Understanding and defining "Named Communities" in Energy Justice

The Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) specifically identifies Highly Impacted Communities and Vulnerable Populations as groups that must benefit from the equitable distribution of energy and non-energy benefits and the reduction of burdens. In collaboration with interested parties and different advisory groups, PSE has sought to understand, define, and identify customers in "Named Communities," a term that refers, collectively, to highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations. They are the priority segment for Energy Justice efforts at PSE. Visit PSE's Energy Equity page for more details on the different domains of Energy Justice.
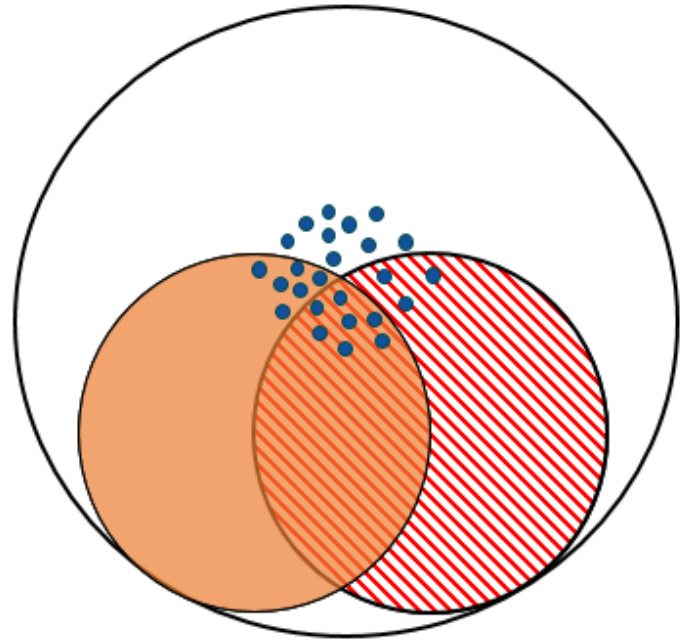
Who are Highly Impacted Communities?

The Washington State Department of Health identifies highly impacted communities by evaluating environmental exposures and effects of pollution and climate change, indicators of sensitive populations, and a host of compounding socioeconomic indicators. These factors are ranked on a 1–10 scale, and census tracts assigned a score of 9 or 10 are classified as highly impacted communities. A tract may also be classified as a highly impacted community if it does not have a score of 9 or 10 but does intersect "Indian country," as defined in 18 U.S.C. Sec. 1151.

Who are Vulnerable Populations?

CETA defines vulnerable populations as communities that experience disproportionate cumulative risk from environmental burdens due to adverse socioeconomic factors, including unemployment, high housing and transportation costs relative to income, access to food and healthcare, and linguistic isolation as well as sensitivity factors, such as low birth weight and higher rates of hospitalization. Vulnerable populations are defined at the census-block group level.

Who are customers in Deepest Need?

This term is used to describe **individual residential customers with severe energy burden** (10 percent or more of household income allocated to energy expenses) in areas of concentrated severe energy burden. Compounding vulnerability factors are used to inform our understanding of customers in Deepest Need. Deepest Need was defined through collaboration with PSE's advisory groups, including the Equity Advisory Group, in 2023.

○ All PSE Customers

● High Vulnerability

◌ Highly Impacted Communities

● Deepest Need

Customer Designation	Percent of Electric Customers*
Not in a named community	55%
high vulnerability only	18%
high vulnerability and highly impacted communities	15%
highly impacted communities only	11%
Deepest need	6%

*Based on 2023 customer data analysis.