ENERGY
EFFICIENCY
FOR ALL

Everyone has the right to an affordable and healthy home during and after the COVID-19 crisis

Pandemic Response Guidance

Contents

EEFA's Pandemic Response Guidance

Everyone has the right to an affordable and healthy home during and after the COVID-19 crisis

We are in the midst of a rapidly evolving public health and economic crisis that threatens the safety, housing, employment, and connectedness of millions of individuals across America, especially the most vulnerable who are under-resourced and living on low to extremely low incomes. The costs of staying in one's home with the lights on, heating or cooling equipment running, and other appliances operating exceed more than 50% of income for households living on extremely low incomes, and missing just a single paycheck can put that all in jeopardy. Meanwhile, unemployment is skyrocketing.

The impacts from COVID-19 and the accompanying economic recession will worsen America's housing crisis and likely force households to make tradeoffs between food, medicine, energy, and housing. This problem isn't new to Energy Efficiency for All (EEFA), and we know the impact is most felt by people of color in this country. We agree with the NAACP that "we must address the systemic underpinnings of inequity" while also providing an emergency response that meets the critical needs in our communities.

Communities across the United States are coming together with an outpouring of aid, and we link to those resources at the end of this page and will update them as we learn more. In addition to this invaluable local work, we have to act now and protect against predatory policies that will harm communities long after the COVID-19 crisis has ended.

EEFA is highlighting policies actively being developed by community groups, local, state, and federal government, mission-driven nonprofit organizations, and academic researchers for protection against eviction and other housing issues. These recommendations can be tailored for any state or local jurisdiction to immediately advocate for the health and safety of everyone. When delivering recommendations please be aware that state and local decision-makers are dealing with many urgent COVID-19 related matters, and we all need to prioritize keeping people healthy and safe during this crisis.

Other pandemic response resources and policy recommendations are linked at the bottom of the document.

Energy Efficiency for All

Ensuring Access to Essential Energy and Water Services

Ensuring access to energy and water services, especially for under-resourced communities, communities of color, and undocumented people, during and the recovery period directly following the COVID-19 crisis.

Enact a comprehensive moratorium on utility disconnections for water, electricity, and gas services during the declared state of emergency and the recovery period that applies to all utility structures, including municipal, investor-owned, or cooperative utilities.

Prioritize the immediate, safe reconnection of currently disconnected households.

Establish emergency water distribution stations for households waiting for their water to be turned back on.

Immediately expand access to utility and state energy assistance funds during the declared state of emergency and the recovery period by increasing funding, modifying eligibility requirements, allowing for cross-eligibility, and enabling online enrollment.

- Accelerate disbursement of newly expanded federal LIHEAP dollars to meet immediate state relief needs.
- Modify eligibility to include people and their households affected by COVID-19 who are out of work, have reduced work, or are experiencing severe disease-related symptoms that affect their ability to work.
- Allow for cross-eligibility for energy assistance funds, i.e. if one is eligible for Medicare or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), they should also immediately qualify for household energy assistance.
- Expand existing energy assistance funds to include water assistance.

Ensuring Access to Essential Energy and Water Services (Continued)

Expand bill payment assistance and set up arrearage forgiveness to reduce energy and water burdens for existing low-income and newly low-income households during the crisis and the recovery period. If neither are sufficient, offer long-term payment plans.

Suspend all late fees and penalties due to non-payment of bills for income-qualified households and households experiencing hardships from COVID-19 during the declared state of emergency and the recovery period.

Suspend all credit and debt collection during the state of emergency and the recovery period for existing low-income and newly low-income households.

Consider special rates for income-qualified households to ease energy and water cost burdens during and after the moratorium on disconnection for residential customers and for small businesses required to close during the declared state of emergency and the recovery period.

Require Public Service or Public Utility Commissions to hold virtual energy efficiency stakeholder processes now to discuss creating continuity plans for energy assistance, energy efficiency programs, and the energy workforce during the crisis. Ensure that participation is inclusive and open to all interested parties.

Ensure there are clear communications, available in multiple languages, to all utility customers about new policies.

Preventing Eviction and Preserving Affordable Housing

Prevent eviction, create housing for people experiencing homelessness, ensure that vulnerable populations are safe, and preserve the operation of affordable housing during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

(Thanks to Georgia Housing & Legal Scholars, KC Tenants and National Housing Trust for developing many of these recommendations.)

Address the Needs of Renters & Housing Providers

Provide sufficient levels of rent payment assistance to ensure that all renters can afford their housing costs without taking on additional debt and that building owners have the resources necessary to continue to maintain their properties. Eviction moratoria without rent relief or cash assistance will put renters in a deeper crisis in the future while harming rental housing providers. States and localities should create emergency relief funds to provide immediate rental assistance to people who risk losing their homes because of sickness, inability to work, or any other factors related to COVID-19. This fund should launch immediately, without barriers to entry, like lengthy paperwork or application fees.

Immediately suspend all eviction filings, hearings, and enforcements currently in process and impose an eviction moratorium going forward that covers every type of eviction case and applies to every stage of eviction proceedings. Include penalties and enforcement for any moratorium violators.

The state or locality should create a fund to provide grants to housing providers so building owners can cover operating expenses.

Section continues on next page

Address the Needs of Renters & Housing Providers (Continued)

If insufficient housing payment assistance is available, institute a statewide freeze on rent and mortgage increases during the state of emergency, including a ban on fees for missed or late rent or mortgage payments.

If neither rent and mortgage assistance nor freezes on increases can be established, residential tenants may be unable to pay rent during an eviction moratorium, which may in turn cause landlords difficulty in paying mortgages, property taxes, and other operating expenses. Jurisdictions should also consider protections against foreclosures for the duration of the state of emergency and the entire recovery period so as to not put renters at risk. State housing finance agencies should offer forbearance for multifamily borrowers with state-financed mortgages who have experienced a decline in earnings due to COVID-19.

Ensure there is clear communications, available in multiple languages, about new policies.

Address the Needs of People Already Experiencing Homelessness

Take action to convert vacant hotel and motel rooms, dorms, schools, hospitals, parking garages, and large stadiums into homes for people who need them, including those experiencing homelessness and people living in unsafe or unsanitary conditions now.

- Identify specific temporary spaces to specifically house those that exhibit fever, other related COVID-19 symptoms, or test positive where testing is available so that people can safely recover.

- Support people recovering from the pandemic and its economic fallout by providing services to transition to permanent housing.

For people who will not or cannot move indoors, build emergency sanitation sites near homeless encampments and major public transit hubs to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Sites should include 24-hour restrooms and showers, laundry, free hygiene supplies, COVID-19 testing, caseworkers, and disease prevention information in multiple languages.

People experiencing homelessness in shelters and encampments live in high density with little access to handwashing and have higher rates of chronic illnesses that puts them at heightened risk of COVID-19. Protecting those who are homeless or become homeless during the crisis will mitigate the spread of disease.

- Place a moratorium on encampment sweeps. Instead, locate additional facilities for sheltering the homeless without exceeding social distance recommendations from the CDC. State and local governments should assist in identifying facilities for decongestion and physical distancing.

- Supply additional sanitization services and supplies to homeless shelters.

- Supply funds and expand testing requirements to ensure routine testing is made widely available for homeless shelters and people experiencing homelessness, regardless of immigration status.

- Supply funding to support frontline staff in homeless shelters, including hiring additional personnel; purchasing personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, and other sanitation supplies; purchasing thermostats; providing paid sick leave to encourage staff to stay home if ill; and funding to cover childcare costs to permit frontline staff to work while schools are closed.

- Ensure there is clear communications, available in multiple languages, about new policies.

Address the Needs of Vulnerable Populations in Prisons and Detention Centers

These recommendations are based on expertise from United We Demand Action, Medical Professionals, and Immigrants Rising.

Guarantee safe conditions, and provide healthcare and support to protect those in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers and prisons.

Alleviate the mass overcrowding in detention facilities through community-based alternatives to detention. Individuals and families, particularly the most vulnerable, should be released while their legal cases are being processed to avoid preventable deaths and mitigate the harm from a COVID-19 outbreak.

Provide free COVID-19 testing, treatment, and services for all, regardless of immigration status.

To ensure the safety of undocumented tenants, housing providers should refrain from calling Immigration and Customs Enforcement to impose evictions if rent payments are not made on time.

Energy Efficiency for All

Address the Needs of Housing Providers for Seniors Who Are Especially Vulnerable

Provide immediate additional operating support for senior affordable housing providers, multifamily properties receiving project-based Section 8 assistance, and private sector mid- and high-rise affordable housing throughout the country, including:

- Establish a fund to discourage informal evictions by defraying the costs of reduced rental income due to lost rents and deferred evictions during this crisis. This could be in the form of a low-interest or no-interest loan to cover operating costs, which would be forgiven if landlords achieve high rates of housing stability during the state of emergency.

- For Section 8 voucher holders who have lost income during the emergency, establish a speedy process to recalculate rents retroactive to the date income was lost before the moratoria on evictions expire.

- Provide additional operating funds to subsidized senior housing and housing for high-risk groups. This includes:

  - Funding for building sanitization efforts and deep cleaning.

  - Funds to support enhanced visitation policies.

  - Funds to support and ensure routine screening and testing.

  - Funding to support frontline staff, including hiring additional personnel, and purchase personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, and sanitation supplies to prevent the spread of illness among frontline staff; paid sick leave to encourage staff to stay home if ill; and childcare to permit frontline staff to work while schools are closed.

- Ensure there is clear communications, available in multiple languages, about new policies.

Protecting All Vulnerable Workers

Protect all workers, especially those that are most vulnerable, during and following the COVID-19 crisis.

This unprecedented moment requires swift action to ensure lasting protections for the most vulnerable communities. The vulnerability of workers is driving an economic crisis that parallels the health crisis. Financial hardships and a lack of access to healthcare during this crisis will deepen the vulnerabilities of many communities. If we want to see change in one sector, we must ensure the change is structural and fosters positive protections for the most vulnerable workers across all sectors. Positive outcomes for energy and energy efficiency workers must be tied to improved outcomes for all workers. We recommend the following for all workers during, and the recovery period following, the crisis:

Sick Leave and Family Leave

Support people at risk of losing their livelihoods, health care, and homes, including vulnerable and low wage workers as well as those impacted by school and child care closures.

Guarantee a minimum of 14 paid sick and family medical leave days for all workers, regardless of sector or business size.

Enforce paid sick day and family medical leave policies, especially for those who are misclassified as contractors and deprived of their right to paid sick leave.

Protect workers who have a right to self-quarantine if they are concerned about exposure to the virus. Workers should be protected from termination without just cause. No worker should be punished because they were quarantined or requested sick leave.

Contractors/Program Implementers

Establish an emergency fund for small contractors--especially those owned or managed by women, minorities, and veterans--to bridge this period of work stoppage so that they can continue to pay their employees and stabilize their businesses.

Enact policies that allow program administrators and state agencies to continue to support providers of water and energy efficiency services in order to maintain employees on payrolls, especially nonprofit organizations that cannot access solutions that rely on an organization's tax status, i.e. tax credits. (These can include partial payment advances for work under contract, timeline extensions, payment for "virtual audits," etc.)

During the stoppage of in-home retrofit work, governments, utilities, and program administrators should provide funding for workforce development programs, using online platforms, that provide access to information about clean energy skills, jobs, and contracts.

Healthcare

All affected workers need a guarantee that they will keep their healthcare during the crisis and any uninsured person should automatically be enrolled in Medicaid, regardless of income or immigration status.

100% paid testing and treatment for COVID-19.

Expand Unemployment Insurance Benefits for workers who lose their jobs due to sickness or the economic downturn because of the national response to the coronavirus.

Underemployment

Create Emergency Support Benefits, distinct from family or sick leave. Emergency Support will cover workers who still retain their jobs but are unable to work or see their hours reduced due to the current crisis or future emergencies. This policy must also cover self-employed workers, gig economy workers, and worker-owners of cooperative businesses

Require businesses that receive federal or state emergency relief funds to apply a portion of those funds to cover lost wage claims due to job loss or reduced hours from their workforce during the emergency or crisis.

States and program administrators should provide funds to employers to support paid online training by employees while onsite work is not possible.

Healthcare, emergency and essential service workers

Require adequate rest breaks and time off for health care and other emergency workers.

Ensure there is clear communications, available in multiple languages, about all new policies and programs.

Dedicate resources to supporting emergency workers with free childcare. Emergency workers could include: emergency services, grocery workers, home-health aids, healthcare workers, janitorial staff, waste management, health equipment manufacturing (respirators, masks, etc), and public transit workers.

Dedicate additional resources to ensure retail, warehousing, distribution, delivery workers are eligible for overtime pay.

Energy Efficiency for All

Emergency safety standards

Provide personal protective equipment (e.g., N95 face masks, gloves, and face shields as needed) to all health care workers, first responders, nursing home workers and others who may routinely come into contact with COVID19-infected people. This must include training, fit testing, and maintenance to ensure PPE is effective.

Ensure workers are protected from all infectious diseases in the workplace, including COVID-19. Implement science-driven emergency standards for all workers, explicitly acknowledging that certain workers are at elevated risk for COVID-19, establish a clear hierarchy for decision-making, and ensure appropriate PPE for workers.

Expanding Access to Internet and Phone Services

Expand access to internet and phone services, especially for under-resourced communities, communities of color, and undocumented people, during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

(These recommendations are based on internet/phone policies and guidance emerging across the country, including the FCC Pledge, Closing the Digital Divide guidance from Human Rights Watch, and other individual company policies.)

During this crisis, phones and the internet can serve as vital connections to pandemic information, support networks, and essential services. Phone and internet services are also critical to families that are now required to work or participate in school remotely. Without access, families are at risk of being misinformed on how to stay healthy; losing their jobs; and lacking access to learning. For these reasons, we recommend that state and local leaders:

Increase and expand access to internet and phone services for all households.

Suspend disconnections, expedite reconnections, and forego late payment penalties.

Offer free wi-fi hotspots.

Loosen or pause data plan charges and offer expanded, unlimited data.

Offer free or discounted services and equipment for under-resourced households.

Ensure there is clear communication, available in multiple languages, to all customers about new policies.

Energy Efficiency for All

Prioritizing Remediation of Unhealthy Housing

Prioritize remediation of unhealthy housing in light of the higher impacts of extended time in the home for thoses under "stay at home" or "shelter in place" orders.

Immediately require the placement of carbon monoxide detectors in federally supported and assisted housing.

Expand the capacity to provide virtual and online healthy housing training programs--including the EPA's Renovations, Repair, and Painting Program-- to increase access to these programs for low-income communities and communities of color and ultimately create additional jobs through workforce, environmental health, and technology grants after the orders end.

Enact proactive rental inspection programs in state and local governments, to launch after the state of emergency has ended, with provisions that allow renters to trigger inspection and remediation while preventing retaliation against those renters.

Supply funds for emergency environmental healthy housing repair and residential services for energy efficiency that remediate severe mold, lead, pest management, and temperature control issues that should be addressed to reduce the prevalence of respiratory illness that can exacerbate COVID-19 outcomes.

Ensure there is clear communication, available in multiple languages, about new programs and policies.

Resources

Resources and policies we recommend for further guidance.

EEFA Tracking Eviction & Housing Policies

EEFA COVID-19 Policy Tracker Spreadsheet	https://www.energyefficiencyforall.org/covid-19/

Mutual Aid by State

California	Statewide mutual aid list (California Environmental Justice Alliance)
	Coachella Valley mutual aid and resource list (Lift To Rise)
Louisiana	New Orleans Mutual Aid and resource list that includes Louisiana resources
Michigan	Map of mutual aid efforts being updated by Michigan Radio
Minnesota	Minneapolis General Request for Community Assistance Form
	Twin Cities Queer and Trans Mutual Aid Form
	MN Disabled/Elder/Caregiver Mutual Aid Form
	South Minneapolis Mutual Aid Sheet (with links to other neighborhoods as well) (has number to call for Spanish)
	MN Financial Solidarity Sheet
	Twin Cities Care Collective Childcare Form (English and Spanish)

Section continues on next page

Mutual Aid by State (Continued)

New York	New York City Mutual Aid Network
Washington, D.C.	Community-organized mutual aid resource DC Mutual Aid Spreadsheet
Nationwide	It's Going Down: digital community center for anarchist, anti-fascist, autonomous anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements Mutual Aid for Black Trans Women Navigating Sex Work (Nationwide) English and Spanish "Know Your Rights" guides for trans people navigating COVID-19, healthcare, and other barriers (nationwide, developed by Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund): • English "Know Your Rights" • Español "Conozcan sus Derechos" Restaurant Opportunities Center United links to state-specific pages

Additional Resources

Policy Tracking	Energy and Policy Institute tracking Utility Shutoff Policies Food and Water Watch Water Shutoff Policies Tracker National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) tracking COVID-19 Related State Legislation

Section continues on next page

Mutual Aid	Mutual Aid Disaster Relief: Collective Care Is Our Best Weapon resource guide
	Safety Practices for Mutual Aid Food & Supply Distribution During the Coronavirus Pandemic (zine formatted)
Equity & Homelessness	COVID-19 - Racial Equity & Social Justice Resources
	Immigrants Rising: Tangible Support for Immigrant Communities During COVID-19
	NAACP Ten Equity Implications of the Coronavirus COVID-19 Outbreak in the United States; The Imperative for Civil Rights Advocacy, Monitoring, and Enforcement
	National Alliance To End Homelessness: Coronavirus and Homelessness
	National Health Care for the Homeless Council: COVID-19 Resources
Policy Discussion & Recommendations	ACEEE Energy Efficiency Workers at Risk
	Green & Healthy Homes Initiative: Healthy Homes & COVID-19
	Housing Matters: When Pandemic Hits, Pausing Evictions Can Help Renters and Landlords—But It's Not Enough
	National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) Consumer Protection Recommendations
	National Housing Law Project (NHLP) Campaign for Protecting Renter and Homeowner Rights During Our National Health Crisis
	NRDC Ensuring Access to Energy More Important than Ever
	NRDC Michigan Must Restore Water to All Homes During COVID-19 Crisis
	NRDC Suspend Shutoffs of Essential Utility Services in Crisis
	Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University: COVID-19 Housing Resources

State–Specific Additional Resources

Connecticut	Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness: COVID-19 and Homelessness Resource Guide
Georgia	Georgia Housing Policy Recommendations
Minnesota	MN COVID Response from a coalition of local groups
Missouri	KC Tenants: Missouri Action Needed on COVID-19 and Housing/ Homelessness