

THE LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)

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Administering Agency: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of Community Services within the Administration for Children and Families

Year Program Started: 1981

Number of Persons/Households Served: According to the US HHS, [LIHEAP Data Warehouse](https://liheappm.acf.gov/datawarehouse) (<https://liheappm.acf.gov/datawarehouse>), an estimated 5.9 million families (17% of estimated eligible households) received Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assistance in fiscal year (FY) 2024 through the regular LIHEAP program, which includes heating grants, cooling grants, and crisis assistance.

Population Targeted: Low-income households (at or below 150% of the poverty threshold or 60% of the state median income) who cannot afford to keep their homes at safe temperatures; particularly households with frail elderly, members with disabilities, or very young children.

LIHEAP is a targeted block grant program aimed at helping struggling families pay their heating and cooling bills. States have flexibility in setting eligibility criteria, benefit amounts, how much to direct to energy crisis situations where the health of the household is in jeopardy, as well as other program components. The typical main challenge for LIHEAP is securing adequate annual appropriations. The need for full FY 2025 LIHEAP program funding (\$5.1 billion) remains and is necessary to help struggling families with unaffordable energy bills.

On November 12, 2025, the “Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, Extensions Act, 2026” (P.L. 119-37) was signed into law. This legislation provided funding for the Labor, Health and Human Services and Related Agencies programs which includes LIHEAP through a continuing resolution. On November

28, 2025, the Office of Community Services in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Administration for Children & Families announced the release to the states [of \\$3.7 billion](https://acf.gov/ocs/programs/liheap/funding-releases/first-block-grant-funding-release-2026) (<https://acf.gov/ocs/programs/liheap/funding-releases/first-block-grant-funding-release-2026>), which is 90% of last year’s funding for LIHEAP plus \$100 million from the “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act” (IIJA; P.L. 117-58). The remainder of the FY 2026 LIHEAP funding should be announced and released to the states once the final FY 2026 the Labor, Health and Human Services and Related Agencies spending bill passes. As of the publication of this article, the final appropriation for LIHEAP in FY 2026 has not been determined.

History

LIHEAP was created in response to rising energy prices in the 1970s and the decreasing purchasing power of low-income households. In 1980, low-income energy assistance was part of the “Crude Oil Windfall Profit Act,” Public Law 96-223, and LIHEAP was authorized in the “Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981,” Public Law 97-35. Since then, LIHEAP has been reauthorized several times, targeting assistance within the pool of eligible households, adding new program components, and expanding authorization levels for funding.

Program Summary

The regular LIHEAP program is a federal block grant program to the states that helps low-income families meet the costs of heating and cooling their homes. LIHEAP is intended to “assist low-income households, particularly those with the lowest incomes, that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy, primarily in meeting their home energy needs” (42 U.S.C. § 8621(a)). States are to target assistance to households with the lowest incomes and highest energy needs (i.e., those who pay a large percentage of

their income on home energy), and to households with populations vulnerable to extreme heat or cold. These are households with very young children, individuals with disabilities, and frail elderly. The LIHEAP program focuses on home energy, which is defined as a source of heating or cooling in residential dwellings.

To receive LIHEAP funds, states must submit an annual application ([state plan https://liheapch.acf.gov/stateplans.htm](https://liheapch.acf.gov/stateplans.htm)) to the Secretary of HHS. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, numerous Tribes, and territories participate in the LIHEAP program. In the majority of states (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/admin/adminintro.htm>), LIHEAP is administered by the state social services agency. In many states, the state agency contracts with local providers, such as community action agencies, to handle intake.

Although states have a great deal of flexibility in designing their programs each year, the vast majority of states' LIHEAP grants are used to provide bill payment assistance to eligible low-income households to help with heating and cooling costs. LIHEAP benefits cover all forms of residential heating or cooling fuels. This includes a range of fuels from natural gas and electricity for heating or cooling to home heating oil, propane, kerosene, and wood. Assistance is often in the form of a vendor payment.

States also have the flexibility to set their program's eligibility criteria in the annual state LIHEAP plan based on income eligibility. The maximum eligibility for LIHEAP is 150% of poverty or 60% of state median income. States are prohibited from setting income eligibility below 110% of the poverty level. States can also rely on participation in another means-tested program to determine eligibility. Low-income households can be eligible for LIHEAP through participation in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as food stamps) and certain needs-tested veterans' benefits.

Several additional components to LIHEAP are:

- Crisis grants: Each fiscal year, states must reserve a reasonable amount of their regular LIHEAP block grant until March 15 for individual crisis intervention grants. States have the discretion to define what constitutes a crisis (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/tables/crisis.htm>) for this component. Common definitions include an imminent shut-off, empty heating fuel tank, or broken furnace. The state crisis intervention funds must be made available to a household within 18 hours if the household is in a life-threatening situation, and within 48 hours under other circumstances. The state crisis intervention component is different from the LIHEAP emergency contingency funds that are at the discretion of the president to release.
- Low-cost weatherization or other home energy-related repairs: States may use up to 15% of their annual LIHEAP block grant (or 25% with a waiver) for low-cost residential [weatherization \(https://liheapch.acf.gov/tables/components.htm\)](https://liheapch.acf.gov/tables/components.htm) or other home energy-related repair. In about 30 states, the same agency administers LIHEAP and the Department of Energy's low-income weatherization program.
- [Self-sufficiency \(https://liheapch.acf.gov/tables/A16.htm\)](https://liheapch.acf.gov/tables/A16.htm): States can use up to 5% of their block grant to provide services to encourage and enable households to reduce their home energy needs through activities such as needs assessments, counseling, and assistance with energy vendors (this is also referred to as Assurance 16).
- LIHEAP emergency contingency fund: The LIHEAP emergency contingency fund is a separate appropriation from the regular LIHEAP block grant. The president can release LIHEAP emergency contingency funds to help meet low-income home energy needs arising from a natural disaster, a significant increase in the cost of home energy, or other emergency. Unfortunately, Congress has not appropriated funds for the LIHEAP emergency contingency fund since FY11.

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Funding

As of the time of writing, the total funding for FY 2026 LIHEAP has not yet been established. The “Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026” (P.L. 119-37) was signed into law on November 12, 2025. States received [90% of last year’s LIHEAP funding](https://acf.gov/ocs/programs/liheap/funding-releases/first-block-grant-funding-release-2026) (<https://acf.gov/ocs/programs/liheap/funding-releases/first-block-grant-funding-release-2026>) amount on November 28, 2025.

The authorized funding level for LIHEAP is \$5.1 billion for the regular block grant program and \$600 million in LIHEAP emergency contingency funds. Note that total funding for LIHEAP in FY23 was \$6.1 billion.

Tips for Local Success

February 2, 2026 is [LIHEAP Assistance Day](https://neada.org/neadtoolkit/) (<https://neada.org/neadtoolkit/>). Advocates can help with social media posts on the importance of LIHEAP. The National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC) is planning its annual [LIHEAP Action Day](https://neuac.org/liheap-action-day/) (<https://neuac.org/liheap-action-day/>) on February 24-25, 2026. All are welcome to join. The LIHEAP Clearinghouse has an energy assistance [referral service](https://liheapch.acf.gov/search-tool/) (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/search-tool/>) (phone line and website). The LIHEAP Clearinghouse site also has a tool to connect households to the nearest [LIHEAP intake](https://liheapch.acf.gov/search-tool/state-territory/) (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/search-tool/state-territory/>) site by applicant’s county.

Advocates should become involved in the development of their state’s annual LIHEAP program. [LIHEAP state plans](https://liheapch.acf.gov/stateplans.htm) (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/stateplans.htm>) are required to be made available to the public in a manner that facilitates meaningful review and comment, and states are required to hold public hearings on the

LIHEAP plan. The plans will set out eligibility criteria and benefit amounts, as well as other aspects of the program, such as the percentage of the state’s LIHEAP grant requested in each quarter.

Please note that some Tribes receive LIHEAP grants directly through the federal agency (as opposed to the state). HHS has provided a [map](https://acf.gov/ocs/map/liheap-map-state-and-territory-contact-listing) (<https://acf.gov/ocs/map/liheap-map-state-and-territory-contact-listing>) to find each state’s LIHEAP office.

Advocates should also become familiar with the other energy assistance programs and utility consumer protections. In addition to LIHEAP, some states and some utilities have separate low-income [energy assistance programs \(sometimes referred to as “leveraging” LIHEAP\)](https://liheapch.acf.gov/state-leveraging) (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/state-leveraging>). For additional help with utility issues, consider contacting the consumer protection division of a state’s utility commission.

Advocates should also become familiar with certain utility rules. For utilities regulated by the state utility commission (generally private investor-owned utilities), the [state utility commission](https://www.naruc.org/about-naruc/our-mission/regulatory-commissions/) (<https://www.naruc.org/about-naruc/our-mission/regulatory-commissions/>) website should have a link to rules regarding: customer shut-offs (for example, a winter shut-off rule, an extreme temperature rule, or a severe illness shut-off protection rule); payment plans; special protections for low-income or LIHEAP customers; and deposits and reconnection fees. Staff in the consumer protection division of the utility commission may be able to help find the relevant rules. For municipal utilities or cooperatives, the rules will reside with the municipality or the co-op.

What to Say to Legislators

Advocates should meet with their members of Congress to share the following messages:

- LIHEAP is a critical safety net program aimed at helping vulnerable households afford residential energy.
- There is significant need in the member’s district (provide, for example, the number of clients seeking help with their utility bills, newspaper clips, or data regarding the number of households being disconnected).

- The current funding level will not be sufficient to meet the record high levels of applications.
- Supporters of LIHEAP should visit the [LIHEAP Action Day](https://neuac.org/liheap-action-day/) (<https://neuac.org/liheap-action-day/>) website of the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (www.NEUAC.org) and sign on to letters to Congress regarding LIHEAP funding. The NEUAC website also contains state-by-state, one-page fact sheets with helpful statistics tailored to each state.
- One-page snapshots of state LIHEAP programs are available on the HHS [LIHEAP Data Warehouse](https://liheappm.acf.gov/datawarehouse) (<https://liheappm.acf.gov/datawarehouse>).

For More Information

For advocates seeking more information about LIHEAP program design, the LIHEAP [Clearinghouse](https://liheapch.acf.gov/) (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/>) is a wealth of information regarding the various ways states have designed their LIHEAP programs.

The National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC) also has information on state energy affordability [resources](https://neuac.org/state-resource-directory/) (<https://neuac.org/state-resource-directory/>).

The LIHEAP Clearinghouse tracks states' [supplemental energy assistance activities](https://liheapch.acf.gov/state-leveraging) (<https://liheapch.acf.gov/state-leveraging>) (listed as "State Leveraging under State Programs in the menu on the homepage).

For information about advocacy regarding LIHEAP funding:

The [National Energy Assistance Directors' Association's](https://neada.org/) (<https://neada.org/>) website provides information on LIHEAP funding needs and current funding levels.

The [National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition](https://neuac.org/) (<https://neuac.org/>) is an organization of utility, nonprofit, and anti-poverty organizations focused on the energy needs of low-income consumers.