



Opportunity Council is a private, non-profit Community Action Agency serving homeless and low-income families and individuals. Our Healthy Homes Program improves the health and safety of the homes for low-income families in Whatcom, Island, and San Juan counties. We offer our clients:

- A comprehensive home assessment to identify health and safety hazards.
- Housing repairs and other measures to reduce asthma triggers in the home environment for young children.
- Education to help families take action to create a healthier home.

These services are provided by credentialed *Healthy Homes Specialists* and weatherization professionals.



The Promise of Healthy Homes for Reducing Asthma and Health Care Costs

A half million adults and 187,000 children in Washington State suffer from asthma. Studies show that exposure to tobacco smoke, certain allergens (dust mites, cockroaches, rodents, pests, and pet dander), and other environmental irritants increase the risk of developing—or losing control of—asthma.¹ As such, identifying and reducing asthma triggers in the home environment is a critical component to reducing and controlling asthma in our state.

57,000
x 
ER visits

In 2010, 57,000 Washington adults with asthma visited an emergency room at least once for their asthma, accounting for 164,000 emergency room visits in that year.²


\$73.2m

Asthma hospitalizations in Washington cost \$73.2 million in 2010 alone; 60% of these costs were paid for by public funds.³



25% of 10th graders with asthma missed at least one school day due to asthma in 2010.⁴

 = #1

Asthma is the number one cause of hospitalizations for children under 15 years of age in Washington⁵



Whatcom County has a higher rate of youth asthma than the state average⁶

Very young children (age 1–4) are most likely to be hospitalized for asthma⁷

Our Impact

Erin and Chad visited Opportunity Council in May 2010 originally looking for assistance to pay their heating bills. At the time of their Energy Assistance appointment, staff learned that their five-year old daughter, Wendy, had asthma. Since age three she has used her inhaler every day and a nebulizer twice per day. We replaced the old carpet in Wendy's bedroom with low-VOC laminate flooring to reduce allergens. We installed fans in the kitchen and bathroom to reduce moisture, mold growth and other indoor air contaminants. We repaired the ductwork as an additional air quality improvement measure. **Following these improvements, Wendy has not had to use her inhaler or nebulizer; she regularly sleeps through the night without coughing; and has not been missing school due to breathing problems.**

The Demonstrated Return on Investment

- For every dollar invested in in-home asthma interventions, **the return on investment ranges from \$5–\$14.**⁸
- Following its systematic review of existing research, the Community Preventive Services Task Force declared in-home multi-trigger, multi-component environmental asthma interventions **“a good value for the money invested based on improvements in symptom-free days, savings from averted costs of asthma care, and improvement in productivity.”**
- The 2007 National Asthma Education Prevention Program Expert Panel guidelines place a strong emphasis on **control of environmental asthma triggers and community education for asthma self management** as vital components of effective asthma management.

Let's Work Together to Lower Health Care Costs

Opportunity Council's Healthy Homes Program helps reduce the occurrence of asthma-related respiratory problems, reduce asthma emergency room visits, and improve quality of life for low-income families in Northwest Washington. Contact us at (360) 734-5121 or HealthyHomes@oppco.org to find out how you can help reduce asthma in our community.

Together, We Can Make a Difference

This is what the families that we work with have to say about the impacts of our program on their children's health:

“I am reassured that my daughter's health has stabilized and her asthma condition is now manageable rather than “out of control.” With your generosity, the troublesome carpet was removed from the home and the new floors immediately reduced asthma symptoms for my daughter. With the new insulation, the warmth in the home has helped all of us to be healthier.”

“There is a genuine joy in our home knowing we will no longer be rushing our four year old to the hospital for asthma attacks. As a single parent, I was not able to insulate my home nor install new floors in my home. You brought these changes into our home and we are very grateful.”

Resources

¹ Etzel, RA. How Environmental Exposures Influence the Development and Exacerbation of Asthma. *Pediatrics* 2003;112:233–239.

² Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Adult Asthma Call-Back Surveys 2008–2010.

³ Washington State Comprehensive Hospital Abstract Reporting Systems, 2010.

⁴ Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, 2010.

⁵ Washington Comprehensive Hospital Abstract Reporting System, 2000–2010.

⁶ Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, 2008 & 2010.

⁷ Washington Comprehensive Hospital Abstract Reporting System, 2000–2010.

⁸ Nurmagambetov TA et al (2011). Economic value of home-based, multi-trigger, multicomponent interventions with an environmental focus for reducing asthma morbidity: A community guide systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*; 41 (2 Suppl 1): S33–47.