bills.
- *Survey responses indicate a potential for the program to reduce the mobility of low-income households, especially those from 151% to 175% of the federal poverty level.* A quarter of respondents reported moving in the last 36 months for some reason, a fifth in the last 24 months, and ten percent in the last 12 months. After “a change in family status,” “less expensive utility bills” was the second highest reported reason for moving followed closely by the home being too cold, hot, or noisy. Programs such as Targeted HPWES can address to some extent the two latter reasons for moving. Respondents in the lower poverty category reported moving almost twice as much at all time intervals than those in the higher poverty category.
- *The program could reduce the number of households experiencing a disconnect.* Ten percent of Targeted HPWES baseline respondents reported experiencing a disconnect

#### 4. Key Findings and Results

in the last two years—this is twice as high as the percent of low-income participants reporting experiencing a disconnect in the last two years. The energy savings realized through a program such as Targeted HPWES could reduce the number of disconnects experienced by the population by helping customers gain more control over their energy bill.

- *The program addresses issues of high concern to the targeted low-income households.* A large percentage of respondents reported high levels of concern with meeting winter heating costs (76%) and monthly electric costs (66%). These reported levels of concern are slightly higher than reported by low-income program participants. Both of these concerns can be addressed through programs such as Targeted HPWES.
- *Survey responses show a willingness on the part of low-income households to take no-cost or low-cost actions to reduce energy consumption and energy bills.* The majority of respondents reported turning off lights and appliances when not in use in order to save energy or reduce their energy bills. Several respondents reported taking other no-cost and low-cost actions to reduce energy consumption and energy bills, although there is still significant room for programs such as Targeted HPWES to expand the implementation of these actions. For example, only one-third of respondents reported having turned down the temperature of their water heater. The receptiveness of households to taking no-cost or low-cost actions also indicate that any education efforts offered through Targeted HPWES may increase energy savings realized through the program.
- *Over 80% of respondents reported uncomfortable or unsafe housing conditions.* Frequently mentioned housing conditions included drafts, some rooms colder than other, mold or mildew, air quality problems, and appliances and furnaces that do not work properly. Targeted HPWES weatherization measures can address many of these unfavorable home conditions making the home more comfortable, safe and energy-efficiency for occupants.
- *Half of respondents reported limiting important purchases to pay utility bills and heating uncomfortably less in the wintertime.* More manageable energy bills could allow participants to have more money for food, medicine and other necessities, which they are reporting having trouble meeting now.

**5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, utility and bulk fuel vendors and customer surveys all indicate that WHEAP and WAP are well-functioning programs that are making progress toward meeting the programs’ goals to improve the ability of low-income households to meet energy and non-energy bills and enjoy an improved quality of life. This chapter summarizes the key findings from Year 1, and discusses recommendations for further exploration and consideration throughout evaluation Years 2 and 3.

**5.1 CONCLUSIONS**

Specific key findings from Year 1 include:

**5.1.1 Program administration is running efficiently**

Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, utility and bulk fuel vendors indicate that the programs run efficiently and without significant administrative difficulties. In fact, one multi-state utility representative, who deals with other low-income programs, uses Wisconsin’s system as an example to hold other programs up to:

*“I consider Wisconsin an example of a very good program and hold it up as an example. Their use of technology and administration make it extremely effective. They are very forward thinking and aggressive in getting the program technically and administratively streamlined. They are very efficient and this results in fewer customers getting disconnected” (utility company).*

**5.1.2 Participants are highly satisfied with the programs**

The high levels of participant satisfaction with all aspects of the programs uphold that the programs are being administered efficiently:

- On a 5-point scale, with 1 being “not at all satisfied” and 5 being “very satisfied,” the overall average satisfaction rating with WAP was 4.8.
- On this same scale, the average satisfaction ratings given to different components of WHEAP ranged from 4.2 to 4.9.

**5.1.3 Both energy and non-energy benefits are being realized as a result of the program**

As a result of participation in the programs, at least a quarter of low-income participants reported the following benefits (see Chapter 4 for more details):

- Improved control of their household’s energy use and the size of their energy bill as a result of the program.
- A decrease in the number of times they have set up a bill payment plan or experienced a disconnect since participating in the program.
- Paying more bills on time since participating in the program.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Lower levels of concern with meeting energy and non-energy bills since participating in the program.
- A decrease in heating system and water heater problems, and appliances not working (WAP participants only).
- A decrease in their utility bills (WAP participants only).

Furthermore, repeat WHEAP participants report greater improvements in energy and non-energy benefits than first time applicants.

### **5.1.4 Program participants report improvements in their quality of life as a result of the program**

Low-income participants also reported improvements in their quality of life (see chapter 4 for more details):

- Greater comfort and health through heating the home sufficiently in the winter
- Improvements in the number of drafts (WAP participants only)
- Improvements in inconsistent room temperatures (WAP participants only)
- Increased safety through decreased use of portable heaters, cooking stoves and fireplaces
- More money for other necessities such as food and medicine that they did without prior to participating in the program
- Fewer participants living without a telephone
- Improved health in the form of decreased number of colds, flues or other sicknesses
- Improvements in indoor air quality problems (WAP participants only).

### **5.1.5 Program benefits and improvements are similarly realized across poverty levels**

A breakdown of participant benefits/improvements by poverty categories also indicate that the programs' energy and non-energy benefits are realized fairly equally across the different income levels participating in the programs.

### **5.1.6 Program benefits help lead participants toward greater sustainability**

While benefits were measured for both WHEAP and WAP, the reported impacts on sustainability are greatest among those who participated in both WHEAP and WAP (or at least WAP). These participants report higher levels of energy and non-energy benefits and an improved quality of life as a result of their participation.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1.7 The programs are serving those most vulnerable, but areas of improvement were identified

A review of the programs' databases, as well as surveys with participating and non-participating households indicate that the programs are reaching the most vulnerable households. However, there are some areas for improvement:

- WHEAP is serving a higher percentage of vulnerable and high-energy burden households than is WAP.
  - In particular, WAP is serving a significantly lower percentage of renters.
- Compared to eligible non-participants, surveyed participants represent more disabled and elderly households, but fewer households with children under 6 years of age (although differences are not significant at the 95% confidence level).
  - In Federal Fiscal Year 2000 (FFY 00), only 15% of eligible elderly and 20% of eligible children were being served.<sup>24</sup>
- In the surveys of households, non-participants self-report a higher energy burden, and are more likely to report engaging in unsustainable behaviors to meet their energy bill (i.e., not paying other bills on time, keeping home temperatures at an uncomfortable level, going without some necessities).

Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, utility and bulk fuel vendors, and customer surveys also indicate that the newly implemented Targeted HPWES program under Focus has the opportunity to help households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level who do not qualify for WHEAP or WAP (although the number of households to be served each year is relatively low). Based on the results of the baseline survey and low-income participant surveys, we would expect that Targeted HPWES could deliver the following benefits to a percent of the eligible population: better bill payment behavior, decreased mobility, decreased disconnections, lowered concern with meeting winter heating and electric costs, increased energy efficiency actions to control energy bills, more comfortable and safe housing conditions, and more income to spend on other necessities besides heating.

### 5.1.8 The type and amount of energy education provided varies widely by local agencies

Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, and participants indicate the level of energy education being provided through the programs varies widely:

- Fewer than 50% of local WHEAP agency staff reported providing energy education due to reported time and budget constraints. Further, the level of education that is provided varies.
- All WAP providers reported providing energy education, although the extent of this effort also varied.

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<sup>24</sup> Data sources: 1999-2001 CPS Survey results presented on the federal LIHEAP website, and DOA's WHEAP database from FFY 2000.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

A majority of participants who reported receiving education said:

- They now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bill.
- They are more likely to report taking low-cost, no-cost actions to reduce their bills.

### 5.1.9 Coordination between WHEAP and WAP agencies need improvements

Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, utility staff, and Division staff indicate there could be increased coordination and communication between the programs to increase efficiencies, better target the most vulnerable households, and to increase their understanding of each other's objectives.

### 5.1.10 Public benefits are viewed positively by those who know and understand it

The addition of funds through Public Benefits is viewed positively by agency staff:

- WHEAP staff who understand Public Benefits view it as a strength, allowing them to expand services and to target additional clients, such as electric heating households. However, almost half of WHEAP staff were unclear about the impact Public Benefits has had on their operation.
- All WAP providers and regional coordinators feel Public Benefits has increased their ability to adequately address a home's needs by providing services in a more comprehensive manner. However, this has resulted in additional time and money to weatherize each home, which has had other implications.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION/CONSIDERATION

Based on the qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts in Year 1 of the evaluation, we have made five recommendations for further exploration and consideration. In Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation, we will continue to monitor these issues, as well as other issues as they arise.

1. *Encourage increased cooperation and communication between WHEAP and WAP throughout the state.* As found in an earlier study conducted by the Energy Center of Wisconsin<sup>25</sup>, our interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff indicate that the current level of integration between WHEAP and WAP varies throughout the state and ranges from close cooperation to minimal cooperation. As discussed in Chapter 4, the qualitative interviews conducted in Year 1 of the evaluation identified three issues—lack of communication and consistency in the referral and prioritization of applications from WHEAP to WAP, disagreement about who should be providing emergency furnace replacements, and frustrations about the amount of money the other program receives. Because households participating in both WHEAP and WAP appear to be making the most progress toward self-sufficiency, the evaluation believes it is imperative that the programs work smoothly together in order to maximize the programs' benefits to low-income households and society. For FFY03, the Division is asking local WHEAP and WAP agencies in each county to develop a local coordination plan. In upcoming years, the evaluation will determine what impact this plan is having on improving communication and coordination in these three, and other areas.

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<sup>25</sup> "Wisconsin Low-Income Energy Services," publication # 167-1, Energy Center of Wisconsin, 1997.

2. *Improve the programs' targeting and servicing of the most vulnerable and high-energy burden households.* While the programs do provide service to a significant percentage of vulnerable and high-energy burden households (households with an excessively high energy burden or a vulnerable household defined as having a disabled member, member over 60, or children under 6 years of age), there is room for improvement. Based on the 1998-2001 Current Population Survey and the WHEAP participant database, 20% or fewer of the eligible households with elderly and with children under the age of 6 participated in WHEAP. Furthermore, since WHEAP serves as the primary referral mechanism for WAP, the types of households targeted and served by WHEAP, and referred to WAP could impact the level of participation in WAP by the most vulnerable households. In the Federal Fiscal Year 2002 (FFY02), WAP served significantly fewer households with individuals over 60 years of age, households with disabled persons, those below 75% of the poverty level, and those with an energy burden greater than 10% than what were served through WHEAP. Furthermore, WAP is delivered to a much higher proportion of homeowners than renters. This is a cause for concern since renters are more likely than homeowners to report having difficulty meeting bills and controlling their energy use.

One of the main barriers to program participation found in the WHEAP/WAP non-participant survey is that a significant percent of the households interviewed are not aware of the programs (45% and 65% reported unawareness of WHEAP and WAP programs, respectively). Participant surveys indicate that the main avenue for participants learning about the programs is through word-of-mouth. Because many vulnerable households such as those that are disabled or elderly may not be connected into personal networks as well as other low-income households, the program may only be able to reach many of these most vulnerable households by more proactive outreach activities such as on-site visits (i.e., visits to the Center on Aging, senior citizen centers, schools), which are an infrequently implemented outreach practice. This sentiment was shared by utility and fuel providers who think the program may not be sufficiently reaching elderly and disabled households through their current outreach activities. In interviews with local WHEAP agency staff, most staff professed that they find disabled households the hardest to reach, and said the greatest barrier to reaching the elderly was pride and program misperception barriers. They said because of the high intervention outreach activities needed to reach some of these households and their own limited administrative funds and time, they did feel there was room for improvement in their reaching these households.

In addition, local WHEAP and WAP agency staff, and utility and bulk fuel providers commented on their concern for not serving ineligible households just over the 150% poverty level that are vulnerable and have high energy burdens. The baseline survey for Targeted HPWES supports that households between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty level are vulnerable and face high-energy burdens, bill payment problems, and home comfort and safety problems similar to those experienced by households below 150% of the federal poverty level. The Targeted HPWES program should partially remedy the programs' not reaching vulnerable, high-energy burden households just over income eligibility requirements, although the annual number of households to be weatherized under Targeted HPWES is relatively small (425 units in FFY03). Another possibility for allowing these households to receive WHEAP and/or WAP services is to consider allowing more program deductions such as medical and health care and child care expenses or changing income requirements to median

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income as allowed by Federal law, which in Wisconsin is higher than the statutory limit of 150% of the federal poverty level.

3. *Explore methods for and the effectiveness of increasing energy education.* Interviews with WHEAP and WAP agencies found great variation in the amount of energy education provided by the local agencies. Less than half of WHEAP providers reported providing energy education to participants. WHEAP agencies said although they see value in providing customer education, they do not feel WHEAP provides this service at an optimal level because of time and budget constraints. All interviewed WAP agencies and subcontractors reported providing some customer education, although their descriptions of the education provided suggest that customer education efforts are not extensive. This is despite the fact that four of the five WAP regional coordinators feel energy education is very important, and three of the five regional coordinators feel energy education is one of the areas most in need of improvement.

Participant surveys found that almost all respondents who reported receiving information on how to reduce energy use in their home—or properly maintain their heating, cooling, or other equipment—believed that they now know more about how to save energy and control their utility bills and they have been able to use this knowledge to help reduce their utility bills. Furthermore, those receiving energy education reported implementing more no-cost or low-cost actions than those who did not report receiving education through the program.

Because WHEAP reaches significantly more households a year than WAP, but appears to be providing less education to participants, increased coverage for WHEAP participants is especially in need of improvement. The evaluation recommends promoting specific education through the programs, exploring the possibility of state-sponsored documentation, and the possible ear-marking of specific monies to support these efforts as some providers mentioned money as a barrier to providing customer education. The evaluation will continue to explore the extent of education offered and its impact over time.

4. *Explore different methods for WHEAP direct payment and expansion of service benefits.* Interviews with local WHEAP and WAP agency staff and utility and bulk fuel providers suggest that the main way the low-income programs as currently offered could be revised to increase their impact on sustaining payment is through a revision in the way WHEAP program payments are made. Interviews identified that one way the program could increase its impact on a client's ability to sustain payment of bills is through more consistent implementation of non-emergency crisis funds and a proactive, co-payment arrangement. Most utility and bulk fuel providers and almost a fifth of WHEAP providers interviewed expressed the belief that this type of arrangement helps people get into the habit of paying their bills and taking responsibility for meeting bills on an on-going basis. In addition, average customer satisfaction with proactive, co-payment arrangement plans was reported as high (above a 4 on a 5-point scale) in participant surveys. Therefore, although it could be hypothesized that households would not be open to participate in this type of plan because it requires significantly more effort on their part than receiving a direct payment, it appears many households are receptive to this service offering. In addition, about half of those providers that discussed this practice said they believe this type of plan increases participants' self-esteem. Currently, only about ten percent

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of WHEAP participants are reporting participating in a proactive, co-payment arrangement.

Another aspect of the direct payment that a few WHEAP agency staff and utility and bulk fuel providers feel is limiting the program's impact on sustaining payment is that the direct payment through WHEAP is placed on a client's account once a heating season. These respondents feel that this does not promote clients' ability to sustain payment because clients then do not think about their energy bill or make any payments until they are in arrears again at the end of the season.

5. *Address, as able, administrative and funding barriers limiting program performance.* Slightly more than a quarter of interviewed WHEAP agencies said that funding for administrative support was a problem for them. It is important to note that this was more of a problem prior to the addition of Public Benefit funds. Due to the seasonal nature of the program and the limited funds they have for administrative support, WHEAP agencies reported that they often lose high-quality, trained individuals in the summer months. These agencies said they then need to hire administrative staff again in the fall to replace those they lost. Other agencies close during the summer months because of lack of administrative funding, which is reported as a problem by utility and bulk fuel vendors who say their main referral source to help customers is then not available during the summer months. Another administrative problem reported by one local WHEAP agency was that they cannot hire enough people to process all of the applications during the heating season so providers can only meet with clients for 15 minutes at a time, and clients often have to wait several weeks before they can get an appointment. Although most participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the WHEAP program, some respondents did mention that more helpful service provider staff and more accessible service provider staff would have increased their satisfaction with the program. A couple WHEAP agencies also said they do not offer more client education because they do not have the budget to expand education efforts.

Although Public Benefits appears to have largely offset funding limitations faced by WAP, the program now appears to be facing new administrative and program barriers, which increased state support and training may be able to help alleviate during this period of transition. Most interviewed WAP agencies said that funding for weatherization had not been sufficient in the past, but the advent of Public Benefits changed that. However, the expansion of services through Public Benefits has staffing implications for agencies. Most agencies are meeting increased staffing needs through expanding their use of subcontractors or using subcontractors for the first time. Two Coordinators reported that they have seen an increase in customer complaints as a result of the program having to hire new staff because they are not as experienced and well trained as the staff who have been delivering services for a considerable length of time. However, both Coordinators feel that with time to adjust and train those delivering weatherization services, rise in customer complaints will not persist. Agencies and Coordinators also noted that Public Benefits has resulted in increased waiting lists because of it taking longer to weatherize each home and this affects customer satisfaction. Another problem for agencies is that for many of them, customers in their territories are not all eligible for Public Benefits (some territories are not 100% Public Benefits because some municipal and cooperative utilities had elected not to participate in Public Benefits). These providers said that this causes a great deal of confusion and resentment from customers who do not understand why

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they are not able to receive the same service as their neighbor. Interviewees also mentioned difficulties with the expanded measures. The state will need to be actively involved with WAP agencies it explores the best combination of measures to be offered under the weatherization assistance program.