



LIHEAP Opens With Application Surges, Changes in Eligibility, Benefits FY 2010

LIHEAP programs are underway in most states and early reports indicate that applications are at record levels, with many people seeking assistance for the first time.

Compared to last year, Colorado's LIHEAP has already seen a 40 percent increase in applications, although part of the increase is attributed to a mass mailing early in the season. In Denver, LIHEAP applications are up 52 percent.

The Energy Assistance Office in Terre Haute, Indiana, reported its applications have tripled from two years ago and doubled from last year. In Alabama and Missouri police were called to help with crowd control as hundreds lined up to receive help paying their energy bills.

There is some good news — lower energy prices are making energy bills more affordable, with the exception of heating oil, which is expected to cost 4 percent more this winter. Natural gas prices are expected to be down 11 percent from last year, propane 10.6 percent and electricity 0.07 percent.

In Vermont, heating oil prices are about half of last year's, but LIHEAP applications are at record levels. Savings from lower energy prices are being canceled out by increasing numbers of people who are losing their jobs, according to National Energy Assistance Directors' Association.

Some states made changes in eligibility or benefit levels this year. Montana, Ohio, Texas , and South Dakota raised their income eligibility limits to 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG), while Wisconsin and Idaho increased theirs to 60 percent of state median income (SMI).

Pennsylvania lowered LIHEAP eligibility to 150 percent of FPG after raising it to 60 percent SMI for FY 2009. Wyoming also lowered its eligibility from 75 percent to 60 percent of SMI , and Georgia's program has a slight decrease in eligibility this year.

Most states' benefit levels are remaining about the same as last year; however, some lowered their benefits because they are counting on reduced LIHEAP funding. While Congress has approved \$5.1 billion for FY 2010 LIHEAP, the same amount as last year, unlike last year the funds weren't released all at once at the beginning of the fiscal year. Thus far, under a Continuing Resolution, \$2.7 billion of the \$4.509 billion in regular funding <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/news/oct09/funding.htm>> has been released. The \$590.3 million in emergency funds will be released at the discretion of the President.

Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Utah plan to lower regular heating benefits. Oregon, South Carolina and Nevada are raising benefits and Delaware and Minnesota plan to raise regular benefits but lower the maximum for crisis.

FY 2010 REACH Grants Awarded The Department of Health and Human Services made grant awards totaling \$735,000 to one state and the District of Columbia (D.C.) and awards totaling \$280,000 to one territory and four tribes under the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge Program (REACH). This is the "first round" of REACH grants in FY 2010.

Connecticut and D.C. both received \$350,000 plus \$35,000 for Energy Efficiency Education Services (EEES). The Blackfoot Tribe in Montana, and the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Tribe and Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, both in Michigan, received \$50,000 awards plus \$10,000 for EEES. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands both received \$50,000 awards.

All projects propose to reduce health and safety risks for households with young children, elderly or disabled members.

In Connecticut vulnerable households will receive carbon monoxide detectors and have fuel-level monitors installed on oil tanks.

D.C. plans to provide one-on-one counseling to clients and expedited applications, training and technical assistance on the availability of energy assistance programs for health service workers, long-term care case managers and caregivers and will work to support legislation to prohibit shutoffs for participants with in-home care.

Members of the Blackfoot Tribe will receive training in energy conservation and audits and will in turn educate other tribal members living in isolated areas where electric disruptions may put households in danger.

Home improvements are on tap for vulnerable Choctaw households, as well as information on payment plans, energy conservation and communicating with fuel vendors. Both Michigan tribes are providing energy efficient light bulbs, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and are replacing inefficient appliances in households with elderly, disabled, and small children.

Households in the Mariana Islands that have members with medical conditions or elderly or young children may receive window air conditioners, compact refrigerators (for medicine) and

written information about health and safety issues.

All state and tribal EEES plans include health and safety information and/or energy conservation materials. HHS will accept REACH applications March 2010 for a "second round" of REACH grants later this fiscal year.

For more information, visit the LIHEAP Clearinghouse web site for state <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/clntself.htm>> and tribal <<http://www.liheap.ncat.org/tribrech.htm>> REACH history and project summaries and evaluations.

Rhode Island REACH Evaluation An evaluation of Rhode Island's \$1.1 million 2005 REACH project was released June 2009 by its evaluator, the Rhode Island College School of Social Work. From 2006 through 2008, the project provided energy conservation education, intensive case management, appliance management and weatherization measures to 670 LIHEAP-eligible individuals 55 years of age and older.

The program hoped to show an improvement in participants' health over time and relate that to case management. Data were collected to measure health conditions, concerns about energy use and cost and to monitor electricity and gas use.

Positive changes in health were not consistent across study groups and some losses in health were evident. Although a satisfaction survey showed participants were very appreciative of case management, it was not possible to show through quantitative data that case management made a difference in participants' health.

However, qualitative results showed that case management and energy education were more helpful to participants than weatherization and financial assistance. Both case managers and participants recognized that positive energy-efficiency behaviors were adopted and sustained. Participants reported modest improvements in well-being and a sense of control over living situations.

Case managers found that working with participants and responding to their needs in meaningful ways was the most valuable part of the project and recognized the need for more training in working with elderly clients.

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February 10, 2010:

National Fuel Fund Network's (NFFN) LIHEAP Action Day, Washington D.C. Free registration is now open.
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June 14-16, 2010:

National Energy and Utility Affordability Conference, Hyatt Regency Riverwalk, San Antonio, Texas. For details, see the conference website <<http://www.energyandutilityconference.org/>>