

National Energy Assistance Survey

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The **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** is the most comprehensive federal program that helps low-income families meet their immediate home energy needs. Approximately **8.9 million** low-income families received assistance in FY 2011; approximately **10 million** households are expected to apply for assistance in FY 2012.

While the average LIHEAP benefit is modest, covering about half the cost of home heating, or **\$417 per year**, nearly **two-thirds** of households reported that they would have kept their homes at unsafe or unhealthy temperatures if it had not been for LIHEAP.

The following is a summary of the key findings from the 2011 National Energy Assistance Survey of 1,768 families. A complete copy of the survey is available on the NEADA website: www.neada.org.

LIHEAP Households Are Among the Most Vulnerable in the Country

LIHEAP recipients have an acute need to maintain safe and healthy temperatures in their homes. Nearly **90 percent** of recipient households have at least one vulnerable member—defined as someone who is age 60 or older, age 18 or younger, or disabled—for whom a loss of heat in the winter or cooling in the summer could have serious health and safety implications.

Table I

Household Members Who Are Vulnerable to Temperature Extremes or Loss of Electricity	
Senior ≥ 60	40%
Disabled	42%
Child ≥ 18	41%
Young Child ≤ 5	21%
Single Parent	15%
Serious Medical Condition	72%
Seniors with Medical Conditions	85%
Use Medical Equipment that Requires Electricity	26%

Because of the difficulty they faced in paying their utility bills, these vulnerable households were forced to make choices that carry serious health risks. As many as **37 percent** went without medical or dental care, and **34 percent** did not fill a prescription or took less than their full dose of prescribed medication. In addition, **19 percent** became sick because the home was too cold.



Frozen House

This past heating season highlighted how dangerous it can be for people living with disabilities to go without heat. In Maine, a disabled woman was running out of heating oil. To conserve supplies she was forced to turn her heat down extremely low. Her poorly insulated home leaked warm air and moisture, eventually resulting in her door freezing over completely. Her disability prevented her from removing the ice, and she became trapped inside her home. Through LIHEAP assistance and Maine's Weatherization program, contractors were sent to her home to melt the ice from around her door, seal the leaks that contributed to her high energy bills, and provide her with fuel to heat her home.

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The Burden of High Utility Bills

LIHEAP recipient households are among the poorest in the nation. **Sixty-one percent** reported incomes at or below the poverty line. For them, the rising cost of home heating is an extraordinary burden—**52 percent** said that energy bills were more difficult to pay than in the previous year.

As a result, LIHEAP households faced difficult—and sometimes dangerous—choices in the face of high energy costs.

Table II

Household Responses to the Problem of Unaffordable Energy Bills	
Closed Off Part of Home	39%
Kept Home at Temperature They Felt was Unsafe or Unhealthy	23%
Left Home for Part of the Day	21%
Used Kitchen Stove or Oven to Provide Heat	33%
Went Without Food for at Least One Day	24%



Even with LIHEAP benefits, many households reported enormous challenges. However they also reported that LIHEAP was extremely important, in many cases allowing them to keep their homes at a safe temperature. And the LIHEAP benefit, while modest, significantly reduced the percentage of their household income that they spend on home energy, commonly referred to as “residential home energy burden.”

Table III

Total Residential Home Energy Burden		
% of Energy Burden	Pre-LIHEAP	Post-LIHEAP
0 - 5%	9%	26%
6 - 10%	32%	32%
11 - 15%	23%	20%
16 - 20%	13%	9%
21 - 25%	9%	5%
>25%	13%	8%

Inability to Pay Energy Bills

Despite the assistance they received, many LIHEAP recipients were unable to pay their energy bills. Almost **half** of the respondents reported that they had skipped paying or paid less than their entire home energy bill in the past year. More than **one-third** said they received a notice or threat to disconnect or discontinue their electricity or home heating fuel.

Housing and Financial Problems

Many LIHEAP recipients had difficulty paying for housing, in part because of their energy burden. Almost **one-third** did not make their full mortgage or rent payment. **Six percent** were evicted from their homes or apartments, and **four percent** faced foreclosure on their mortgages.



The Best Winter in Many Years

In Minnesota, an elderly couple was living on social security benefits totaling \$998 a month. They prided themselves on being self-sufficient; for many years they set the thermostat at 57 degrees and dressed in many layers. However, after they were referred to the Minnesota Energy Assistance Program, they were able to heat their home to a safer temperature and afford better food. They thanked the agency for giving them “one of the best winters in many years.”

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The Need for LIHEAP

93% of households reported that LIHEAP was essential in helping them meet their home heating needs

92% of households have an elderly member

77% of households have incomes less than \$20,000

61% of households reported that LIHEAP prevented shut off of natural gas or electric service

The average LIHEAP benefit is modest—about **50%** of home heating costs—and temporary.