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economics of equity

Many of the issues of equity in energy efficiency are economic in nature, so the most effective solutions are likely going to at least partially address those economic problems. As one example, the vast majority of low-income households are renters. The main economic issue with equitably having LI households participate in efficiency programs is split incentive between the owner of the building (who has to make an investment) and the tenants (who reap the rewards IF the owner makes the investment). The California Utility Allowance Calculator is a partial solution but only for a narrow subset of LI households - those in LIHTC properties. The CEC should foster research into solutions that have a wider applicability, since less than 1/4 of California's LI households live in LIHTC properties.

Another issue is the link between gas appliances within the living space and occupant health. This is an equity issue because LI households (a) generally have less understanding of the link between IAQ, their health, and their economic situation, and (b) have fewer resources to fix the IAQ problems if/when they understand them. Some research by the Green and Healthy Housing Initiative indicated a causal link between improved IAQ in LI housing and improved health outcomes. The value of the health improvements was found in that study to be greater than either the cost of the upgrades or the utility bill savings. This research needs to be replicated in CA, and particularly in areas with high incidence of asthma ER visits. The research should include identifying cost-effective ways of reaching those households and economically sound ways of upgrading their homes - whether rentals or owned.