

Alice Napoleon, Synapse Energy Economics

Poster Title: Strengthening the Connection Between Energy and Health Equity and Well-Being

Abstract: Today's power sector is a source of health disparities and inequities: Disenfranchised populations—particularly communities of color and low-income communities in rural areas and in small to mid-sized towns and cities—have insufficient access to clean and affordable energy, experience excessive exposure to pollution from fossil fuels, and face disproportionately large impacts from climate change. They struggle with managing energy use, because either they do not own their dwelling and thus cannot make efficiency improvements or they must make unaffordable repairs before installing such measures. Power sector transformation has the potential to alleviate inequities by providing wider access to clean, distributed energy resources such as solar energy and energy efficiency. It can also create new job opportunities, helping to address equity issues related to under-employment. Early action can ensure that health equity and human well-being are key factors in energy decision-making processes and ensure that frequently marginalized communities won't be left behind. Synapse, RAP, and Community Action Partnerships are undertaking a far-reaching study of the health disparities and inequities arising from today's power sector. We will also look at the promising policies and changes to decision making processes that could mitigate these inequities, now and as the sector transforms. Following an initial literature review and analysis to prioritize roughly 10 pathway/policy groups, we will engage key stakeholders through a series of web forums, interviews, and convenings to gather input and leverage the power of the collective to generate ideas and address crucial problems. These stakeholders include representatives of consumer groups and advocates, environmental non-governmental organizations, public utility commissions, energy offices, air regulators, public health agencies, investor-owned utilities, electric cooperatives, and municipal utilities. The project will culminate at the end of 2019 in a concept paper with case studies that highlight the four or five actionable measures most likely to achieve tangible progress on these issues. The aim is to motivate action on energy sector decision-making practices and encourage the implementation of policies to improve the equity of energy system outcomes. We propose discussing the approach, case studies, and preliminary findings for this project at BECC, given the interest in equity and serving disadvantaged communities. In November, we will be near the end of the project and can review our findings to elicit feedback from the conference participants.