

**NEWS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | April 27, 2020

## **Help is available for North Dakotans struggling to pay heating bills**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services wants state residents to know help is available if they are currently having trouble paying their heating bills due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in household income.

The federally-funded Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) can help qualifying households by paying a portion of their home heating costs. The regular heating assistance program, which ends on May 31, together with LIHEAP's year-round emergency crisis program, can assist with ongoing heating costs and immediate needs.

The program also focuses on improving home heating efficiency by offering furnace and chimney inspections and cleanings, furnace repair and replacement, weatherization services like home insulation, weather stripping around doors and windows, and other energy-saving improvements to help lower heating costs for qualifying households.

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

Households are encouraged to apply as soon as possible if they need financial help with heating bills, have received a shut-off notice or have been disconnected, are low on fuel or completely out of fuel, or are unable to pay for home heating fuel or services due to an unexpected economic hardship from the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergency program can assist with unpaid heating costs incurred up to 90 days before the date a household applies for help.

Assistance is based on household income, the number of people living in the home, type of fuel, 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 \$49,021 (adjusted gross income) per year for a family of three.

Individuals can apply online at [www.nd.gov/dhs/services/financialhelp/energyassist.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/financialhelp/energyassist.html). To apply, complete the [energy assistance application form \(SFN 529 on state forms\)](#), print and sign it, and return the form to their local human service zone office, formerly known as a county social service office, along with documents verifying household income.

Zone offices are temporarily restricting public access but are still providing services to North Dakotans by phone, email and fax. Office contact information is online at [www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/countysocialserv/index.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/countysocialserv/index.html).

Individuals can also contact the human service zone office in their county to request an application. Anyone who needs help completing and submitting an application, can contact Community Options at 800-823-2417 ext. 140.

The deadline to apply for regular heating assistance is May 31, 2020. However, applications for LIHEAP's emergency crisis program are accepted any time during the year.

Last year, the heating assistance program paid an average of \$954 in heating energy costs for 13,352 qualifying North Dakota households. The program directly pays fuel vendors, such as utility and fuel oil companies, on behalf of qualifying households. Over two-thirds of the participating households include people who are elderly, have disabilities, or include children age five and younger.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services contracts with the North Dakota Department of Commerce for weatherization services and furnace repair and replacements. 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](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/financialhelp/energyassist.html).

Information about coronavirus (COVID-19) resources for individuals and families is available on the department's website at [www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/index.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/index.html). For details about the state's COVID-19 response, visit [www.ndresponse.gov](http://www.ndresponse.gov).

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