

Q&A

Q: Does the bill have to be in the tenant's name to apply?

A: No, a tenant MAY still be eligible for LIHEAP depending on whether or not they can establish that they have a home heating responsibility. This can include paying the landlord directly for service or paying the landlord indirectly through an undesignated portion of rent. Details on this are included in the slides.

Q: Is there a fax number for applications in Philadelphia?

A: Yes, contact information for all County Assistance Offices can be found here:
<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/CAO-Contact.aspx>

Q: For clients that use gas and radiators, they need electric to use with the furnace but also need water for the radiators. Can LIHEAP help with water in addition to gas and electric?

A: DHS issued an Operations Memorandum several years ago indicating that it does not consider water as a secondary heating source. Advocates should contact PULP at pulp@pautilitylawproject.org to discuss options if they run into this situation.

Q: Are there limits on the number of times an applicant can apply for a crisis grant in their lifetime?

A: No, there is no limit to the number of times an applicant can apply for a cash or a crisis grant in their lifetime, many applicants need and receive these grants every year. In addition, the applicant can receive up to the maximum crisis grant (\$1000) each year, even if that means that they are applying more than once per season.

Q: To qualify as an eligible immigrant when working under the table or independently for cash, what documentation or proof can be provided? Is a letter sufficient?

A: If the applicant is able to establish lawfully admitted non-citizen status, they can provide the same acceptable documentation of proof of earned income as citizens. If an applicant cannot obtain income information, ask the CAO to assist with third party verification. If third party verification is not possible, request that a CAO accept the client's statement.

Q: Does the hotline have interpretation available and can you do a regular LIHEAP application over the phone or only crisis?

A: Yes, the LIHEAP Hotline has access to the same interpreter service that the County Assistance Offices use and are able to dial in a third party translator. If an applicant has already been approved for a LIHEAP Cash grant, then, yes, they can simply call the CAO to apply for Crisis. However, if they have NOT yet been approved for Cash or Crisis

through the regular application process, they will need to fill out the application and apply either online, in-person, or through the mail.

Q: If the household receives Section 8 Housing and receives a utility allowance are they still eligible for LIHEAP?

A: Receiving a utility allowance does NOT preclude the applicant from receiving a LIHEAP grant. However, subsidized housing tenants may not be eligible for a Cash grant if their rental charge includes an undesignated amount for heat **and** is based on a fixed percentage of their income. If the tenant has a direct relationship with the electric company and the electricity is necessary to operate their primary fuel type, they may then be eligible for a Crisis grant for their secondary fuel type (electricity).

Q: If someone was awarded a LIHEAP grant and it was applied to their second choice of utility provider (for people who have electric and gas heating), instead of the one they chose first, what should they do?

A: The applicant should reach out to the CAO right away to try to get it corrected.

Q: If a utility agrees to accept a lower amount than the entire bill to resolve a crisis, how can applicants provide proof on their application that the utility agreed to a lower amount?

A: The applicant will not need to provide proof. The CAO will reach out directly to the utility to see if they will accept the Crisis grant to resolve the crisis, so the utility will provide that information directly to the CAO.

Q: Can a Crisis grant be applied to any past due balance, even if the applicant is no longer living at the residence associated with the balance?

A: Partially yes, if the household has a balance from a previous address, LIHEAP can be used to pay for up to 50% of the back balance if necessary and sufficient to establish service at the new address. The applicant would be responsible for the remaining portion of the balance.

Q: Did the income guidelines increase due to cost of living increases so that those previously not eligible may be able to receive help this year?

A: The income limits remain at 150% of FPL. This year's limits are higher than last year because FPL guidelines have increased. The limits are listed on DHS's website, here: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/LIHEAP.aspx>

Q: If a gas furnace needs to be repaired/replaced, can the LIHEAP application be for that alone, or would it also have to be for assistance with the gas bill?

A: Yes, an applicant can apply for Crisis Interface alone. However, if they are eligible for Crisis interface, they are also likely eligible for a LIHEAP Cash grant, so applying for both is advisable.

Q: My residents live in a low income senior HUD property. If the resident is getting the LIHEAP funds sent to them directly and not the utility company, where should the resident indicate that?

A: If they are getting paid directly because they pay for heat as an undesignated part of rent, they can note that on the application. Question 3 on the application addresses how they pay for their heating needs, and the check will be sent to the address indicated on the application. However, if their rent includes an undesignated portion for heat AND the rent overall is based on a percentage of their income, they would not be considered to have a home heating responsibility and would not be eligible for LIHEAP.

Q: Is clean and tune available for a wood stove, the household's only heating source?

A: Yes, although it is dependent on finding qualified contractors to do that specific kind of work. Once the applicant is approved for LIHEAP, they should reach out to their county's weatherization agency here: <https://dced.pa.gov/housing-and-development/weatherization/agency-list/>

Q: What is the process for combining a Crisis grant with a UESF (hardship) grant when the balance is higher than both grant limits, but would be resolvable when combined? (For example, a \$2200 balance).

A: In Philadelphia, that process can get cumbersome. There was a process put in place where LIHEAP staff would obtain consent from applicants and reach out to UESF to get approval, but it is unclear whether that is the current process. There previously was a process whereby applicants whose crisis could be resolved by both grants combined were given a piece of paper to take over to UESF. That is now supposed to be happening behind the scenes. If you are advocating for someone, I would reach out to both agencies to do applications simultaneously and let them both know that the other application is pending and that together, the crisis would be resolved. As an advocate, you may also want to reach out to the utility company directly to ensure that they will accept the grants.

Q: If someone receives a life insurance payout for death of a spouse, how does that affect income eligibility for LIHEAP Crisis for elderly individual on a low fixed income?

A: That would count as a lump sum resource and would be excluded from household income for purposes of LIHEAP. The applicant would still qualify if otherwise eligible.

Q: In Lawrence County, weatherization would only help someone with their cooling systems if the applicant received a furnace from them the previous year. However, everything I read about the program stated receiving LIHEAP assistance in general would make one eligible. Is there another way someone can receive assistance in this county if they continue to have this limited measure of eligibility?

A: It is our understanding that to be eligible for the program, Pennsylvanians must have received assistance from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

or Department of Energy (DOE) or LIHEAP Weatherization Assistance during the last 12 months. Applicants must show proof of the letter confirming receipt of LIHEAP to their local Weatherization agency. Please email us at pulp@pautilitylawproject.org to discuss the issues you are experiencing in Lawrence County.

Q: Are you aware of any program that would help a homeowner fix gas lines under his house? The gas company shut his gas off until the lines are repaired.

A: A household facing a home-heating emergency due to weatherization-related issues can receive support through LIHEAP Crisis Interface to repair broken gas or other fuel lines necessary for the main heating source. If excavation, which would typically be the homeowner's responsibility, is needed in the repair or installation of gas or fuel lines, it is an allowable expense as long as the expense is reasonable. The utility company should be contacted to confirm the responsibility of gas or fuel line repair or installation.

Q: Client is in a homeless shelter and told she cannot get placement for housing until her utility balance is addressed.

A: LIHEAP would be able to cover up to ½ of the existing balance from a previous residence, provided that amount is sufficient to establish service at the new residence. The applicant would be responsible for the remaining balance. The applicant can pursue utility-run hardship grant funds and ask the utility about enrolling in their Customer Assistance Program (CAP) to see if that combination of resources is sufficient to establish service at a new residence. Note that CAP is often only available to current customers. If that is the case, the consumer could request a restoration payment arrangement from the utility for the balance remaining after LIHEAP and/or other grants are applied. Once service is reconnected, the consumer may be better able to pursue enrollment in CAP.

Q: Does the Heat and Eat benefit have to be applied for separately?

A: No. DHS reviews all SNAP households for Heat & Eat eligibility, and it is processed automatically.

Q: For furnace replacement for renters, is there a specific form that the owner of the property needs to complete?

A: There is not a specific form, but Crisis Interface will require the consent of the landlord, which can be obtained over the phone.

Q: Is it correct that applicants cannot apply for LIHEAP using the myCOMPASS app, and can only file a LIHEAP application on the COMPASS web site? No applications can be filed through myCOMPASS mobile app?

A: That is correct. Applicants who received LIHEAP in previous seasons were able to pre-apply through the app before November 1. Now that the program is open, applicants will need to apply on the COMPASS website, in person at their County Assistance Office or

through the mail. However, the app can still be used to upload income documentation and other required documentation.

Q: If an applicant needs a furnace replaced and it takes multiple days, do they have access to a hotel or other housing during that time?

A: The Crisis Interface contractors have a responsibility to ensure the household is safe. That may include providing supplemental heating sources temporarily or confirming that the household has a safe place to stay. It is unlikely that the household would be provided a hotel room or other no-cost housing.

Q: Oct 1, 2023 the FPIG for SNAP benefits was increased to 200%, will DHS consider doing the same for next season 24/25?

A: DHS reviews possible programmatic changes for LIHEAP each year. However, one item to consider with a change such as this is that LIHEAP is not an entitlement program, it is a block grant, meaning there is a finite amount of funding each year. Increasing the income limit to 200% of the FPIG could potentially double the number of eligible households, but with the same level of funding would require all benefits to be cut by 50%, or the season to be drastically shortened. DHS works to find the best possible balance between the number of potentially eligible households, length of the LIHEAP season, and ensuring that a meaningful LIHEAP benefit can actually be issued to eligible households.

Q: I was told recently that the medical needs exception to prevent shut offs is limited to 3x in a lifetime. Is there anything more that can be done to ensure that someone with a medical need (for electricity) will never be without service?

A: A household can get additional medical certificates, beyond three, if they pay their new current charges **in full and on time** while protected by a certificate. Beyond that, they are limited to three regardless of the type of condition or required medical usage. In addition to LIHEAP, there are a host of other programs, such as utility run customer assistance programs, that may be accessed. There are avenues for advocacy right now through the Chapter 14 reauthorization, which is the section of the Pennsylvania Code that outlines the requirements around medical certificates.