

2008 National Energy Assistance Survey

Executive Summary

The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), representing the state LIHEAP directors, received a grant through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to update the information about LIHEAP-recipient households that was collected in the 2003 National Energy Assistance (NEA) Survey and the 2005 NEA Survey. This survey documented changes in the affordability of energy bills, the need for LIHEAP, and the choices that low-income households make when faced with unaffordable energy bills.

The 2008 Survey included a subsample of 12 of the 20 states that were included in the 2003 and 2005 Surveys. Stratified samples of fiscal year 2008 LIHEAP recipients were chosen from each of the 12 state LIHEAP databases. Due to budget limitations, the full set of 20 original states from the 2003 survey could not be included in this study. However, a subsample of states was chosen to represent the geographic diversity and weather variability across the county.

This report presents the findings from the 2008 NEA Survey and provides comparisons to the 2003 NEA Survey. The survey and report were prepared for NEADA by APPRISE.

LIHEAP Recipient Households

The study confirmed that LIHEAP recipient households are likely to be vulnerable to temperature extremes.

- 43 percent had a senior in the household aged 60 or older.
- 50 percent had a disabled household member.
- 40 percent had a child 18 or younger.
- 93 percent had at least one vulnerable household member.

The study also provided information on challenges that these households faced.

- 29 percent were unemployed at some point during the previous year.
- 30 percent did not have health insurance for everyone in the household.
- 70 percent had a serious medical condition.
- 24 percent used medical equipment that requires electricity.
- 31 percent characterized their health condition as fair and 16 percent characterized their health condition as poor.
- 14 percent reported that there was an adult in the household who required help with personal care needs.

Energy Costs

LIHEAP recipients reported that they face high and increasing energy costs.

- 36 percent reported that their energy bills were more than \$2,000 in the past year.
- Pre-LIHEAP energy burden averaged 16 percent and post-LIHEAP energy burden averaged 12 percent for these households, compared to 7 percent for all households in the U.S. and 4 percent for non low-income households.¹

¹ Source: 2006 LIHEAP Notebook.

- 49 percent said that their energy bills were higher than they had been in the previous year and 43 percent said that they were more difficult to pay than in the previous year.
- 75 percent of those who said that it was more difficult to pay their energy bills reported that one of the reasons for the increased difficulty was lower income or loss of employment.

Almost all respondents said that they had taken at least one constructive action to reduce energy costs.

- 85 percent said that they turned down the heat when they went to bed.
- 73 percent said that they wash their clothes in cold water.
- 66 percent said that they use compact fluorescent light bulbs.²

The percentage who reported that they had taken these actions increased significantly from the 2003 survey.

Responses to High Energy Costs

Households reported that they took several actions to make ends meet.

- 44 percent closed off part of their home.
- 28 percent kept their home at a temperature that was unsafe or unhealthy.
- 23 percent left their home for part of the day.
- 33 percent used their kitchen stove or oven to provide heat.

Inability to Pay Energy Bills

Many LIHEAP recipients were unable to pay their energy bills.

- 47 percent skipped paying or paid less than their entire home energy bill.
- 37 percent received a notice or threat to disconnect or discontinue their electricity or home heating fuel.
- 12 percent had their electric or natural gas service shut off in the past year due to nonpayment.
- 28 percent were unable to use their main source of heat in the past year because their fuel was shut off, they could not pay for fuel delivery, or their heating system was broken and they could not afford to fix it.
- 17 percent were unable to use their air conditioner in the past year because their electricity was shut off or their air conditioner was broken and they could not afford to fix it.

² This is significantly higher than Reid's 2007 national survey for all households that found 50 percent of households had at least one CFL in the home. Source: Reid, Michael. Who's Buying CFLs? Who's Not Buying Them? Findings from a Large-Scale, Nationwide Survey, 2008 ACEEE Summer Study on Energy Efficiency in Buildings Proceedings.

Housing and Financial Problems

Many LIHEAP recipients had problems paying for housing in the past five years, due at least partly to their energy bills.

- 28 percent did not make their full mortgage or rent payment.
- 4 percent were evicted from their home or apartment.
- 4 percent had a foreclosure on their mortgage.
- 11 percent moved in with friends or family.
- 3 percent moved into a shelter or were homeless.

They faced other significant financial problems as well.

- 15 percent got a payday loan in the past five years.
- 3 percent were forced into bankruptcy in the past year.

Medical and Health Problems

Many of the LIHEAP recipients faced significant medical and health problems in the past five years, partly as a result of high energy costs. All of these problems increased significantly since the 2003 survey.

- 32 percent went without food for at least one day.
- 42 percent went without medical or dental care.
- 38 percent did not fill a prescription or took less than the full dose of a prescribed medication.
- 24 percent had someone in the home become sick because the home was too cold.

The Need for LIHEAP

Households reported enormous challenges despite the fact that they received LIHEAP. However, they reported that LIHEAP was extremely important.

- 63 percent of those who did not keep their home at unsafe or unhealthy temperatures said they would have done so if LIHEAP had not been available.
- 59 percent of those who did not have their electricity or home heating fuel discontinued said that they would have if it had not been for LIHEAP.
- 98 percent said that LIHEAP was very or somewhat important in helping them to meet their needs.

It is clear that many of these households will continue to need LIHEAP to meet their energy and other essential needs. 88 percent said that they have or plan to apply for LIHEAP in the next year.

The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA) represents the state directors of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. For a copy of the complete of the survey, go to: www.neada.org.