



Staying warm together: Improving access to energy advice for older and multi-generational South Asian households

Research report by

Centre for Sustainable Energy

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Introduction

The project was delivered in partnership by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) and Dhek Bhal and funded by City Funds and Quartet Community Foundation. The project aimed to understand the barriers faced by older and multi-generational South Asian households when accessing energy advice and support services, and to develop recommendations for improved service design and delivery.

The project consisted of 16 interviews with members of older and multi-generational households who were offered an energy advice follow-up session with a CSE advisor, three interviews with community and advice staff, and a workshop with community organisations to present the research findings and develop recommendations. Recommendations are presented at the end of this report.

Project Background

Cold homes and fuel poverty are linked to a range of negative health outcomes, including respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, mental health problems and even contributing to excess winter deaths ([Bristol City Council, 2018](#)). There is a lack of evidence to determine if ethnicity is a factor in rates of poor health caused by cold homes, however, the South Asian

community are at higher risk of coronary disease and diabetes ([NICE, 2015](#); [British Heart Foundation, 2022](#)). South Asian communities have also been amongst the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the older generations in these communities ([Public Health England, 2020](#)).

CSE identified that South Asian families are underrepresented amongst referrals to our advice service. In addition, we have identified that the combined household income of multi-generational households living in energy-inefficient homes may exceed the household income threshold criteria for available public and industry-run domestic energy efficiency funding schemes.

By doing this research, we wanted to get a clearer picture of South Asian multi-generational households' domestic energy needs and practices. We also wanted to understand what stands in the way of South Asian multi-generational households asking for and using energy advice and support services. By working with our community-based partner, Dhek Bhal, we wanted to identify recommendations for how to increase awareness and uptake of warm homes services amongst multi-generational South Asian households. We considered this an important contribution towards achieving health and wellbeing benefits for members of such households, notably including older generations.

Research methodology

What we mean by certain terms used in the report

How we defined a multi-generational household

We defined a multi-generational household as three generations living within one home. This included grand-parent(s) representing the older generation, parent(s) representing the younger or middle generation, and child(ren) as the youngest generation. In some cases, the youngest generation included adult teenagers and young adults (aged 18 – 25).

How we defined vulnerable person

We defined vulnerable person to mean a person vulnerable to the health effects of living in a cold home. This includes:

- people with cardiovascular conditions
- people with respiratory conditions (in particular, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and childhood asthma)
- people with mental health conditions

- households with young children (from new-born to school age)
- pregnant women

This definition follows NICE guideline [NG6] Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes¹. The NICE guidelines also identify low income, older people (65 and older) and disabled people as at greater risk to the health effects of living in a cold home. In this report we make separate specific references to low income, older people and disabled people.

Research interviews

CSE research workers conducted semi-structured interviews during October and November 2021.

Interviews with household members

We interviewed a total of 16 adults from one or two generations of a total of 12 multi-generational South Asian households. The interviews were either conducted at Dhek Bhal's offices in Barton Hill, Bristol or over the telephone, with an interpreter available for all interviews. A member of Dhek Bhal acted as interpreter for one interview with a participant who required support to understand questions asked in English and/or who found it easier to answer questions mainly in their first language.

Inviting people to take part

Dhek Bhal is a well-regarded community organisation trusted by the South Asian community. Dhek Bhal played a crucial role in identifying and inviting people to participate in the research.

As a thank you for taking part, all participants were given a £20 shopping voucher and were offered a follow-up advice session with a CSE advisor. The advisor has a South Asian background and speaks Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi.

We also interviewed two Dhek Bhal community centre staff and one advisor from a money advice service. The research team also held a follow-up meeting with the CSE advisor on their reflections from providing follow-up advice sessions to some of the participating households.

Analysis and reporting

¹ [1 Recommendations | Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes | Guidance | NICE](#)

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded against the research questions in NVivo specialist software. We used the coding to produce the initial research findings which we presented at a virtual workshop attended by representatives of CSE, Dhek Bhal and other invited community and advice organisations.

Research limitations

The research encountered several limitations which may be seen to make the research findings less representative of the wider South Asian community and less applicable to community members not involved in this research.

Some research participants had no knowledge of available advice and support services and had never attempted to or felt the need to access these services. This made it difficult to explore some of the topics of interest with them.

We tried to recruit household participants via several other community-based organisations, including local mosques, gurdwaras, and community support organisations already known to the community. But in fact, all the participating households were recruited via Dhek Bhal and therefore already have some involvement with the organisation. This means that the findings may not reflect the experiences of households not engaged with Dhek Bhal or other local South Asian community organisations and who may require different approaches to be reached.

Many participants and community centre and advice staff told us that religious institutions play a vital role in accessing support and advice, and for this reason it would have been useful to interview a relevant representative. However, the research was unable to recruit such a representative to take part in the research and so we were unable to include their perspective.

The research aimed to explore the role that income thresholds can play in receiving additional support and funding. However, most participants did not know or want to share their household income when asked. Without this information, it was difficult for the research to reach an understanding of the role of household income and income thresholds as intended, particularly concerning the eligibility of multi-generational households living in a single property to access domestic energy performance grant funding.

Finally, some household participants reported changing circumstances due to COVID-19 and other factors affecting household constellation. Some households saw children of the middle generation moving in or out of the household, some households saw changes in constellation due to the pandemic. These recent and ongoing changes limit how far we can

be confident that our findings about the relative importance of different factors in shaping energy behaviours within a multi-generational household are correct.

Research findings

The findings are reported by theme. Some of these findings are also likely to be useful when thinking about working with other under-served communities.

Household characteristics

We interviewed 16 adults who represented both middle (younger) and older generations from 12 multi-generational South Asian households. For four households, we interviewed two household members: one adult from the oldest generation and one adult from the middle generation.

All 12 households include family members over the age of 60, and at least five households include children under the age of 5, though this number may be higher as some participants did not share the ages of all family members in the household. Five households include at least one person who is either disabled or vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home.

All 12 households live in houses² of between three and five bedrooms. Nine households own their homes and three households rent from the council.

Whilst most household participants were unable or unwilling to share their combined household income with interviewers, the combined household income of those that did provide this information varied from:

- £14,400 for a household of five adults and one child, where two of the adults are disabled. This is well below the qualifying low-income threshold of £31,000 proposed for national energy efficiency schemes, including the Home Upgrade Grant, (HUG), Local Authority Delivery (LAD) and the proposals for ECO4³.
- £60,000 for a household of three adults and three children. This exceeds the low income threshold for national energy efficiency schemes.

Roles within the household

Participants described some variability across domestic and caring responsibilities, though these were reported as usually being undertaken by the women in the household; sometimes the middle generation, sometimes the older generation, sometimes a mixture of

² This includes detached, semi-detached, and terraced houses.

³ [Energy Company Obligation ECO4: 2022 - 2026 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/107113/energy_efficiency_schemes_2022-2026.pdf)

both. Participants told us that women in the household are more likely to perform domestic and caring tasks such as cooking, cleaning and doing laundry, whilst men in the household are more likely to undertake home repairs and maintenance tasks. Whilst participants shared that men are most likely to be responsible for these tasks, they are often outsourced to paid external services, particularly for 'larger' or specialist jobs such as electrical or plumbing tasks. Several male participants – across both middle and older generations – said that they also support the women in the household with domestic tasks such as washing-up dishes and doing their individual laundry.

Home energy use

Multi-generational households reported using more energy at home compared to other households, which also results in higher energy bills:

"I think they [energy bills] are very high but I think I know why 'cause we've got a lot of people and they use a lot of electricity." Household member 13, older generation

With more family members in the household, more energy is used. One example of this is that some households told us that they had more than one fridge or freezer for storing food for multiple family members:

"I've got one freezer and two fridges, because we've got a big family." Household member 6, older generation.

Some families said that they had routines for when different family members would use energy in the household, for example showering:

"On the weekend we have a routine, so we give ourselves times: you have a shower at this time, I'll have a shower at this time." Household member 3, older generation

Participants gave examples of inter-generational differences in desired household temperature within the home. At its most extreme this can lead to even greater spending on electricity and heating:

"In the winter it's obviously cold but for mum we put the heating on 24 hours a day... then my boys get hot and then they put the fan on, so it is very hard to save energy" Household member 11, middle generation

The COVID-19 pandemic had meant that across all the participating households, nearly all family members had spent more time than usual at home, which in turn meant greater than

normal home energy use and bigger fuel bills. Adding to this, some families reported reduced incomes due to earners being furloughed, experiencing job losses, or struggling to find paid employment. This meant a reduced overall household income and an increased risk of fuel poverty. Some participants told us that their household income had stayed the same throughout the pandemic.

Participants also shared that the pandemic had negatively impacted the mental health and well-being of household members across generations:

“We were at home all the time. All the time. It was so depressing. Even the kids were getting fed up, yeah. It was a difficult time.” Household member 2, older generation

Income & energy costs

We asked participants about their combined household income. This was to give us a sense of how their incomes related to the eligibility thresholds for public and industry domestic energy efficiency funding schemes. Energy advisors will generally ask about household income so that they can provide suitable advice on which funding schemes a client might be able to apply to for funding.

Most research participants either told us they did not know their combined household income or did not want to share this in interviews. Some household participants told us that they do not discuss or are aware of different family members’ incomes within their home:

“I don’t really tend to ask how much my dad is receiving in benefits... or my sister, how much she receives in a month.” Household member 1, middle generation

We were told that finances are kept separate between older and middle generations, and the youngest generation’s (where this includes teenage and young adult grandchildren) income is seen as entirely separate to the household’s and solely for their individual use.

Participants reported different financial pressures within the household. Some households relied on one sole earner, some households relied entirely on income from state pensions, and some household members were unable to work due to disabilities but were not receiving the correct Universal Credit or benefits.

Most households reported concerns around increasing energy prices⁴ and this was further reflected in staff interviews:

⁴ This was before the February 2022 Ofgem increased energy cap announcement.

“Most of the clients are a bit worried about the price increase.” Advisor 2

Some household participants reported multiple and intersecting financial impacts: being on a low income, not having work, struggling to find work due to the pandemic, increased energy costs due to the pandemic, and rising energy prices.

Other participants said that whilst their energy bills had recently risen in cost, they are confident that they are able to pay.

Saving energy and money

Participants reported using energy at different times of the day, as family members have different schedules relating to their attending to school, going to work, or doing other leisure or social activities:

“We’re all doing things at different times of the day.” Household member 14, middle generation

Participants commented that this can make it more difficult for their household to shift their energy use to more energy efficient practices. For example, family members said that they are unable to cook and eat altogether to reduce energy costs related to food preparation. Participants told us that their reasons for saving energy include saving money and for environmental reasons, or a mixture of both:

“It’s cost saving but you know obviously you don’t like wasting things unnecessarily it’s obviously reducing the amount of consumption as well. So it’s kind of twofold really.” Household member 15, middle generation

Some household participants told us that they are already trying to save energy (and money):

“It’s very expensive heating and electric so when you don’t need it switch it off, even the kettle.” Household member 8, older generation

Participants also talked about other ways of saving energy and money. This includes using blankets or wearing warmer clothes instead of putting the heating on. Most participants said that they are already conscious of their energy use, meaning that it is more difficult for advisors to help with advice around actions and changes in behaviour that can reduce their home energy consumption. Participants emphasised their concern to find a balance between trying to save energy (and money) with protecting older family members within the household from cold-related illness:

“So she thinks that rather than saving money what if she becomes ill as well.”
Household member 3, older generation

Who pays the bills

The research found no fixed patterns around who pays the household bills in terms of generation or gender. In some cases, we were told that bills are managed and paid for by one person in the household (with a tendency for this to be the highest earner), other times this is split across different household members:

“[Children] contribute a little bit... one of them pays the council tax, one of them will do the shopping, one of them will pay the gas/electric bills so they contribute in that way rather than giving us cash.” Household member 13, older generation

“Obviously as a family we help each other out. So mum helps out financially if we ever need sort of any sort of assistance from that side.” Household member 15, middle generation

Participants shared that sometimes the household bill may be in one person’s name, but in fact is managed and paid for by a different family member.

Some participants reported that changes due to the pandemic changed who paid the bills. For example, the son of one interviewee who usually paid the bills lost his job due to COVID, and so she took over paying the household bills.

Struggling to pay

Some participants told us that they are having to decide between ‘eating or heating’, as the household is unable to afford both food and energy costs:

“[If] you don't cut down the energy, you can't buy your food.” Household member 10, older generation

Participants on pre-payment meters (PPMs) told us that they have noticed that their gas and electric are running out quicker. Several participants said that costs adding up can become difficult to manage such as repairs, new devices, and rising bills. Some households told us that they have to balance the need for family members vulnerable to the health effects of living in a cold home to keep warm to avoid illness with the ability to pay the bill:

“I think with vulnerable adults in the household... you’re trying to keep everyone warm with the fact that obviously at the end of the day it’s just making sure we can actually pay it as well!” Household member 15, middle generation

Not all households told us that they are struggling to pay.

Accessing energy advice

Most of the household participants interviewed said that they have never sought energy advice, even if they have been struggling in the past. Most participants reported being unaware of advice and support available but said that they would feel comfortable accessing services and would welcome the advice and support. Some participants said that they have not needed advice, but would feel comfortable reaching out if needed:

“I haven’t [accessed advice] but I would welcome it because I think it’s good to be aware of what goes on and what support is out there for improving on your electricity and gas bills.” Household member 16, middle generation

As well as little awareness of advice services in general, most household participants had not ever contacted their energy supplier for any reason, or heard of the Priority Services Register (PSR) or the Warm Home Discount scheme⁵.

Interviews with community and advisor staff also reflected that there is little awareness of available services, particularly if services rely on referral pathways as this relies on individuals already being in contact with referrers:

“If someone in the community doesn’t have support to make a referral, that could be a barrier.” Advisor 1

Participants told us that accessing advice services would be difficult due to being time consuming, language barriers, and being able to find a trusted source of information. Community centre staff and advisors interviewed also discussed the role that stigma and shame can play as a barrier for individuals and families accessing advice and support services. Adding to this, one community centre staff member told us that confidentiality is key when working with the community:

⁵ The Priority Services Register (PSR) is a free support service to help people in vulnerable situations and is offered by energy suppliers and network operators. The Warm Home Discount Scheme offers £140 off a household electricity bill between October and March. The government recently announced measures to increase the value of the Warm Home Discount as well as to widen eligibility. See [Chancellor's statement to the House - Energy Price Cap - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-statement-to-the-house)

“Bristol is not too big and South Asian people are concentrated in certain parts of Bristol so a lot of people know each other. It’s quite a close-knit community. That is why confidentiality and privacy, all these things are very important to our people.”

Community staff member 2

When asked where they would turn to for advice, participants said they would search online, use a price comparison website, ask friends or family, or ask someone at a trusted organisation such as their mosque, Dhek Bhal, or Citizen’s Advice. Older participants said that they would ask their children, the middle generation, with help to access services – often with getting online.

Community centre staff and advisors likewise said that word of mouth is a successful way to reach the community. However, they also told us that limited funding and staff capacity mean they must limit their efforts to promote the service:

“We are currently in a delicate situation without all of our funding, which means we are reluctant to promote our services further because we are already over-run.”

Advisor 1

Staff felt that individuals value being able to visit a ‘community hub’ to discuss their concerns and receive advice and support in person:

“Sometimes people prefer to come here where they feel already safe.” Community staff member 2

For advice organisations wanting to better reach the South Asian community, community centre staff said that it is important to build relationships with organisations already known to and trusted by the South Asian community who can then signpost people to those other services:

“Dhek Bhal is a barrier breaker.” Community staff member 1

“We are a gateway to a lot of other services that improve the quality of life of the service users.” Community staff member 2

A member of Dhek Bhal staff explained how their staff can add to the quality of advice provided by external organisations, not only by providing interpreter services, but by also advocating on behalf of community members, using their own understanding of the cultural context and family situation. They noted that using community-based staff as interpreters

can be more cost effective than using a professional interpreter service, and they were also at pains to note that their advocacy role may be more significant in terms of ensuring that the advice responds to the specific circumstances of the individual and their household. Advice staff also noted that individuals may not want other members of the family to know some details of their personal or financial situation. They cautioned against an over-reliance on other family members to act as interpreter in potentially sensitive discussions about health or household bills.

Supporting South Asian and multi-generational households

Reflecting the findings from household interviews, community centre and advisor staff recognised that multi-generational households' energy consumption is typically higher than average, reflected in higher than average fuel bills. Energy advice staff recognised that, in the context of an energy market where the onus is on customers to make sure they are on a cost-efficient tariff and where there are no rewards for customer loyalty, it can be frustrating for people to have to go the trouble of checking and switching tariff on a regular basis. The energy advisor emphasised the important of providing good information to customers.

The energy advisor who provided follow-up energy advice to project participants reflected that older members of South Asian multi-generational households may be entitled to but not claim a variety of age and disability-related welfare benefits, such as attendance allowance or Personal Independence Payment. She observed that their uptake of such benefits could not only help maximise household income but would also mean the household would then be eligible to apply for affordable warmth grant schemes, such as the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme and the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (GDG LADS):

“The best route to for this kind of scheme is to make sure that the older generation are getting disability benefits, so that would be the best route, actually, to make them eligible for support.” Advisor 2

The same advisor drew attention to an apparent tendency for older members of South Asian households to rely on younger members of their family to navigate them to support:

“So, there's this lack of awareness about income maximisation and benefits—not knowing where to go and not being proactive. Just depending on someone, like their daughter or son, to deal with this. And, obviously, they [the daughter or son] have busy lives and, unless they're actively doing it, I would think they [the older generation] would miss out on a lot of stuff.” Advisor 2

Community centre staff encouraged recognition of diversity amongst people from South Asian backgrounds:

'Asian doesn't mean people speak one language or they come from one culture. It is very diverse.' Community staff member 2

Community centre and advice staff said that culture and religion may affect how comfortable men and women from South Asian backgrounds feel about engaging with advice and other forms of support, such as home care. These included examples where:

- An older South Asian woman asking the advisor to talk to their husband about advice on home energy bills and possible home improvements.
- A South Asian man preferring to receive home care from another man rather than from a woman.

Advisors should be alert to such sensitivities although it may not always be possible to meet preferences about who provides advice. In interviews with household representatives, we found that both men and women were concerned about their household energy use and it was not only men that were responsible for bill payment.

Conclusion

This research with South Asian multi-generational households in Barton Hill, Bristol identified several factors that may explain why such households do not access energy-related advice or funding schemes to improve the energy performance of their homes.

We found that many participants had no knowledge of available advice and support services and had never attempted to access energy-related services. This is an important finding in itself but it also meant we weren't able to learn as much as we'd hoped about people's prior experience of engaging with energy advice services.

Whilst some better-off households said they hadn't felt the need to access support, the research showed that some large multi-generational households are struggling to manage to afford energy bills on a low combined income – a situation that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, which led both to increased domestic energy use and – for some households – reduced income.

A tendency to keep finances separate between the generations within a household may mean that individuals feel uncomfortable or unable to provide information about the

combined household income. For homeowners, being able to provide information about the combined household income is necessary to establish eligibility for funding schemes.

Regardless of income, most South-Asian multi-generational households are likely to be eligible for some forms of financial and energy-related support because they include older people or people with a long-term health conditions or disability. However, if they don't know about or do not claim relevant benefits, this can affect their ability to access funding schemes for which eligibility is based on claiming certain benefits or support. Where older generation household members rely on the middle generation (their children or children-in-law) to help them access support and the middle generation is too busy with other commitments, this can mean the entire household misses out on accessing relevant help and funding.

We found that multi-generational households unavoidably use more energy at home compared to other, typically smaller-sized households. This is partly due to the large overall size of the household, but also the need to keep older and vulnerable members of the household warm and the varied meal patterns, daily routines and heating preferences amongst different family members within the home. Research participants told us this can make it harder to reduce overall energy usage and save money.

The research found no strong pattern in terms of who, or which generation, pays the household bills, though it appears that men are mostly considered responsible for household maintenance and repairs arrangements. Women were mostly considered to bear the main burden of responsibility for housework, childcare and looking after older or disabled adult family members, though some responsibility for some tasks, such as cooking and washing-up, were shared.

The complex and varied daily living patterns in multi-generational households and differing arrangements for paying bills, maintaining the property and other domestic activities are important considerations for advice delivery.

Our experience of arranging this research as well as what we learned from interviews with community centre staff show that organisations trusted by the South Asian community are important in helping connect the community to other services, such as energy advice. They can help make introductions, provide interpreter, translation and advocacy services to support uptake and effective use of advice services. They can also provide useful insights concerning the diversity of the South Asian community, and the role of culture and religion in shaping community attitudes and preferences regarding advice and support.

Recommendations

We developed recommendations from the research findings and tested them in a follow-up workshop with community centre and advice service staff, including organisations not directly involved in the field research. We recognise that organisations require appropriate funding to act on these recommendations.

1. Be proactive, go to the community, do not wait for the community to come to you!

The research findings demonstrated that there remains an unmet need for increased community awareness of what advice and support services are available, including energy advice. Practical actions advice organisations can take to increase awareness of services are:

- Put up posters and leave flyers in shops and community buildings frequented by the target community. Suggested examples include specialist food shops, gurdwaras, mosques, mandirs, South Asian community buildings, and GP surgeries.
- Reach out using a range of different online and traditional communication channels – post, face to face, online, word of mouth, local media.
- Produce community-language versions of materials used to promote awareness of advice service.
- Promote memorable offers where possible. For example, community members remembered a past outreach activity run by CSE in the area, where we gave away free low energy lightbulbs.

2. To reach multi-generational households, be ready to engage with household members via multiple different channels.

Offer ways for individuals from the different generations in a multi-generational household to reach and use advice services. This should be reflective of the different age bands and life course stages of different household members.

- School-age children and their parents may be reached via school communication channels (e-news or letters home).
- Social media and other digital channels may offer additional effective channels for reaching working age adults.
- Younger generations may prefer online or telephone access to fit in with their busy lives, whilst older generations may prefer to receive in-person support. The oldest generation may be reached via GP practices, faith centres, community social centres and local shops.

- Workshops, surgeries, and community centre open days are good ways to connect services to the community. Where possible, home visits may also be useful for older or disabled people with health or mobility limitations.

3. Work in partnership with organisations already known and trusted by the community and aim to cut the steps involved for households to access advice.

- Find out which community-based organisations are active, well-known and trusted in the community of interest. Approach them and agree how to work in partnership with them to deliver support to their members.
- Work with community champions as entry points or gate keepers to the community.
- Agree with partner organisations on a suitable time scale for delivery of shared goals. Sustain partnerships over time so that there is continuity in engagement and trust.
- Recognise and draw on the expertise of South Asian community organisations to develop the advice organisation's cultural competency.
- In addition to making use of community organisation staff's language skills for interpreter support, also value their ability to provide (sometimes bi-lingual) advocacy support for individual clients and multi-generational households.

4. In the delivery of advice, a good starting point may be to focus on the health of older generations within multi-generational households.

The research showed that the health and wellbeing of older household members can be an important concern for multi-generational households. However, household members may not be fully aware of the potential greater health risks for older people and people with certain health conditions from living in a cold home.

- Advisors can achieve quick wins for multi-generational households by checking if an older household member is eligible for the Warm Homes Discount and to be registered with their supplier's Priority Services Register.
- In delivering behavioural advice, advisors should explore any differences amongst household members concerning heating preferences, as well as to understand who is responsible for setting heating controls and paying fuel bills. Advisors should clearly communicate the importance of providing sufficient warmth for older family members. Advisors should offer advice on cost-effective ways to achieve sufficient warmth for older family members, avoid family disputes and resort to wasteful practices by other family members.
- Asking about the health of older household members may also enable advisers to identify where they are potentially entitled to attendance allowance or other age and

disability-related benefits. This in turn may provide a route to eligibility for funding to pay for insulation measures and the heating system of a home.

5. Explain the reason for asking apparently intrusive questions about income, health and household composition.

The research showed that individual members of a multi-generational household may be unwilling to discuss financial matters openly with other household members across generations. Advisors should explain the purpose of asking about household income. Advisors may need to ask for income information from more than one member of a multi-generational household to get a full understanding of household income. Similar considerations may apply to questions about health status and household composition.

6. Recognise the more complex energy practices and likely greater than average energy consumption of multi-generational households.

The research indicated that, reflecting the larger overall number of people in the household and differing daily routines of individuals across the different generations, a multi-generational household is likely to use more electricity than the average household.

- An advisor should take time to get an overall picture of energy usage patterns and how the individual's own energy usage fits into that.
- Advisors should aim to provide advice that fits with the actual roles of the advice recipient and recognise the limitations of advice aimed at changing the practices of other members of a multi-generational household.
- Be realistic about what behavioural change advice can be accommodated within the context of previously negotiated or established arrangements for cooking, washing-up and bathing/showering in multi-generational households. It may be more realistic to concentrating on offering advice on practices that won't impinge on these arrangements, such as taking shorter showers.

The research indicated that multi-generational households may have more than one fridge and/or freezer for storing food. This may be in part reflect greater-than-average food storage requirements of large households but may also be about separate storage for different generations.

- An energy advisor may choose to focus on recommendations around replacing a very old appliance with newer, more energy efficient model, regularly defrosting appliances, or tips on how to avoid under-full freezers or overloaded fridges.

7. Use interpreter services to support effective advice delivery.

- Language can be a key barrier experienced by older generations from South Asian backgrounds. Interpreters can help make sure information is understood by the advisor and the client, including where misunderstanding may be due to cultural differences. Whilst an independent professional interpreter will not advocate on behalf of a client, a community organisation staff member may additionally offer advocacy support to the person receiving advice and/or mediate cultural sensitivities around advice.
- Advisors should beware of relying on family members to act as interpreter during advice delivery sessions. A person may be unwilling to discuss their health or financial issues openly with another family member. An independent interpreter is a neutral third party and has no influence over the decisions by the service provider or the client.⁶

8. Focus on developing early intervention rather than crisis services.

Wherever possible, advisors should aim to reach individuals and families within older and multi-generational South Asian households as part of general advice delivery services. Outreach and partnership with community organisations can support awareness of good household energy practices. As with other groups, the aim should be to minimise the need for crisis services for households in fuel debt or where households experience health risks due to living in a cold home.

9. Employ volunteers and staff from the South Asian community.

Energy advice services should, as far as possible, ensure their workforce reflects the profile of the communities they serve. The research showed that people from South Asian communities may not be aware of the paid employment opportunities in energy advice. Recruiting student volunteers from a South Asian background may offer a low-cost way to enable awareness raising in these communities and a route to employment. However, a more sustainable strategy is to recruit and train staff from South Asian and other under-represented cultural backgrounds as paid advisors. This will bring additional benefits for organisational diversity and overcome language and cultural barriers to serve different communities.

10. Shape existing services to better meet the needs of the community.

⁶ [Translation and interpreting - bristol.gov.uk](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/translation-and-interpreting)

When reviewing service delivery, there should be a recognition of the distinctive needs of households from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as different household structures, including multi-generational households.

Service models should also consider how they can equip household members with relevant financial and budgeting skills to better plan and manage their energy usage and fuel costs.

Influencing the design of domestic energy performance schemes

The research found that most of the household representatives interviewed weren't aware of available grant and loan schemes for improving the energy performance of homes, such as the ECO schemes. It also found evidence that amongst the South Asian community of Bristol, some older people and people with long term health conditions living in multigenerational households are not claiming age- or disability-related benefits for which they are potentially eligible. The research also found that adult members of multi-generational households may not know or feel comfortable discussing their combined household income, either with the adult generation above/below them in the household or with other people. The disproportionate effect of Covid on South Asian households showed that housing conditions, economic factors, health status and where people live contributed to higher death rates for some ethnic groups, including people from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds.⁷

The England definition of fuel poverty (now Low Income Low Energy Efficiency or LILEE) adjusts the definition of 'low income' to reflect household size in recognition that a larger household will require a larger income⁸. However, for practical reasons, national energy efficiency policies tend to set a single upper income threshold route for income-based targeting. The proposed target for ECO4 is a single household income cap of £31,000 which is likely to be below the combined household income of many multi-generational households with high household costs. Some of the households in this study who live in homes in bands E, F or G (or in older homes with no EPC, which are likely to be E or worse) would be likely to qualify via proxy targeting. Others are likely to qualify based on NHS referrals, where a member of the household has a condition that could be severely impacted by living in a cold home (respiratory, cardiovascular, limited mobility or immune suppressed conditions). However, if an actual NHS referral is required, this could lead to some households missing out. The ECO4 consultation included provision for incentivising innovative methods to more accurately target low income and vulnerable households. This could provide opportunities for targeting multi-generational households with low income

⁷ [Why have Black and South Asian people been hit hardest by COVID-19? - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁸ A household is classed as being in fuel poverty if: The household's fuel poverty energy efficiency rating* is Band D or below and their disposable income (after housing and fuel costs) is below the poverty line. See [Fuel poverty factsheet 2020 data \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

and vulnerable members of the household. Further research which includes larger scale quantitative analysis of eligibility, awareness of, and uptake of energy efficiency schemes by multigenerational households living in a single property should be undertaken. This should include exploration of which targeting routes are most effective at identifying low income and vulnerable households, including more innovative routes to targeting.