



ENERGY ASSISTANCE

A GUIDE TO THE LOW INCOME HOME
ENERGY ASSISTANCE & WEATHERIZATION
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SAMPLE





WHAT IS ENERGY ASSISTANCE?

The cost of energy bills can be a real burden on families during the coldest months of winter and the hottest months of summer. Turning off the heat or the air conditioning can present real health and safety risks. To help people get through the toughest months of the year, there are two federal programs that provide assistance with home energy costs: the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).

LIHEAP is a federal program that is known by different names in different states, such as LIEAP, LEAP, HEAP, or EAP. If you qualify, LIHEAP can help you pay your heating and in some cases your cooling bill. All fuel sources are eligible, including electric, natural gas, heating oil, kerosene, propane, wood, coal, and in some cases renewable energy such as wind, hydroelectric, and solar. Congress

created LIHEAP in 1981 to help low-income families pay their home heating bills after the Iran-Iraq war caused oil prices to spike. The program now serves more than six million households a year.

WAP helps by repairing or replacing heating and cooling systems, improving the home's ability to retain energy, and improving the health and safety of home energy systems.

The two programs often work together and help families weather the extremes of winter and summer.

This booklet provides information about how to apply for energy assistance programs, reduce your utility bills, and keep your utilities from being shut off.



LIHEAP

SAMPLE

What services does LIHEAP provide?

- Grants to help you pay your home heating bill and in some cases your cooling bill
- Crisis assistance to provide an additional grant if you receive a shut-off notice, are at risk of being disconnected or have been disconnected for nonpayment, or are very low or out of fuel.
- Counseling and education programs to help you learn about ways to save energy in your home.

Does LIHEAP help pay for water and sewer bills?

No. LIHEAP funds can only be used to help you pay to heat or cool your home. Generally, LIHEAP funds may not be used to pay water and sewer bills. One exception is when water is used for air conditioning, such as in an evaporative cooler. In this case, LIHEAP funds can be used to pay for water bills.

Will LIHEAP pay for my whole utility bill?

LIHEAP is not meant to pay for all of your energy costs for the year, the season, or even the month. In many places, you can get help only with your main heating source. For example, if you heat with gas, you might be eligible for help with your gas bill but not your electric bill.

The amount of help that you get will depend on where you live (each grantee's payment levels are different), your income, your energy costs or needs, your family size, and possibly other factors.

Eligibility

Each state determines its own income eligibility rules. Contact your local agency to see if you qualify. To find your local agency's contact information, call the National Energy Assistance Referral hotline – 1-866-674-6327.



APPLYING FOR LIHEAP

How do I apply for assistance?

In most states, the easiest way to apply is to contact your local community action agency. If you do not know the name of the agency, you can call the National Energy Assistance Referral hotline – 1-866-674-6327 for the contact information of your local agency. Your state LIHEAP office may also have a listing of local agencies on its website.

What Documents do I need to apply?

Requirements vary, so make sure to contact your local agency about the paperwork requirements in advance. Plan to have the following on hand:

1. Names and Social Security numbers (SSNs) of everyone living in your household. SSNs are required for all applicants unless you are applying as an eligible non-citizen (for example, a permanent resident, asylee, refugee, etc.). If you are an eligible non-citizen, you may be able to apply without an SSN.

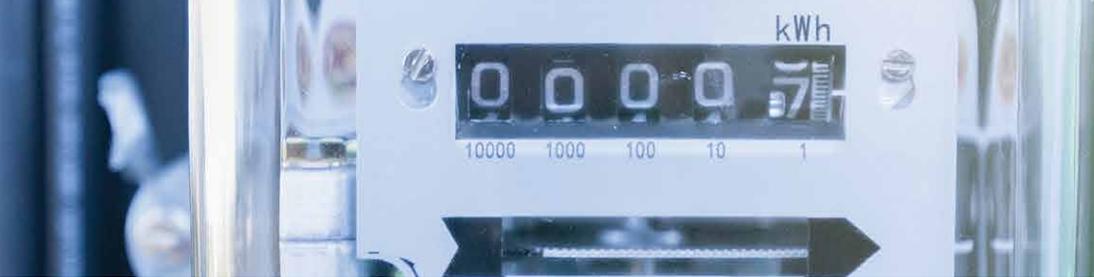
2. Proof of recent gross household income. Check with your local agency to confirm the period of time you need your documents to cover. For example, you may need a recent wage statement or you may need statements that cover a certain period of time.

Household income includes, but is not limited to:

- Wages
- Social Security
- Unemployment
- Pension
- Disability payments
- Alimony payments
- Strike Benefits

3. Proof of present address (a copy of your most recent rent receipt, lease, or property tax bill and mortgage payment to prove ownership).

4. Most recent copy of your electric, gas, or other home energy bill.



If I'm not a citizen, can I still apply?

To get help from your state LIHEAP office, you must be a citizen or in the United States legally. If you or some member(s) of your household are ineligible non-citizens, your household may still receive assistance if any household member is a citizen or eligible non-citizen. Contact your local agency for details.

Members of your household who are eligible non-citizens and applying for help must show proof of their immigration status. Provide a copy of both sides of immigration cards or other documents that show immigration status for every household member who is an eligible non-citizen and applying for help. All household members, regardless of immigration or citizenship status, must provide their income information, but only those who are citizens or eligible non-citizens will be counted as household members.

What if my application is denied?

If you were turned down for assistance, you should first contact your local agency to find out the reason. You have the right to appeal any decision made by your local LIHEAP office. The appeal process is typically outlined in the denial notice that you received. You can also contact your state energy office.

What do I do if I think someone is wrongly taking advantage of LIHEAP or breaking the rules?

Your state LIHEAP office should have a process for reporting cases of fraud, waste, and abuse. If you don't feel comfortable calling that office or if you want to report something suspicious happening at the main LIHEAP office, you can call an anonymous fraud hotline: (800) HHS-TIPS (800-447-8477) or submit a report online at <https://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/report-fraud/index.asp>.

What if I give incorrect information in my application?

The local agency or state LIHEAP office will verify the data provided in the application. You will be denied assistance if you provide incomplete or false information. If you mistakenly provide incorrect information, contact your local agency to address the mistake.

When I called about assistance they told me that the program had run out of money. Now what?

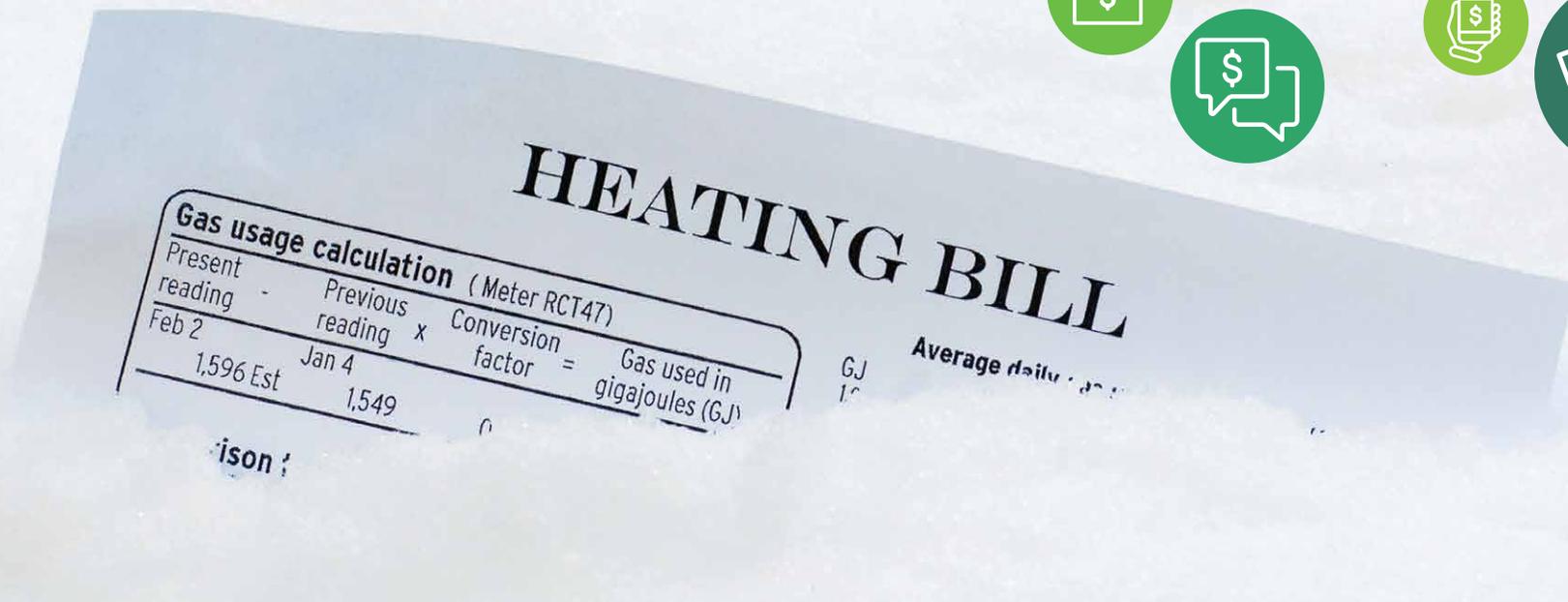
Sometimes your local program will run out of money before everyone who has applied can get help. You should ask them when money will be available in the future. For example, sometimes additional funding becomes available because the federal or state government adds funding to help people with emergency needs.

Can my local utility provide assistance?

Many utilities offer supplemental benefits to LIHEAP, including discounted rates and additional weatherization benefits. Sometimes you can apply for these benefits at the same time you sign up for LIHEAP. Ask your local agency about utility benefits when you apply for LIHEAP. They almost always know what else is available.

Are there other sources of funds available?

In addition to LIHEAP and utility programs, there are also private sources of funds known as "fuel funds" that can help you pay your utility bill. Ask your local LIHEAP program for the name of your local fuel fund. They can sometimes help with an emergency payment to pay your utility bill.



MANAGING YOUR UTILITY BILL

Many utilities offer programs to help you manage your bill during the year.

- If you are eligible for LIHEAP, you may also be able to get discounts on your utility bills.
- Payment plans can help you manage your bill during the high-cost winter heating or summer cooling seasons. Commonly referred to as “balanced billing” programs, the utility will estimate your annual bill by taking an average of your natural gas and/or electric usage during the previous eleven months and the current month’s usage. Current energy rates are then applied to this average monthly usage to calculate the current payment due. Averaging your usage over the year can reduce large fluctuations in usage brought on by extreme weather conditions.
- Forgiveness programs can help you pay back outstanding bills. Some utilities will match your payment to help you pay back the amount you owe.

What if I received a shut-off notice from my utility?

First, check with your local LIHEAP office and see if they can help come up with a plan to delay the shut-off and give you time to develop a repayment plan.

Second, call your local utility and tell them you are trying to work out a plan to address the amount you owe and ask them for extra time to pay your bill. Check to see if the utility has a “forgiveness program” where they match the amount you contribute to help pay back the bill.

Many states have shut-off protections in place, regardless of whether you are able to pay your bill.

- If you are disabled or have a doctor’s note stating the access to energy is essential for your health, you may qualify for health-related protections. These protections also apply to elderly customers, households with someone who is seriously ill, and households with young children.
- In some states you cannot be shut off from utility services during the winter heating season or summer cooling season.



WEATHERIZATION

The WAP makes energy-related improvements on the homes of low-income households using the most advanced technologies and testing protocols available in the residential energy-efficiency industry. The WAP works on all types of housing, including single-family homes, multi-family units, and mobile homes. Program services are free of charge to qualified applicants, providing both short- and long-term energy savings, as well as increased comfort in the weatherized homes.

The WAP has been weatherizing homes since the late 1970s, having made energy-efficiency improvements to more than 7.4 million homes nationwide. Workers receive thorough and ongoing training on state-of-the-art diagnostic tools and installation techniques utilized by the program to maximize the benefits to program recipients.

The health and safety of each household is a priority. The energy auditor and the work crew do various tests to ensure that any

combustion appliances, like furnaces and hot water heaters, are operating safely and that the energy repairs will not cause any potential health or safety problems.

What can the WAP do to help lower my energy bill?

The WAP can help you fix broken or inefficient furnaces or air conditioners, install insulation, replace leaky hot water heaters, and fix faulty appliances. The WAP can also help you by installing health and safety measures, including repair and replacement of ventilation systems for combustion gas draft safety, installing smoke and CO detectors, and evaluating/addressing mold and moisture hazards. The program can also provide education on carbon monoxide, mold and moisture, fire safety, indoor air pollutants, lead paint, and radon.

Check with your local agency to make sure funds are available and find out if there is a waiting list for help.



ENERGY-SAVING TIPS

You can also play a role in managing your utility bills. Here is a set of simple steps you can take to reduce your monthly energy bills and make them more affordable:

Consider light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs.

Switch to ENERGY STAR® certified LED bulbs. LEDs make more light with less electricity. An LED lightbulb uses only 12 watts to produce as much light as a 60-watt incandescent bulb. LEDs last longer. A 60-watt incandescent bulb usually lasts about 1,000 hours before burning out. LEDs can last 25,000 hours or more! LEDs will save you money. LEDs cost a little more, but they save so much electricity that they pay for themselves through energy savings. An LED bulb cuts energy use by 80% or more.

Look for the ENERGY STAR label.

Certified products, such as appliances, ceiling fans, and electronics meet energy-efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. Go to energystar.gov for a complete list of ENERGY STAR certified products.

Install a programmable thermostat.

You can set it to automatically adjust your home's heating or cooling during the times when you are normally not home or sleeping.

Turn your thermostat down 5 degrees.

Each degree saves about 2% on your heating bill. Five degrees would save about \$100 on a \$1,000 annual heating bill. Install a programmable thermostat, and it will do the work for you.

Decide what you want from the refrigerator before you open the door.

Every second the door is open, cool air is escaping.

Wash only full loads in the dishwasher.

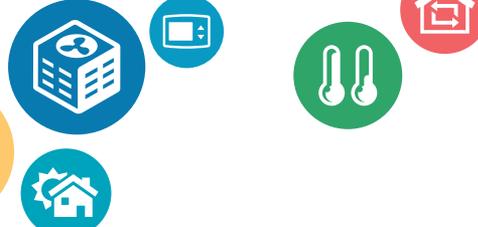
It costs exactly the same to wash one dish as a whole load.

Use fans in the summer to cool off.

You can use circulating fans near open windows at night to help rid the house of daytime heating. Ceiling fans make you feel about 4°F cooler than the actual temperature by moving air across your skin—but they do not lower the actual temperature of the room. Be sure to turn ceiling fans off when you leave a room.

Never use the stove to heat your home!

It's expensive and very dangerous.



REFERENCES

LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/programs/liheap
www.liheap.org

WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

www.energy.gov/eere/wap/weatherization-assistance-program
www.benefits.gov/benefit/580

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