

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: (Speaking Spanish).

OLIVIA: In a far suburb of San Francisco, Uba Salas and I are standing in the middle of the street, looking up at his home.

UBA SALAS: (Speaking Spanish).

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: (Speaking Spanish).

OLIVIA: "We can't see them very well," he says, "but they're there."

What they are is solar panels.

On hot, sunny days like this one, the panels make electricity Salas uses and sends back to the grid, reducing his family's energy bills.

SALAS: (Speaking Spanish).

OLIVIA: It helps a lot, he says, because you save a little money with solar.

You don't have to worry if you have to use air conditioning during the day because it is very hot.

Rooftop solar has a median cost of \$30,000 before government incentives, according to Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

Salas - an ironworker - didn't have that money sitting around for panels.

But about five years ago, a nonprofit called GRID Alternatives helped install solar on his home, and he paid...

SALAS: Nada.

OLIVIA: Nothing.

SALAS: (Speaking Spanish).

OLIVIA: Soon, more low-income households like his will get affordable solar energy.

A new Environmental Protection Agency program is giving \$7 billion to programs that fund rooftop solar panels, batteries to store solar energy and something called community solar.

David Widawsky at the EPA says community solar allows renters and others who can't install panels to tap into solar energy generated at a shared site, like a solar farm.

DAVID WIDAWSKY: So it's that kind of a model where households or occupants of buildings can still participate in the promise of solar energy.

OLIVIA: For Sanya Carley, professor at UPenn, this program called Solar for All is a big deal in two ways.

One, switching to solar from fossil fuels reduces planet-heating pollution.

SANYA CARLEY: Solar is the fastest-growing resource, the fastest-growing form of electricity.

This is a very significant and important pathway for greenhouse gas mitigation.

OLIVIA: And, two, solar energy can reduce families' electric bills.

CARLEY: They're spending less on energy and thereby able to put more money towards other things like food and medicine.

OLIVIA: Since getting solar, Salas hasn't paid more than \$165 a year to his utility, PG&E.

The EPA expects to roll out the funds later this summer and says the program could save Americans more than \$350 million annually on electric bills.

Still, Widawsky says there are obstacles for low-income solar, including predatory lenders that have made some communities wary.

WIDAWSKY: The fact is that there are some unscrupulous characters operating in the solar space.

OLIVIA: Widawsky says the EPA is helping local governments and communities create lists of reputable solar actors who can get the money to help build trust in solar.

The EPA expects the solar program to help over 900,000 households.