

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Reminder: Applications being accepted for program that helps qualifying low-income households with heating costs

BISMARCK, N.D. – As bitter cold temperatures settle in, most families are turning up their thermostats to stay warm. For some low- and fixed-income households, cranking up the heat is not always an option. The North Dakota Department of Human Services reminds people that help is available through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

The federally-funded program pays a portion of home heating costs for qualifying low-income households. Older adults, people with disabilities, and families with children age five and younger are the primary groups assisted by LIHEAP.

“Households that qualify for the program may also benefit from furnace cleaning, repair and replacement and weatherization services funded by LIHEAP to reduce energy consumption and improve home energy efficiency,” said Michele Gee, director of the department’s Economic Assistance Division.

Gee said weatherization services include furnace and chimney inspections and cleanings, and other energy-saving improvements like adding home insulation and weather stripping around doors and windows.

Program eligibility is based on the number of people living in the home and their combined income, type of heat (natural gas, electricity, propane, coal, fuel oil, wood or kerosene) and other factors to ensure help goes to those most in need. To qualify, a household can earn up to 60 percent of the state median income, which equals about \$45,737 (adjusted gross income) per year for a family of three.

This year, the department is also partnering with Community Options and churches, domestic violence and family crisis centers, veteran assistance centers, homeless shelters and other organizations in the state to distribute blankets and sleeping bags for people in need. The department received federal approval to use a portion of LIHEAP funding for this new effort.

Individuals can complete an LIHEAP application at www.nd.gov/eforms/Doc/sfn00529.pdf and either drop it off or mail it to their local county social services office along with a current utility bill and required documentation that verifies household income and any medical and child care expenses. Anyone who needs help completing and submitting an application can contact Community Options at 800-823-2417 ext. 158. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2018.

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Both homeowners and renters living in a permanent housing structure can apply for LIHEAP and weatherization services. Some restrictions apply.

Last year, the program paid an average of \$768 per household in heating costs and served about 12,300 North Dakota households. The program directly pays fuel vendors, such as utility and fuel dealers, on behalf of participating households.

The department contracts with the North Dakota Department of Commerce for weatherization services. The direct work is often carried out by Community Action agencies in the state.

For more information on LIHEAP, visit
www.nd.gov/dhs/services/financialhelp/energyassist.html.

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