

## Low-Income Home Energy Assistance

Through LIHEAP, the Federal Government provides grants to States, territories, Indian tribes and tribal organizations to help low-income households meet home heating and cooling costs and to weatherize and make energy saving repairs. The program was established under Title XXVI of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981 and has been in effect since FY 1982. It is administered at the Federal level by the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services.

For fiscal year 1996, a total of \$1.08 billion (including \$180 million in emergency contingency funds released because of abnormally cold weather during the 1995-96 winter) was appropriated by the Congress for low-income home energy assistance.

### Benefits

Eligible households may receive funds for heating and cooling costs and for weather-related and supply shortage emergencies. Grantees may also spend a portion of the funds on weatherization or energy-related home repairs. The number of households receiving assistance from the 50 States and the District of Columbia in FY 1995 is shown below. (An unduplicated total of households assisted cannot be derived from these estimates because the same household may be included under more than one type of energy assistance.)

Type of assistance	Number of households (in thousands)
Heating	5,148
Cooling	34
Crisis intervention:	
Winter	932
Summer	78
Low-cost residential weatherization/energy-related home repair	103

## Eligibility

The unit of eligibility for energy assistance is the household, defined as any individual or group of individuals who are living as one economic unit, for whom residential energy is customarily purchased in common either directly or through rent. Payment is limited to households with income under 150% of the poverty income guidelines or 60% of the State's median income, whichever is greater, or to those households with members receiving AFDC, SSI, Food Stamps, or means-tested veterans' benefits. States are permitted to set more restrictive criteria as well.

No household may be excluded from eligibility on the basis of income if its income is less than 110% of the poverty guidelines, but States may give priority to those households with the highest home energy costs or needs in relation to income. Owners and renters are treated equitably.

The States must provide a program plan to HHS that describes eligibility requirements, benefit levels, and estimated amount of funds to be used for each type of LIHEAP assistance. Timely and meaningful public participation in the development of the plan is required. The States must also conduct outreach activities to assure that eligible households, especially those with elderly or disabled individuals or young children, and households with high home energy burdens, are made aware of this assistance.

## Administration

LIHEAP is a block grant program. The States have broad discretion in administering the programs. However, they submit program plans to the Department of Health and Human Services, which provides technical assistance and ensures that States follow Federal requirements.

States make payments directly to eligible households or to home energy suppliers on behalf of the households. Payments may be provided in cash, vouchers, or payments to third parties, such as utility companies or fuel dealers.