

Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)



Mission Statement:

LIEN aims to ensure universal access to adequate, affordable energy as a basic necessity, while minimizing the impacts on health and on the local and global environment of meeting the essential energy and conservation needs of all Ontarians.

LIEN promotes programs and policies which tackle the problems of energy poverty and homelessness, reduce Ontario's contribution to smog and climate change, and promote a healthy economy through the more efficient use of energy, a transition to renewable sources of energy, education and consumer protection.

Background

LIEN was formed in 2004 by anti-poverty, affordable housing and environmental groups in response to the impact of rising energy prices on low-income Ontarians. LIEN has over 80 members from a broad range of environmental, legal, tenant/housing, and social service organizations across Ontario that have endorsed our mandate. LIEN is directed by a Steering Committee made up of representatives from Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), A Place Called Home (APCH), Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Salvation Army Centre of Hope.

We seek to raise awareness of, and propose solutions to, energy poverty through:

- Outreach to community groups to involve them in LIEN;
- Outreach to the public, e.g. through the media;
- Participating in OEB hearings and legislative processes;
- Working with policy-makers and local utilities.

Advocacy

LIEN's activities have included:

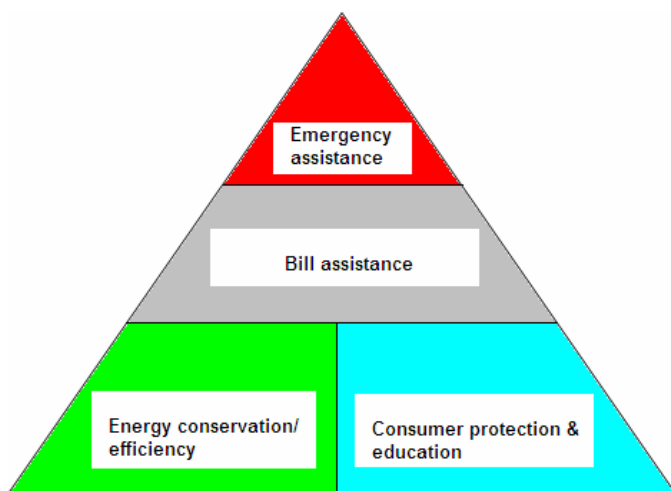
- A proposal for an **Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program** was developed for LIEN by Roger Colton, U.S. low-income energy expert, and submitted to the Ontario Energy Board. The proposal advocates that low-income consumers should not pay more than 6% of total household income on energy. On April 26, 2007, the OEB issued a decision that it did not have the jurisdiction to implement rate affordability programs for low-income consumers. LIEN appealed this decision to Divisional Court and won. The Court ruled on May 16, 2008 that "the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has the jurisdiction to establish a rate affordability assistance program for low-income consumers." Following the Divisional Court decision, the Board initiated a consultation process on energy issues relating to low-income consumers, after which it released a report laying out the groundwork for a comprehensive assistance program for low-income energy consumers. The **Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)** proposes a number of measures, including financial assistance and customer service practices, designed to help low-income Ontarians better manage their electricity and natural gas bills.
- **Zapping Tenants: a critical analysis of sub-metering in the residential rental sector** – LIEN's report, released in May 2005, outlines concerns with unregulated sub-metering and the potential impact on low-income tenants' housing affordability. The report concluded that electricity sub-metering in apartment buildings is not cost effective, not an effective method of energy conservation, and not fair to tenants.
- The Ontario Power Authority (OPA) has been rolling out conservation pilot programs under the Energy Minister's directive to save 100MW of electricity consumption in the low-income and social housing sectors

The OPA consulted with LIEN and other stakeholders in the development of its **Multi-family Buildings Program** to reduce energy demand and consumption of all existing multi-residential buildings with six or more housing units. The OPA also launched the **Low-income Energy Efficiency Assistance Program for Houses** pilot, designed to reduce energy consumption in 1,400 electrically-heated owned or rented single-family homes. The pilot program was delivered by EnviroCentre and Green Communities Canada, both of which are LIEN members. LIEN participated in various stakeholder consultation sessions on the OPA's **Integrated Power System Plan (IPSP)** and called for specific inclusion of low-income CDM programs in the plan.

- Ongoing consultations with Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. and Union Gas Ltd. on the development and delivery of their low-income demand-side management (DSM) programs. LIEN recommended the delivery of low-income DSM programs with energy audits and the installation of extended energy saving measures – such as weatherization and replacement of energy inefficient appliances and heating equipment – that would provide the benefits of deeper reductions in energy use and costs for low-income consumers, as well as reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- LIEN designed a Lobby Kit which offers an introduction to the problem of energy poverty and how it can be best addressed. The kit includes some simple templates which people can use in their advocacy work with politicians and their community.
- LIEN has hosted four annual conferences, the most recent on June 10, 2008 in Toronto with financial support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The conference, entitled **Making Connections: Green Pathways out of Energy Poverty**, involved over 50 participants representing a range of organizations from the anti-poverty, affordable housing and environmental communities, as well as representatives from local utilities. Participants focused on the opportunities presented by Ontario's poverty reduction and long-term affordable housing strategies, and climate change plan to address energy affordability for low-income consumers.

LIEN's Low-Income Energy Conservation and Assistance Strategy

LIEN wants to ensure that low-income consumers are able to participate in the "Culture of Conservation" being promoted by the Ontario government as part of the plan to address the province's energy supply/demand crisis. We also want to ensure that low-income households are able to afford their basic energy needs. LIEN's strategy involves a province-wide, comprehensive approach to low-income energy conservation and assistance. It places the greatest emphasis and resources on long-term, environmentally sustainable measures to reduce energy consumption and costs for low-income households.



- Targeted low-income energy conservation/efficiency programs, at no-cost to participants and with as extensive measures as practicable to provide deep reductions in energy use
- Extensive consumer education about energy conservation and the available programs to support conservation activities
- Low-income rate assistance
- Adequately funded emergency energy assistance to help low-income households in crisis

For information on, and to download, LIEN publications and media releases, please visit www.lowincomeenergy.ca or contact the LIEN Coordinator at tel. (416) 597-5855 ext. 5167; fax (416) 597-5821; or by email at bhanjiz@lao.on.ca.

LIEN would like to express its appreciation to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for supporting this initiative