



News Release

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HEAP Winter Crisis Program Available for Lake County Residents November 16, 2021

PAINESVILLE, Ohio— The Ohio Department of Development and Lifeline want to remind Ohioans that assistance is available to help with their home energy bills. The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) helps Ohioans at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines pay their heating bills. Ohioans who are threatened with disconnection, have been disconnected from their utility service, transferring services, establishing new services, at or below 25% fuel, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 12 months, may also be eligible for the HEAP Winter Crisis Program, which started on November 1, 2021.

In just the first two weeks, 71 Lake County households have applied for assistance, with 46 being approved and over \$18,500 allocated for local residents.

“With the financial impacts of COVID-19 on our residents and local community, we anticipate more people than ever needing help with heat,” said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline. “Our winters can be harsh, particularly in northeast Ohio and this program helps people heat their homes safely without needing to choose between basic needs like heat, rent, medications and food.”

Ohioans can visit energyhelp.ohio.gov to apply online, download a copy of the application, or find contact information for a local Energy Assistance Provider. Individuals will need to have copies of the following documents to include with their application:

- Most recent utility bills
- A list of all household members (including birth dates and Social Security numbers)
- Proof of income for the past 30 days for all household members (12 months for certain income types)
- Proof of U.S. citizenship or legal residency for all household members
- Proof of disability (if applicable)

HEAP benefits are applied to an individual’s energy bill after January 1st. If you need immediate assistance with your energy bills, please contact your local Energy Assistance Provider. A list of providers can be found at energyhelp.ohio.gov.

Applications for the HEAP Winter Crisis program must be received by March 31, 2022. The last day to apply for the regular HEAP benefit is May 31, 2022. For more information on the programs, visit energyhelp.ohio.gov or call your local Energy Assistance Provider.

The Winter Crisis Program assists low-income households that have been disconnected (or have a pending disconnection notice), need to establish new service, need to pay to transfer service, have 25% (or less) of bulk fuel supply remaining, or have a household member who was diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 12 months to help stay warm this winter.

Due to COVID-19 precautions, all application intake will be scheduled by appointments only and are in-person. No walk-in sessions will be held. Same day appointments will be added daily for customers who are disconnected. Please call 440-350-9160 if you meet these guidelines for same day appointments.

Ohioans can visit www.energyhelp.ohio.gov to start their application prior to their required agency interview with Lifeline. To schedule an appointment call, 1-440-381-8230 or visit <https://app.capappointments.com/>

Eligible households can receive a payment for their main heating source and/or their secondary heating source (electric). The program can also assist with fuel tank placement, fuel tank testing, and furnace repair. Ohioans must have a gross income at or below 175% of the federal poverty guidelines to qualify for assistance. For a family of four, the annual income must be at or below \$46,375.

For more information about the Winter Crisis Program locally and what is needed to apply, contact Lifeline's Energy Assistance Office at 440-350-9160 or visit our website at www.lclifeline.org. Lifeline's office re-located in June 2020 and is now located at One Victoria Place, Suite 265A in Painesville. Additional information can also be found at www.energyhelp.ohio.gov or by calling (800) 282-0880.

Ohioans also have the option of enrolling in a longer-term plan, PIPP Plus, which allows them to pay a percentage of their income rather than high bills they cannot afford. Under PIPP Plus, customers pay five percent of their monthly income or \$10 a month, whichever is greater, to both electric and gas utilities. Customers in all-electric homes pay 10 percent or \$10, whichever is greater. This stays the same for 12 months and then income is rechecked. The key to this program is keeping up with on-time payments, said Marina Rivera, Energy Programs Manager at Lifeline.

"For each on-time and full monthly payment, PIPP Plus customers see a credit on their bills for their current balances and a credit toward their accumulated arrearage," Rivera said. "PIPP Plus helps customers eliminate old utility debt and avoid new utility debt."

To be eligible for PIPP Plus, customers must have a household income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line and be a customer of a regulated gas or electric company. Any adult household member reporting zero income will be asked to provide tax documentation as verification. The program is administered by the Ohio Development Services Agency and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

The office will be closed on Thursday and Friday, Nov. 25 and 26 for Thanksgiving.

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers was founded in 1973 with the mission of helping Lake County residents by providing them assistance and life skills programming that is designed to increase self-sufficiency. In 1980 Lifeline became a participating agency of the United Way of Lake County, UWLC, and in 1987 was designated a community action agency by the Ohio Development Services Agency, ODSA. In 2008, Lifeline was designated as a mental health agency by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Lifeline received interim designation as Geauga County's community action agency in 2020.

Today Lifeline continues with the same mission of helping Lake County's low-income residents break the cycle of poverty and make the transition from agency-dependency to self-sufficiency. Lifeline's current programming includes services in the healthcare, housing & energy assistance, information & referral services and consumer education & job training areas. Our motto is 'helping people, changing lives.' Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODSA, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Lake County ADAMHS Board, Lake County Department of Job & Family Services, the City of Mentor, the Western Reserve Junior Service League, the Lake County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Lake Health and through private donors.