

# Working to End Energy Poverty in Ontario



## A TOOL KIT

Produced by the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)

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

*The price of home energy is very big news these days. It affects everybody everywhere in Ontario. This past winter you probably had to make sure you were sitting down when you opened your home energy bills. Thermostats were lowered. Sweaters were worn. Changes were made.*

*But what if you were poor, working hard at a minimum wage job that doesn't cover the basics of your family's life, even when energy costs aren't rising?*

*Or what if you were older and living on a fixed income, asking yourself the basic question: Do I pay the utilities bills or do I buy my medicine?*

*With these realities, lower thermostats and sweaters aren't enough. They never have been for the poor. Sometimes, for many Ontarians, it literally comes down to the grim choice of heating or eating. For Ontario's poor, the high price of home energy isn't just big news; it's a life-changing, often debilitating, reality.*

*The high price of home energy stands as a massive road block between many Ontarians and self-sufficiency.*

*This manual will help you understand:*

- 1. The life-altering impact of high home energy costs on low-income Ontarians, and the social consequences this issue creates for all Ontarians.*
- 2. Some of the things both the public and private sector are doing to address the problem.*
- 3. How you can help end energy poverty in your own community.*
- 4. The road that lies ahead.*

**The biggest myth would be to assume that any of us are immune to personal tragedies or the many misfortunes that can lead to energy poverty.**



## LIEN Energy Poverty Toolkit

This manual offers an introduction to the problem of energy poverty and some simple templates which you can use locally in outreach and capacity building efforts in your community.

**The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) has designed an energy poverty toolkit. Inside the manual you will find:**

- a backgrounder on energy poverty that outlines the problem
- a summary of existing low-income energy programs in the province and the current landscape
- a list of barriers and common issues facing low-income energy consumers
- examples of how to work locally to end energy poverty in your community
- tips for dealing with your local media, including a sample opinion piece that can be tailored
- helpful conservation tips
- other resources, such as statistics

This manual has been compiled with the assistance of the LIEN steering committee, which is comprised of Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation, Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), A Place Called Home (APCH), Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army Centre of Hope, and Social Development Council of Cornwall and Area.

The manual was made possible through the financial support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). This funding support does not indicate endorsement by OTF of the contents of this material. The opinions expressed herein are those of the Low-Income Energy Network, as is the responsibility for any errors or omissions.

All materials can be downloaded from the LIEN website. Feel free to photocopy and distribute the manual.

Please contact LIEN if you have any questions about these materials, or require additional information.

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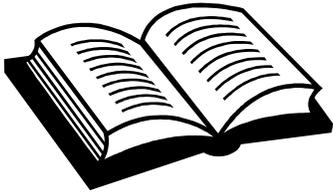
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	<b><u>ACRONYMS</u></b>
ACTO	Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario
AGI	Above Guideline Rent Increase
APCH	A Place Called Home
CDM	Conservation and Demand Management
CELA	Canadian Environmental Law Association
CFLs	Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs
CHRA	Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
ComSoc	Ministry of Community and Social Services
CSUMB	Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefits
CWG	Conservation Working Group
DSM	Demand-Side Management
EEF	Emergency Energy Fund
ESK	Energy Saving Kit
FAWG	Financial Assistance Working Group
IPSP	Integrated Power System Plan
ISAC	Income Security Advocacy Centre
LDCs	Local Distribution Companies
LEAP	Low-Income Energy Assistance Program
LICO	Low-Income Cut-Off
LIEN	Low-Income Energy Network
ODSP	Ontario Disability Support Program
OEB	Ontario Energy Board
OPA	Ontario Power Authority
OTF	Ontario Trillium Foundation
OW	Ontario Works
RGI	Rent-Geared-to-Income
RPP	Regulated Price Plan
SHSC	Social Housing Services Corporation
TAPS	Thermostat, Aerator, Pipewrap, Showerhead
TEA	Toronto Environmental Alliance



## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION** **WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR AND WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?**

LIEN's energy poverty manual is intended to be a "**living document**" which will continue to be altered, amended and updated by either a limited or unrestricted group. This is to ensure that it is both relevant and current. We will continue to update the toolkit and we invite you to provide feedback and share your own ideas and resources so that all community members can benefit from your knowledge and experience. Comments as to how it might be improved or additional material added would therefore be welcomed.

The framework of the toolkit is organized around individual modules. Each module is designed to be a stand alone source of information such that the user of the toolkit will readily be able to access the specific information desired, although it is hoped that many will find the entirety of the toolkit of use. Further, there are several embedded links to websites in the toolkit that will provide additional information.

*Disclaimer: Much of the information contained in the toolkit is a compilation of existing resources (e.g. Ontario Energy Board website). However, it has been developed and arranged in a manner that should facilitate easy use. The reader is encouraged to follow weblinks to other documents in order to obtain additional information about specific areas.*

### **Who is this manual for?**

Users may come from a wide range of experience and organizations. Ideally they will include:

- Staff or community members who are well-positioned to train others in using the toolkit and who also want to be better able to assist low-income consumers in their own communities
- Individuals who are actively involved in energy awareness and conservation campaigns and want to explore certain topics in greater depth
- Low-income individuals who, having experienced energy poverty, can offer insight into what they might find useful in a toolkit

### **What is the purpose of the manual?**

The overall goal of the manual is to enable you to:

- Provide up-to-date and targeted advice on energy poverty to low-income households, groups and agencies across Ontario in order to raise awareness
- Provide energy efficiency advice and conservation tips to encourage the reduction in energy consumption (and therefore a reduction in energy bills)
- Support groups and agencies that provide advice to low-income energy consumers so as to ensure maximum take-up of available programs

### **Why did LIEN develop this manual?**

LIEN's aim in the development of the manual is to:

- Raise awareness about low-income energy consumer issues as well as available energy assistance and energy conservation/efficiency programs
- Raise awareness in low-income communities across the province about the environmental impact of energy use and the effect of energy poverty on health
- Exchange knowledge and information with LIEN members and other partners, leading to greater cooperation
- Build the capacity of LIEN member organizations, i.e. pass on skills and knowledge to trainers so that they are better able to help low-income energy consumers in their own communities; this will also lead to the development of local leadership
- Ensure that LIEN's work is sustainable across the province in the long-term



## **CHAPTER 2: ABOUT LIEN**

LIEN was formed in March 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), Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation, Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), A Place Called Home (APCH), Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army Centre of Hope, and Social Development Council of Cornwall and Area.

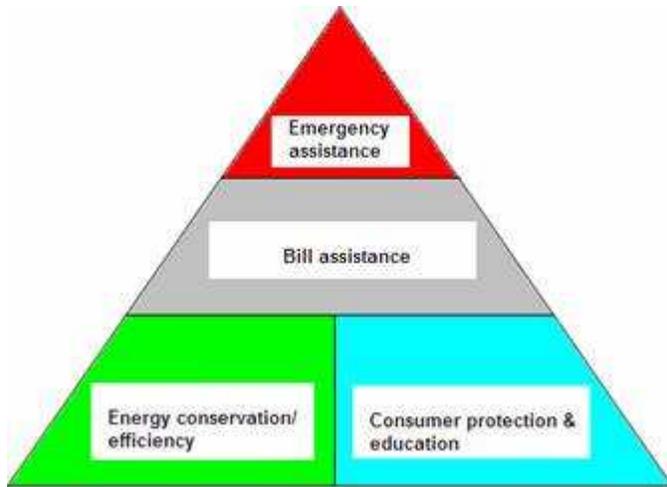
We seek to raise awareness of, and propose effective, environmentally sustainable solutions to, energy poverty. LIEN wants to ensure that low-income consumers are able to participate in the “Culture of Conservation” being promoted by the Ontario government as part of the plan to address the province’s energy supply/demand crisis and the plan to tackle climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. 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 - and reduce pollution.

Some of LIEN’s typical activities have included:

- working with, and serving as a resource for, social service organizations, environmental organizations, affordable housing advocates, natural gas and electricity distribution companies and other stakeholders on the design and delivery of energy conservation programs for low-income consumers
- advising government, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) on the need for policies and programs that will protect low-income energy consumers and the ways in which they can deliver such programs; producing models for such programs that are shared with stakeholders and delivery agents
- educating LIEN member organizations, environmental, energy and social service organizations across Ontario, provincial and municipal government officials, OEB, OPA, local electricity and natural gas distribution companies and the general public about the need for specifically designed programs for low-income consumers through workshops, meetings, the website and the media
- compiling and updating regularly summaries of, and contacts for, currently available energy assistance and energy conservation programs for low-income consumers; these summaries have been a useful resource for individuals in need, social service agencies, legal clinics, housing help centres and other organizations working with clients at risk of utility service disconnection

## **LIEN's Low-Income Energy Conservation and Assistance Strategy**

To address energy poverty, LIEN has proposed a multi-pronged approach to promoting energy conservation and ensuring access to energy for low-income consumers:



### ***Targeted low-income energy conservation and efficiency programs, at no-cost to recipients AND Extensive consumer education about energy conservation, and specific low-income consumer protection measures***

The foundation of the pyramid consists of policies and programs that promote energy conservation and efficiency and provide consumers with education about how to reduce their energy consumption. While we know that energy efficiency programs alone cannot solve the problem of affordability, they can, however, make a significant contribution to reducing the energy burden. The greatest benefits will be achieved through the introduction of measures that achieve deep energy savings (such as the installation of energy efficient appliances, proper attic and wall insulation, and an efficient heating system).

The base of the pyramid also includes conditions of service that will not penalize low-income energy consumers who are already struggling to pay for gas/electricity bills, i.e. security deposit exemptions, no late payment fees, fair arrears repayment programs.

### ***A permanent low-income rate assistance program***

Moving up to the middle, LIEN has also been advocating for a low-income rate assistance program which will ensure that low-income consumers do not pay more than **6%** of their total household income on energy. Such a program would ensure ongoing affordability of energy bills and serve to prevent energy crises rather than just react to them after they have occurred. So while energy efficiency programs and consumer education initiatives reduce the energy bills of low-income households, the reality is that energy prices are likely to continue to rise over time. Energy poverty is also expected to increase as many tenants' rents will cease to include utilities with the installation of suite meters.

### ***Adequate emergency energy assistance to help households in short-term crisis***

Considering the reality of circumstances facing many people living with low-income (such as insecure work, fluctuating income, and short-term financial emergencies) it is important to note that even with a rate affordability program and an energy conservation and efficiency program, there will still be a need for a permanent, adequately funded, and accessible emergency energy fund.



## CHAPTER 3: ENERGY POVERTY BACKGROUND

### **WHAT IS ENERGY POVERTY?**

Rising energy costs have an impact on all Ontarians, but low-income households are hit hardest. Low income households often pay a very high percentage of their income on energy costs. The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) believes that low-income consumers should not be paying more than 6% of their total household income on energy. LIEN uses the term “energy poverty” to describe this disproportionate burden of electricity, natural gas and other utility costs on low-income households which reduce the funds available for food, clothing, medicine and other basic necessities. Inability to pay utilities is second only to inability to pay rent as a reason for homelessness.

Energy poverty affects low-income people living in all categories of housing: private rental, social housing and owner-occupied. While energy poverty can often be the result of lack of income, it can also be the result of the quality of housing. For example, if a home lacks insulation or draft-proofing, has inefficient heating equipment or has other inefficient appliances, energy costs will remain high despite the resident's best efforts to be responsible and conserve.

High energy costs and low incomes are a painful combination. In the cold winter months, when energy bills can sometimes be greater than rent, poor families have to choose between food, clothing, and keeping themselves warm. They may be forced to live in moderate to extreme discomfort. Health can be affected. Higher summer temperatures, prolonged heat waves and more episodes of extreme heat can combine to deadly effect.

In order to adequately heat our homes, prepare food and live in safe conditions, we need energy. According to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), housing is a vital platform for individual health and well-being. “Housing in disrepair leads to higher risks of injury and accidental death in the home and unhealthy, indeed sometimes fatal, exposure to extremes of heat and cold. Exposure to dampness, moulds, fungus (e.g. from poor insulation ... poor heating and ventilation systems) can cause a wide range of pathologies, including asthma and other respiratory diseases.”<sup>1</sup> Although these health risks apply to all people, seniors, children and those who are disabled or have a long-term illness are especially vulnerable.

There has been an increasing awareness of the impact of high energy costs on low-income consumers and a variety of responses to address the impact, many of which will be discussed in this toolkit. However, we still do not have a comprehensive, environmentally sustainable strategy in place to reduce energy poverty.

Of course, we must also step up to our responsibility to reduce emissions as climate change is a serious threat requiring serious attention. Reducing our energy consumption is a critical component of any climate change strategy. Low-income Ontarians want to be able to conserve energy where possible. However, low-income people do not have the money available to invest in energy conservation and efficiency. Additionally, often low-income families live in private rentals or social housing. This means that they are unable to address their quality of housing and the effect this has on their conservation efforts. As such, measures are required to ensure low-income people are able to gain access to effective conservation programs.

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<sup>1</sup> *Home Truths: Why the Housing System Matters to All Canadians*, Andrew Jackson, CHRA, 2004, p.37-38.

## **ENERGY POVERTY FACT SHEET**

*Compiled by the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)  
Revised: May 2011*

### **Low-income consumers and electricity service**

- 14.7% of Ontario's population (1,749,965 persons) is living at or below the "poverty line".<sup>i</sup> The majority of these persons live in tenant households.
- For the lowest income quintile households paying electricity bills, the median annual bill payment was \$1,000.<sup>ii</sup>
- The lowest household income quintile in Ontario is twice as likely as the average income household to heat with electricity (30.2% compared to 14.7% for the average income household).<sup>iii</sup>
- The lowest household income quintile in Ontario is more likely to use electricity as principal heating fuel for hot water (34.8% compared to 20.8% for the highest income quintile and 25.3% for the average income household).<sup>iv</sup>
- Back in 1998, approximately 23% of tenant households paid for utilities (hydro, heating, water) directly and separately from their rent.<sup>v</sup> Thirteen years later, there are more tenant households paying for electricity directly because of rising energy costs and the installation of suite metering systems in multi-residential rental buildings.
- For the majority of tenants whose rent includes utilities, landlords can apply, under the *Residential Tenancies Act*, to pass on utilities cost increases when they are one and a half times greater than the Annual Rent Increase Guideline (i.e. Ontario CPI)<sup>vi</sup>. There is no limit on an Above-Guideline Rent Increase for utilities cost increases.
- 45% of Ontario tenant households (580,265 households) pay 30% or more of their household income on shelter costs.<sup>vii</sup>
- 20% of Ontario tenant households (261,225 households) pay 50% or more of their household income on shelter costs.<sup>viii</sup>
- The risk for homelessness increases where rental costs consume more than 50% of pre-tax household income for a tenant household.<sup>ix</sup>
- 96% of Ontario Works' beneficiaries are tenants, but only 13% of these OW beneficiaries who rent live in subsidized housing – the vast majority live in the private rental market.<sup>x</sup>
- 78% of Ontario Disability Support Program beneficiaries are tenants, but only 19% of these ODSP beneficiaries who rent live in subsidized housing.<sup>xi</sup>
- A single mother with two children on social assistance in Ontario receives a maximum shelter allowance of \$627<sup>xii</sup>. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Toronto CMA is \$1,123; in the Ottawa CMA, it's \$1,048.<sup>xiii</sup> Over half of Ontario's tenant households live in the Toronto and Ottawa CMAs.

- There were 141,635 low-income households across Ontario on the active waiting lists for social housing at the beginning of 2010 – an increase of 9.6% or 12,382 households in one year.<sup>xiv</sup>
- According to CMHC's 2006 Census-based Housing Data, while Ontario renter households accounted for 28% of all Ontario households, they comprised 64% of Ontario households in core housing need – a significantly disproportionate share.<sup>xv</sup>

## **POLICY AND LEGAL LANDSCAPE OF ENERGY POVERTY IN ONTARIO**

As a result of LIEN's work in the courts, with the Ontario government, at the Ontario Energy Board and our engagement with communities across Ontario, we have had ground-breaking victories in our efforts to reduce energy poverty in the province and to include low-income households in the "Culture of Conservation" to reduce energy use and related greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to climate change. Among the barriers facing low-income consumers who wish to participate in conservation efforts are the lack of capital to invest in energy-savings retrofits and energy efficient appliances, as well as the lack of authority for those who are tenants to undertake retrofits or replace inefficient appliances in their rental units.

A proposal for a ratepayer-funded Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program was developed for LIEN by Roger Colton, a U.S. low-income energy expert, and submitted to the Ontario Energy Board in the Enbridge Gas Distribution 2007 Rates proceeding. 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 on February 25, 2008 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."

The Divisional Court decision led to the OEB initiating a consultation on energy issues relating to low-income consumers. The first step of the OEB's consultation was a four-day stakeholder conference held in September 2008 in which LIEN and four steering committee member organizations (ISAC, CELA, TEA and ACTO) participated actively, making extensive oral and subsequently written submissions. Primarily as a result of LIEN's work and participation, and following the low-income consumer issues consultation, the OEB released its Low-Income Energy Program report on March 10, 2009, in which it:

- explicitly recognized the reality of energy poverty and its hardship;
- explicitly recognized that energy regulation in the public interest includes low-income considerations, and
- explicitly recognized the need for province-wide equitable solutions to energy poverty as opposed to fractured, piece-meal approach.

This laid the groundwork for a comprehensive assistance program for low-income energy consumers. The OEB's Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) is comprised of the following three components to help low-income Ontarians better manage their electricity and natural gas bills:

- Temporary financial assistance for consumers in need
- Access to more flexible customer service rules on matters such as bill payment and disconnection notice procedures, waivers for security deposits and late payment fees
- Targeted conservation and demand management programs for energy efficiency upgrades to homes, to assist low-income energy consumers to reduce their overall energy usage.

LIEN was encouraged that, with the LEAP announcement, the OEB recognized that a comprehensive approach to address energy poverty in Ontario was required. **However, we were disappointed that the Board decided against implementing LIEN's recommendation for a permanent energy rate affordability program. Such a program would proactively prevent low-income households from falling into arrears.**

LIEN steering committee representatives were selected by the OEB to sit on two LEAP implementation working groups through the summer of 2009: the Financial Assistance Working Group and the Conservation Working Group. The customer service component of LEAP was addressed through code amendments rather than a working group. The members of the LEAP working groups represented identifiable constituencies, including environmental interests, social service providers, gas distributors, electricity distributors, and various levels of government.

LIEN's challenge in the working groups has been to ensure effective and adequately funded programs are developed and delivered, with appropriate eligibility criteria, to Ontario's low-income consumers. It is also essential that there will be a monitoring and evaluation process in place as the programs are rolled out, and full and transparent public reports on the uptake and outcomes of the programs. The tracking of the outcomes and effectiveness of the LEAP programs will indicate whether there is a need to move forward with an energy rate affordability program.

Province-wide strategy:

On September 8, 2009, the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure advised the OEB of the government's plan to develop a province-wide integrated program for low-income energy consumers. In light of these plans, the Minister requested that the Board not proceed with implementation of the framework for low-income energy consumers in advance of a ministerial direction. The Minister further indicated that the Ministry, in the development of its program, would build upon the work the Board had undertaken to date and asked the Board to work with the Ministry as the Ministry moved forward with the programs.

However, on July 5, 2010, the Minister Energy and Infrastructure issued a letter to the OEB requesting it to resume its work on a province-wide low-income energy program. The Minister asked that the OEB complete its work by January 2011, and acknowledged that 2011 may be a transition year regarding the establishment of a 'robust and integrated gas and electric low-income energy strategy'.

The Minister also sent a companion letter to the OPA, directing it to develop a new province-wide conservation program for low-income residential consumers as part of the suite of OPA-Contracted Province-Wide CDM Programs. The Minister also directed the OPA to ensure that low-income customers in multi-family buildings have access to enhanced energy efficiency by ensuring that a component of the Commercial and Institutional program targets multi-family buildings including assisted and social housing.

As a result, the OPA is in the process of developing new province-wide conservation initiatives for low-income residential consumers. These initiatives are being developed in conjunction with Ontario's Local Distribution Companies (LDCs) and in coordination with Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. and Union Gas Limited. The initiatives will be part of a new suite of province-wide conservation and demand management programs contracted by the OPA. LIEN was invited to provide feedback on and input to the proposed offerings, as well as submit written comments.

LIEN also resumed its stakeholder role in the OEB's financial assistance working group.

Stakeholder consultations:

LIEN's major challenge has been to educate decision-makers and raise public awareness of the implications of rising energy prices on low-income households, to develop a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach to making energy more affordable for low-income consumers, and to propose and promote practical programs and solutions that can be implemented.

LIEN has continued to work with Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas on the progress of their low-income demand-side management (DSM) programs, particularly with public information and outreach about the programs as they are launched to assist the companies in meeting their client targets. LIEN has regularly been invited to attend the gas companies' consultative meetings where we have made a case for increased spending on the low-income programs, expansion of the low-income weatherization program, as well as targeting those most in need, namely, social assistance recipients, the working poor, low-income seniors and others living on fixed incomes.

Over the years, the OPA has rolled out several 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.

### **Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010 (ECPA)**

The *Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010*, which came into force on January 1, 2011, provides greater protection for residential consumers in relation to contracting for electricity and natural gas supply with retailers and marketers and enables the OEB to "crack-down" on industry practices that violate new conduct rules.

The Board will also have the power to regulate issues such as the form of contracts and invoices, the availability of information in other languages, contract renewals, extensions and amendments, and enhanced rights for contract cancellation including a 10-day cooling off period. The Board will also be able to make regulations on security deposits and service cancellations.

The legislation also empowers the Board to make regulations respecting the employees of energy providers. This includes the power to issue directives on employee training, identification requirements such as badges, and background checks on employees. Employees may also be subject to new licensing and insurance requirements.

The Act also implements a new legal and regulatory framework for individual suite metering of electricity.

While a significant element in the Act is that it provides for rate oversight of suite metering providers by the Ontario Energy Board, no regulation has been issued to give the OEB the authority to undertake this responsibility.

In addition the Act empowers the government to regulate issues such as:

- Specifications for suite meters
- Designating when the installation and use of suite meters is permitted or required
- Creating energy efficiency requirements for units with sub-meters
- Information obligations for suite meter providers and landlords to customers and tenants

The Act also adds significant amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, including new rules for landlords that intend to transition their units to suite metering. This includes requirements

for landlord's to obtain a tenant's consent, to provide a rent reduction, and to meet certain energy conservation and efficiency obligations with respect to the rental unit and appliances.

### **Green Energy and Green Economy Act, 2009 (GEA)**

Because of LIEN's focus on environmentally sustainable solutions to energy poverty, we were invited to join the Green Energy Act Alliance (a diverse group including First Nations, farmers, municipalities, community organizations, environmental groups, wind and solar developers) which came together to envision a greener Ontario and to identify opportunities for Ontario to enact a Green Energy Act modeled on Germany's very successful Renewable Energy Sources Act. LIEN was consulted by the Alliance on provisions for a Green Energy Act that would address energy affordability and protections for Ontario's low-income consumers. On February 23, 2009, Bill 150, *Green Energy and Green Economy Act, 2009* (GEA) was introduced in the Ontario legislature. It received Royal Assent on May 14, 2009.

This legislation is part of Ontario's plan to become a leading green economy in North America. The GEA is intended to:

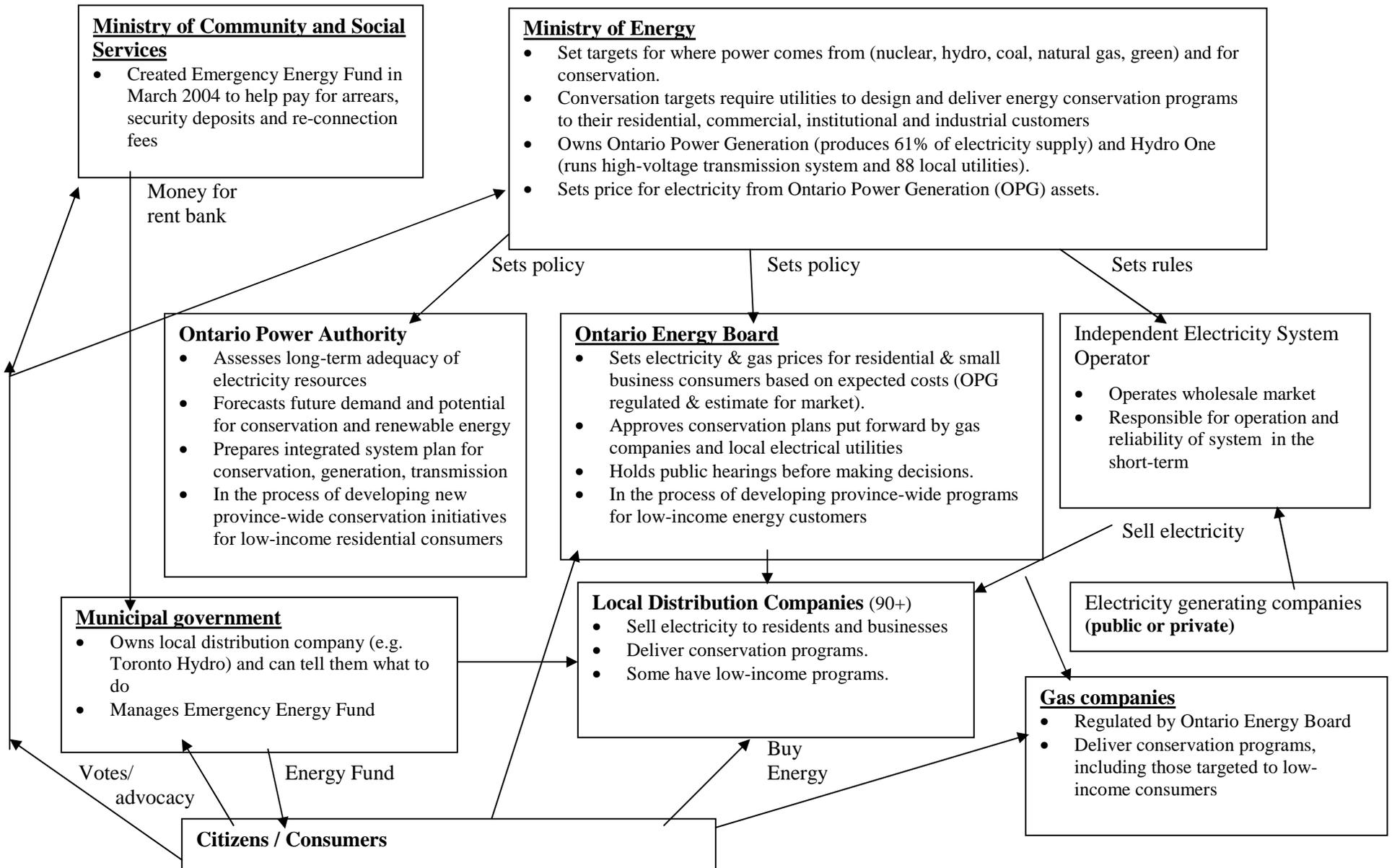
- Spark growth in clean and renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, hydro, biomass and biogas in Ontario.
- Create the potential for savings and better managed household energy expenditures through a series of conservation measures.
- Create 50,000 jobs for Ontarians in its first three years.

The Act contains amendments to the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 that require the OEB to collect assessments to fund conservation or renewable energy programs:

- aimed at reducing consumption of various fuels (natural gas, electricity, propane, oil, coal and wood) and
- aimed at a specific geographical, social, income or other sector of Ontario.

The Act also specifically calls for targeted conservation measures to protect low-income Ontarians from increases in energy prices.

# Who Does What on Energy Policy in Ontario





## CHAPTER 4: LOW-INCOME ENERGY PROGRAMS IN ONTARIO



There are several types of low-income energy programs available in Ontario, such as:

- Emergency assistance programs, which provide financial assistance due to emergencies such as an impending energy service cut-off or eviction;
- Energy efficiency programs, which reduce energy burden by reducing the amount of energy being used by low income households; and
- Consumer protection and education initiatives, which indirectly reduce energy burden and/or protect low-income consumers from the risks associated with high energy burdens.

### A. Emergency assistance programs

Low-income households have been facing a patchwork of programs to help them retain their housing and pay their heating and electricity costs. Some energy bill emergency assistance programs are funded and delivered by the provincial and municipal levels of government, utility companies, community groups, and charities. These programs are designed to address individual household crises when a household is unable to meet the financial demands of energy bills. As such, energy emergency assistance programs provide invaluable relief and must continue. However, they are ill-suited to address permanent and widespread conditions of rising energy prices and income shortfalls.

Many existing assistance programs are seasonal, have different eligibility criteria, application processes, and assistance levels, are not available in all communities, and often do not provide enough money to solve the problem faced by the consumer. While some households may be able to prevent homelessness by pooling varying amounts of assistance from each program, funds tend to run out before the heating season is over. Accessibility to energy assistance programs is further hampered by lack of awareness of the programs and by social stigma. Completion of the application form is also a barrier to low-income consumers (whether because of the length of the form, language barriers, or feeling overwhelmed).

An effective emergency energy assistance program should engage various local community and non-profit groups that have experience in working with low-income households and are therefore better placed to identify and direct low-income people to the program. Engaging with these local groups is particularly important as low-income individuals have often already built a relationship of trust with these agencies. This trust is key to the success of energy assistance programs. In order to ensure that all eligible households are aware of the energy assistance programs, there has to be an aggressive public education and outreach campaign which includes utility companies, social service agencies, charitable organizations, and community and advocacy groups.

LIEN has been advocating for a low-income rate assistance program which will ensure that low-income consumers do not pay more than 6% of their total household income on energy. Such a program would ensure ongoing affordability of energy bills and serve to prevent energy crises rather than just react to them after they have occurred. Energy efficiency programs and consumer education initiatives reduce the amount of energy used by low-income households and subsequently reduce their energy bills.

However, the reality is that energy prices are likely to continue to rise over time, exacerbating the energy burden on low-income households. Energy poverty is also expected to increase as many tenants' rents will cease to include utilities with the installation of smart meters.

Below is a list of low-income financial assistance programs in Ontario. This list is not exhaustive, however, we have taken care to be as comprehensive as possible:

### Province-wide funding

#### ***Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)***

LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance is a comprehensive, year-round emergency financial assistance program developed by the Ontario Energy Board to assist low-income energy customers better manage their bill payments and energy costs. The program is based on the "Winter Warmth" program (currently administered by the United Way) and is intended to supplement existing government initiatives, such as the Emergency Energy Fund. LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance, which is funded through the distribution rates of distributors, is a grant program intended to provide emergency relief to eligible low-income customers who may be experiencing difficulty paying current arrears. It is not intended to provide regular or ongoing bill payment assistance.

The delivery of LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance relies heavily on cooperation between utilities and social service agencies. It is expected that as agencies screen and assess applicants in need, that they may refer customers not only for Emergency Financial Assistance, but also for customer service measures and/or conservation programs. However, if no referrals are provided, we recommend that you contact the utility and request what your options may be. For more information, please go to:

[http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/Documents/Press+Releases/bckgrndr\\_lowincome.pdf](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/Documents/Press+Releases/bckgrndr_lowincome.pdf)

The maximum grant level is \$500 per fuel per household per year. At the discretion of the agency, you may be eligible for a grant of up to \$600 if you live in an electrically heated home. Some utilities, such as Hydro One, are giving clients additional funds, up to \$550 – \$575 if clients normally heat with another fuel source, such as oil, but have been using electric heating because they were not able to purchase oil.

The first step is to contact your utility or unit sub-metering provider. You will be referred to the social service agency serving the area in which you reside (this agency is called the "lead agency"). The lead agency, and not your service provider, is responsible for assessing whether you are eligible for LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance. For more information, go to <http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/Consumers/Consumer+Protection/Help+for+Low-Income+Energy+Consumers>

If you are a Hydro One customer you will be provided the number for Hydro One's Lead agency who will complete an initial eligibility screening with you over the phone. If you meet the initial criteria, you will then be requested to contact another local social service agency in your area to complete a small application process.

#### ***Emergency Energy Fund***

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has provided funding, the Emergency Energy Fund (EEF), to municipalities to provide help to low-income Ontarians, facing energy-related emergencies. Residents can apply for assistance under this program to help pay utility arrears, security deposits and reconnection costs for electricity, natural gas, oil and other forms of energy. Municipalities deliver this program directly or through a contracted third-party service provider.

Each municipality sets its own eligibility criteria. Residents should contact their local municipality for more information.

### ***The Winter Warmth Fund***

If you're in a low-income household, Winter Warmth can offer you some assistance with a one-time grant credited toward your heating bill. It is sponsored by Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas. The United Way administers the program through a network of community-based agencies across the province. Winter Warmth is coordinated by a network of community agencies through the United Way. You can qualify for Winter Warmth if you've exhausted all other sources of support and if: (i) your energy bills are in arrears; (ii) you have recently received a disconnection notice; (iii) your personal circumstances make it hard to pay your heating bill. To determine eligibility for assistance, customers should contact their nearest community agency participating in the program. In Toronto, call Neighbourhood Information Post at 416-924-2543. For information on program availability outside of Toronto, contact one of the participating regional agencies – for a list, visit <https://www.enbridgegas.com/corporate/donations-sponsorships/winter-warmth-fund.aspx> or call 416-495-5790

### ***Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB)***

The CSUMB is available to recipients of social assistance (i.e. Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program) who are in danger of losing their housing because they owe rent or utility payments. A resident may be eligible for this benefit if they are facing disconnection of energy-related services and payment of the arrears would stop disconnection, or if they have had energy-related services disconnected and payment of arrears would have services resume. To apply, OW or ODSP recipients should speak to their case worker. In addition, **discretionary benefits** may be available to assist OW or ODSP recipients with the cost of utility arrears, deposits and reconnection fees. Individuals can also contact their local legal aid clinic to for further information and assistance with regard to accessing the CSUMB and discretionary benefits.

### ***Electricity Late Payment Settlement (soon to come)***

If you were a customer of a local municipal electricity distribution company in Ontario, such as Toronto Hydro, and paid late payment penalties at any time after April 1, 1981, your local community agency that administers emergency energy assistance may be receiving extra funding in July 2011 to provide emergency financial assistance to low-income consumers.

Background: In a ruling released in July 2010, the Ontario Superior Court approved the settlement of a class action lawsuit launched on behalf of customers against Toronto Hydro and other Ontario utilities for charging illegally high interest on late payments. Collectively, all the provincial LDCs were found liable for \$17 million in settlement costs. Since it would be impossible to find and reimburse customers who had paid the high interest rates over decades, this money will be paid to the Winter Warmth Fund managed by the United Way of Greater Toronto and similar low-income energy assistance programs managed by charities in all other areas serviced by participating Electricity distribution companies for the indirect benefit of members of the plaintiff class.

It is important to note that not all communities will be considered part of this suit. For greater certainty, if a municipality sold the assets of its local municipal electricity distribution utility to Hydro One and the municipality retained liability for claims relating to late payment penalties, then the municipality would be considered to be a member of the defendant class.

### Regional funding

#### ***The Heat and Warmth Program (THAW) – City of London***

The Heat and Warmth Program (THAW) provides emergency financial assistance to cover the cost of utility bill arrears in order to avoid disconnection of service. Applicants may be eligible if they

meet income criteria, are pending disconnection or are currently disconnected, and have paid a minimum of \$50 towards the utility account in the previous four months.

The program begins each year on January 2<sup>nd</sup> and operates until funds are exhausted. THAW is administered by Housing Support Services at The Salvation Army Centre of Hope. Applications are completed at satellite sites throughout the City of London and at The Salvation Army Centre of Hope. Applicants can call 519-661-0343 ext. 300 for more information.

***Fund for Utility Service Emergencies (FUSE) – Peterborough Utilities Services***

In Peterborough, low income customers of Peterborough Utilities Services (PUS) may apply to the FUSE program if they are facing disconnection of their utilities or need help to restore service. FUSE funds can be used for PUS utility arrears and security deposits.

Assistance may be available to individuals or families a maximum of once per year except in extraordinary circumstances. Maximum levels of assistance may vary according to availability of funds. FUSE is administered by the Housing Resource Centre, a program of the Community Counselling and Resource Centre. Call 705-743-9122 for more information.

***Waterloo Region Energy Assistance Program (WREAP) - Waterloo***

WREAP is a seamless, coordinated approach to assisting households with low-income to avoid the consequences, such as loss of heat or homelessness, associated with the inability to manage utility arrears. The program is funded by the Province, corporate sponsors in the community and Winter Warmth (sponsored by Union Gas). 100% of the funds contributed by corporate sponsors go directly to people in need.

If you are not receiving Ontario Works, call the Application Line at 519-883-2100 and select option #1. When you call Regional Social Services, you will need to provide your Social Insurance Number, Health Card Number, banking information (including account number), information on assets and income, and rent or mortgage amount. If you are receiving Ontario Works, speak with your caseworker.

***Keep the Heat – Windsor & Essex County***

Keep the Heat provides energy assistance to eligible low-income households experiencing financial difficulties and/or in receipt of a notice of termination of utilities. The public and affected families are also educated about energy conservation and provided with tools such as window insulation kits. Contact the Unemployed Help Centre at 519-944-4900, or Housing Information Services at 519-254-4824 to find the location closest to you, or visit [www.uhc.ca](http://www.uhc.ca)

***North Hastings Community Trust***

The North Hastings Community Trust provides low-income families, individuals and children with community referrals and emergency financial assistance. Items covered may include rent, heat, hydro, groceries, and medical expenses. Other requests will be considered on a case by case basis. Call 613-339-1100 for assistance.

***Shelter Fund – Toronto***

This fund is available to OW or ODSP recipients in Toronto who have one or more dependent children under the age of 18. This benefit, up to a maximum of \$1500, may be received in addition to CSUMB to assist with last month's rent deposit, fuel and electricity security deposits (i.e. establishing new account for services), rental, utility, or fuel arrears. To apply, OW or ODSP recipients should speak to their case worker.

### ***Hamilton Utilities Arrears Program***

The City of Hamilton has established a fund to help low-income households, including OW and ODSP recipients, to pay for utility arrears, disconnection and security deposits. Families with children are eligible for up to \$1,500 in assistance per year. Singles and couples without children can receive up to \$799 in assistance per year. To apply, OW and ODSP recipients should contact their case worker directly. Individuals or families not receiving social assistance may contact Special Supports at 905-546-2590. For more information visit: [www.hamilton.ca/support](http://www.hamilton.ca/support).

### ***Housing Emergency Loan Program (HELP) – Hamilton***

Operates its own loan program as well as the Provincial Rent Bank. Interest-free loans are available for people in a number of situations, including people who are behind in their rent or utilities. Contact 905-527-7479.

### ***Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board – Prevention of Homelessness and Advocacy***

The RRDSSAB Prevention of Homelessness and Advocacy will provide advocacy and support in maintaining necessary heat and utilities to ensure that persons can remain in their homes. This program is funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services under the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Plan. Access to Homelessness Funding for utilities and heat is “once in a lifetime” funding. Qualifying applicants residing in the Rainy River District are given support to ensure that all other resources have been exhausted prior to applying for Homelessness funding. Households must be pending disconnection or currently disconnected and all funds are paid directly to the electricity or gas account. The program is funded annually and operates until funds are exhausted. Applicants can call 807-274-5349 for more information.

### ***Niagara Emergency Energy Fund (formerly Share the Warmth) – Niagara Region***

This fund covers electricity, natural gas, oil and other forms of energy. Applicants may receive assistance to pay arrears, security deposits and reconnection fees through direct payments to the energy providers. The maximum assistance per household is equivalent to two months energy arrears, security deposits and reconnection fees, in order to restore or maintain utility services, except under exceptional circumstances. Additionally, recipients may only receive assistance under the program once per year, except under exceptional circumstances. For more information and to learn which agency you may apply to, you can visit: <http://niagara.cioc.ca/record/NIA5937>

### ***Northern Ontario Energy Credit***

This is a new refundable tax credit for low to middle income families and individuals living in northern Ontario, effective for 2010 and later years. The maximum annual credit for a single person is \$130, and for a family (including single parents), is \$200. These credits are reduced when a single person's income exceeds \$35,000 and a family's income exceeds \$45,000, and are completely eliminated when a single person's income exceeds \$48,000 and a family's income exceeds \$65,000.

## **B. Energy efficiency and conservation programs**

While energy efficiency programs cannot solve the problem of energy affordability alone, they can make a significant contribution to the reduction of energy burden, and can have environmental benefits as well. In developing conservation and demand management (CDM) and demand-side management (DSM) programs for low-income consumers, one must ensure that they are effective. For reasons often beyond the low income individual's control, programs focused upon behavioral education and changes may not result in a huge reduction in energy costs but they have important cumulative effects. That being said, the greatest benefits will be achieved through the introduction of deep weatherization measures, such as the installation of energy efficient appliances, proper

attic and wall insulation, and an efficient heating system. Provinces, including Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, have low-income energy efficiency programs that provide such deep weatherization measures.

In some jurisdictions there has been low consumer uptake of existing weatherization programs. This should not be interpreted to mean that a need does not exist for such programs. There are often barriers to low-income consumers accessing weatherization programs. These barriers may include a lack of awareness about the program, discouragement or disenchantment with previous initiatives, and mistrust of utilities. These problems can be addressed through program design and should not serve to limit the availability of weatherization programs for low income-consumers.

There are also a number of free energy efficiency and conservation programs for low-income consumers. The OPA is in the process of developing new province-wide conservation initiatives for low-income residential consumers. These initiatives are being developed in conjunction with local LDCs and in coordination with Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. and Union Gas Limited and will form part of a new suite of province-wide conservation and demand management programs contracted by the OPA.

Below is a list of low-income energy conservation and efficiency programs available in Ontario. Once again, this list is not exhaustive, however, we have taken care to be as comprehensive as possible:

***Enbridge Gas Distribution: Low-Income Home Weatherization Retrofit***

The Enbridge Home Weatherization Retrofit program provides income-eligible participants with a free home energy assessment and weatherization upgrades at no cost, to improve the energy efficiency of their home. Approximately 500 qualifying low-income Enbridge Gas customer households will benefit from this program that will be delivered by GreenSaver in the City of Toronto, Peel, York and Durham Regions, by EnviroCentre in the Ottawa area, Green Venture in the Niagara Region and Peterborough Green Up in Peterborough area. The program runs until December 31, 2011, and applications must be received by November 30, 2011.

For more information, eligibility criteria and to obtain an application form, visit: GTA, York, Peel and Durham Regions – GreenSaver website at [www.greensaver.org](http://www.greensaver.org) and select Special Programs tab or call 416-203-3106 (1-888-855-3106 toll-free); Ottawa Area – EnviroCentre at [www.envirocentre.ca](http://www.envirocentre.ca) or call 613-580-2582, ext. 4; Niagara Region – Green Venture at [www.greenventure.ca](http://www.greenventure.ca) or call 1-866-540-8866; Peterborough Area – Peterborough Green Up at [www.greenup.on.ca](http://www.greenup.on.ca) or call 1-705-745-3238, ext. 202.

***Enbridge Gas Distribution: Enhanced TAPS program***

The Enhanced TAPS Program is available at no cost to qualifying low-income families and individuals until December 31, 2011. Programmable thermostats and low-flow showerheads are supplied and installed. Kitchen and bathroom aerators and compact fluorescent light bulbs are provided for recipients to install themselves. Applications are available through United Way agencies participating in the Winter Warmth program. For more information, please visit the Enbridge Gas Distribution website at: [www.enbridgegas.com](http://www.enbridgegas.com) select “About Us” then “In the Community” and then select “Winter Warmth”.

***Union Gas: Helping Homes Conserve***

Helping Homes Conserve is designed to reduce the energy burden of Union Gas’s low-income residents. Professional technicians will provide the installation of up to two energy efficient showerheads, kitchen and basin aerators, pipe wrap and a programmable thermostat in the homes of low-income residents – free of charge. Installation of all of these components could save the customer up to \$200 annually on energy bills. Customers must have a natural gas water heater to

qualify for the ESK installation, and a natural gas furnace to qualify for the programmable thermostat installation.

The program was launched in Hamilton on August 17, 2007 and will continue throughout 2011 across the Union Gas franchise. For more information, visit <http://www.uniongas.com/helpinghomes/index.asp> OR call 1-877-326-3488.

***Union Gas: Helping Homes Weatherization***

The Weatherization program provides income-eligible Union Gas customers with free energy-saving upgrades for their home. The program features free measures for participants including a pre-energy audit, attic insulation, basement insulation, wall insulation, draft proofing, and a post-energy audit. Tenants or homeowners must live in a residential dwelling that is more than 25 years old to qualify for the program. In 2011 EnviroCentre will retrofit approximately 400 homes on behalf of Union Gas in the Windsor, Hamilton, and Belleville areas.

To apply for the Helping Homes Weatherization program, Union Gas customers can call EnviroCentre at 1 877 580-2582, option 4, or they can email us at [weatherization@uniongas.com](mailto:weatherization@uniongas.com). Full details about the program are available at <http://www.uniongas.com/weatherization>.

***Discretionary benefit to cover energy conservation measures***

This is a \$50 one-time benefit to pay for pre-approved, low-cost energy conservation measures, such as caulking, sealing or weather stripping around doors and windows, insulating hot water pipes and hot water tanks, and installing flow restrictors in showerhead pipes. It is available to OW and ODSP recipients, who can contact their caseworkers for more information.

***Ottawa's PowerPlay program***

The PowerPlay program, launched in 2005 and delivered by EnviroCentre and the City of Ottawa, provides an in-home electricity audit showing how to reduce electricity and gas consumption and installs up to \$300 worth of conservation devices, free-of-charge, to Ontario Works recipients in the City of Ottawa who have an individual account with Hydro Ottawa or Hydro One. Call 613-580-2582 (ext 3) for more information.



## CHAPTER 5: PURCHASING GAS & ELECTRICITY IN ONTARIO

### Electricity

#### **Regulated price plan rates**

Since 2002, Ontario consumers have had the choice to purchase electricity from their local utility or from an electricity retailer. If consumers choose to stay with their local utility, they pay the Regulated Price Plan (RPP) rate. The RPP is set every six months by the Ontario Energy Board, based on a price forecast and any accumulated differences between the amount the consumers paid for electricity and the amount paid to generators in the previous period. The price threshold – the amount of electricity that is charged at the lower price – also changes twice a year for residential consumers. From May 1, 2011 to October 31, 2011, the RPP price is 6.8¢ per kilowatt hour (kWh) for up to 600 kWh, and 7.9¢ per kWh over that amount. The current RPP is posted on the OEB website ([www.ontarioenergyboard.ca](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca)).

#### **Time-of-Use (TOU) rates**

As part of the Regulated Price Plan, the Board also sets time-of-use (TOU) for smart meters.

Current Time-Of-Use Prices			
			<b>Summer Weekdays</b> May 1 to October 31
	Time	Period	¢/kWh
	7 am to 11 am	Mid-Peak	<b>8.9</b>
	11 am to 5 pm	On-Peak	<b>10.7</b>
	5 pm to 7 pm	Mid-Peak	<b>8.9</b>
	7 pm to 7 am	Off-Peak	<b>5.9</b>
<b>Weekends &amp; Holidays</b>			
	All day	Off-Peak	<b>5.9</b>

### Natural gas

Since 1985, Ontario consumers have had the choice to purchase their gas from their utility or from a natural gas retailer. If consumers choose to stay with their utility, they pay the rate regulated by the Ontario Energy Board. Natural gas rates are adjusted quarterly to reflect the difference between the forecasted price for natural gas in the next 12 months and how much it actually costs. In Ontario, utilities pass the cost to purchase the gas on to consumers, with no mark-up. Rate adjustments are implemented January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1, after the OEB reviews the utility's application. Detailed information on regulated natural gas rates is posted on the OEB website ([www.ontarioenergyboard.ca](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca)).

April 1, 2011 Natural Gas Prices At A Glance	
Union Gas Limited	13.32 ¢/m <sup>3</sup>
Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc.	11.81 ¢/m <sup>3</sup>
Natural Resource Gas Limited	20.18 ¢/m <sup>3</sup>



## CHAPTER 6: ENERGY RETAILERS

Electricity and natural gas retailers set their own contract prices for the commodity alone. The price is locked in for the length of the contract term (i.e. certain number of years). It is important for consumers to know that they will continue to pay for the other costs of getting the electricity or natural gas to their home (e.g. delivery, regulatory, debt retirement charges).

Many consumers sign these contracts because they want to insure themselves against any sharp increases in energy prices.

### Protecting Energy Consumers – advice for consumers

In 2010, the Ontario Energy Board received 7,058 complaints, of which 4,195 were concerning energy retail contracts. Many of the complaints were made because consumers were misled into thinking that they would be saving money by purchasing their energy from a retailer. In many cases, the consumer paid much more, leading them to cancel their contract, only to face a sizeable contract cancellation fee.

Ontario is helping protect electricity and natural gas consumers with new rules that address unfair practices by energy retailers and that ensure consumers receive accurate information from energy retailers before they decide to sign a contract. As of January 1, 2011 energy retailers are required to:

- Disclose how the contract price they are offering compares to the price offered to you by the local utility.
- Provide training programs to their staff, in keeping with Ontario Energy Board standards, to ensure they know, understand and abide by the new rules.
- Offer cancellation without penalty in a number of circumstances, and limit the cancellation fees that retailers can charge you.

### **Know Your Rights**

The Ontario Energy Board is helping to inform Ontarians about these new rules. Here are some things to consider before you sign a contract: <http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca>

### Before Signing an Energy Contract: What You Should Consider

This tip sheet applies to contracts that are entered into on and after January 1, 2011.

1. **You have options. You do not have to sign a contract – your energy service will continue without interruption.** Your energy can be supplied by your utility (prices set by the Ontario Energy Board), OR an electricity retailer/gas marketer (private companies) if you sign a contract. *It's a competitive marketplace so take time to understand your options, rights and responsibilities.*
2. **Know who you are dealing with.** An electricity retailer/gas marketer who comes to your home or business must provide a business card that includes, among other things, their name and the name, address, phone number and Ontario Energy Board license number of

the company they represent. They must also wear a valid identification badge that includes, among other things, their name, a recent photo, and the name of the company they represent.

3. **Be aware of when to show your bill.** You are under no obligation to show a copy of your energy bill to a salesperson. However, if you do want to enter into a contract, the salesperson will need to see a copy of your bill to get your utility account number in order to process the contract.
4. **Know your rights.** Take the time to understand your rights and responsibilities as an energy consumer. An electricity retailer/gas marketer that offers you a contract must also provide you with an OEB-approved Disclosure Statement that contains important information about energy contracts.
5. **Compare prices.** There is no guarantee of savings if you sign a contract. Take the time to review and compare prices keeping in mind that if you buy electricity from your utility, the price is set by the OEB and can change and if you buy from an electricity retailer/gas marketer, the price is stated in your contract and is often fixed for a number of years. Remember that an energy contract covers only some parts of your bill. You will still continue to pay other charges to your utility whether or not you sign a contract.
6. **Understanding the Global Adjustment (until January 1, 2011 known as the “Provincial Benefit”).** It is principally your share of the difference between regulated and contract prices for electricity paid to certain generators and the market prices they would have received had they not been subject to regulation or contracts. It can be a charge or a credit.

If you buy from your utility, an estimate of the Global Adjustment is already reflected in the electricity Regulated Price Plan price. If you buy from a retailer, you will have to pay the Global Adjustment in addition to the contract price.

7. **Before agreeing to a contract, make sure you understand it.** Make sure you know the key terms and conditions of the contract – the price offered, exit conditions, cancellation fees and renewal options are all important elements. Read the fine print and understand everything you are committing to.
8. **The final choice is yours.** Don't rush or feel pressured into making a decision. It's up to you how you buy your electricity or natural gas.
9. **Keep a paper trail.** Keep copies of all your correspondence with electricity retailers and gas marketers, including any Disclosure Statements, Price Comparisons and contracts.



### **Bill Calculators (Residential)**

The Ontario Energy Board now offers calculators to estimate your bill or to see how your bill might look based on a contract with energy retailers. The current Global Adjustment is included in these calculations so that you are provided with the true of cost of the contract and not just the rate of the retailer. To access the Bill Calculator, please go to:

## **After Signing an Energy Contract: The Right to Review Your Decision**

This tip sheet applies to contracts that are entered into on and after January 1, 2011.

**1. You must receive a copy of the contract and acknowledge receipt of it.**

The electricity retailer or gas marketer must provide you with a text-based copy of the contract, including all terms and conditions, and you must acknowledge its receipt. Otherwise, the contract will become invalid. If you enter into a contract in person, you are considered to have acknowledged receipt of the contract when you sign it. If you enter into a contract over the internet, you are considered to have acknowledged receipt of the contract when the contract is sent to you by e-mail by the electricity retailer or gas marketer. If you enter into a contract by mail, you are considered to have acknowledged receipt of it when you mail a signed copy of the contract back to the electricity retailer or gas marketer.

**2. You have a 10-day “cooling-off” period to review your decision.**

After you acknowledge receipt of the contract, you have 10 days to cancel it. You may cancel the contract at any time during this 10-day period by contacting the company. You will not have to pay a cancellation fee and your electricity service will continue without interruption.

**3. You can also cancel an electricity contract up to 30 days after you receive your first bill under the contract.**

You will have to pay that bill, but you will not have to pay a cancellation fee. You will be switched back to your utility for your electricity supply without any interruption in service. This additional right to cancel without paying a cancellation fee does not apply to gas contracts.

o **You may need to “verify” the contract for it to remain valid.**

In most cases, after the 10-day cooling-off period but no later than 45 days after you acknowledge receipt of the contract, the electricity retailer/gas marketer will contact you by phone to confirm that you want to continue with the contract. That phone call must be recorded by the electricity retailer/gas marketer. If you ask for a copy of the recording, it must be sent to you within 10 days.

You do not have to verify the contract. If you say no, the contract will become invalid. You will not have to pay a cancellation fee and your electricity service will continue without interruption.

**4. You may have to pay a cancellation fee if you have verified a gas contract and cancel it later. If you have verified an electricity contract, you may have to pay a cancellation fee if you cancel it more than 30 days after you receive your first bill under the contract.**

The contract must contain a description of the circumstances in which the contract can be cancelled by you and the amount of any cancellation fees you may have to pay in each circumstance.

**5. Once you have verified a gas or electricity contract, you may have to pay a cancellation fee if you cancel it later.**

In most of these cases, you will not have to pay any cancellation fees or penalties. If you cancel a contract simply because you no longer wish to purchase gas or electricity from the electricity retailer/gas marketer, you may be charged a cancellation fee. The maximum cancellation fee that can be charged to most residential consumers is:

- for electricity contracts: \$50 for each year, or part year, remaining on the contract
- for gas contracts: \$100 for each year, or part year, remaining on the contract

*Much of this information is provided by the Ontario Energy Board website. For more information, including the rules that apply to contracts that are entered into before January 1, 2011, please go to:*

<http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/Consumers/Consumer+Protection/Retail+Energy+Contracts/After+Signing+an+Energy+Contract>

### **Cancelling an energy retail contract – advice for frontline staff and consumers**

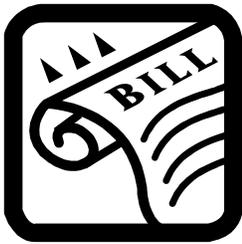
In most cases, consumers will want to cancel an energy contract when they have determined that they are paying more for their gas or electricity than if they continued to purchase the commodity from their gas or electricity distributor. Whether you are acting as an advocate for your client or you prefer to advise them on the steps required to cancel a contract with minimal negative impact, the following information should be helpful to you. If you are advocating for a client, please gain the client's consent to disclose information in hard copy and fax to the energy retailer's office.

If the consumer is a low-income earner, especially if they are in receipt of Ontario works or Ontario Disability Support Program, simply providing proof of income support program entitlement will usually be satisfactory documentation. Upon receiving such documentation, most retailers are willing to cancel the energy contract without penalty. Below are the steps that you can follow to cancel an energy retail contract:

### **Steps to Dissolve a Retailer Contract**

<b>STEP</b>	<b>ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY CONSUMER</b>
<b>1</b>	Contact the energy supplier by phone and advise them that you would like to cancel the energy contract. Advise the customer representative that you are acting for a low-income earner who is experiencing financial hardship due to the increased costs of their energy contract.
<b>2</b>	Ask customer service representative to make notes on the account and request their employee number, documenting it for future reference.
<b>3</b>	At this time, the energy retailer try to negotiate a better rate per kWh so take some time to consider their offer. If the new terms are still not desirable, proceed to the next step.
<b>4</b>	Once the retailer agrees to cancel the contract without penalty, proceed to the next step. If you do not receive verbal confirmation that the retailer agrees to cancel the contract, continue up the chain of command, requesting a supervisor, if necessary.
<b>5</b>	Follow up with a short letter that provides all of the account details plus the request to cancel the contract as well as the reasons why you want the contract cancelled, which is usually financial hardship.
<b>6</b>	Address the letter to a supervisor requesting that they confirm the receipt of your request and to inform you when the contract has been cancelled.
<b>7</b>	Be sure to enclose copies of the income support programs benefit stub as well as a copy of your utility bill that shows your account #, name, and address.
<b>8</b>	Monitor your utility bill every couple of weeks to see if the energy retailer's name comes off your bill. Alternatively call the local utility to see if the retailer has dropped you. Sometimes this process can take a little longer as a final meter reading must occur before the retailer can close the contract.
<b>9</b>	In most cases, the contract will be cancelled. If the low-income consumer is not on an income support program it might be a little more difficult to have the contract cancelled however, perseverance is key. Do not be afraid to move up the chain of command to get the contract cancelled. If necessary, call the Ontario Energy Board for assistance.

If you believe that the electricity or gas marketer violated the Ontario Energy Board's Code of Conduct, you can make a complaint to the Ontario Energy Board at 1-877-632-2727.



## CHAPTER 7: CUSTOMER SERVICE MEASURES

Since 2004, LIEN has encouraging policy makers in the energy sector to provide customer service measures tailored to low-income energy consumers that would assist them in maintaining their electricity and/or natural gas service. Among LIEN's recommendations were disconnection moratoriums, waivers of security deposits and late payment fees, and extended payment plans that offer consumers a longer time to pay arrears.

The OEB's Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) includes Customer Service Code Amendments specific to low-income electricity consumers. The Board is currently consulting stakeholders on the need to develop customer service rules for natural gas distributors similar to those developed for electricity distributors.

For ease of reference, we have separated the summary of new customer service measures for all electricity consumers from the new customer service measures for low-income consumers.

### **Summary of Customer Service Code Amendments: All Electricity Consumers**

#### **Disconnection Notices – Effective Jan 1, 2011**

All customers must receive 10 days notice before being disconnected for non-payment.

Residents, who have provided documentation from a physician that disconnection will pose a significant health risk, must receive 60 days notice before being disconnected for non-payment.

When a disconnection notice is issued in a building with multiple units, and a master meter, a copy of the notice must be posted in a conspicuous place in the building.

Disconnection notices sent to residential customers must contain prescribed information, such as the earliest and latest date disconnection may occur, the forms of payment a customer may use, that a Board-prescribed arrears management program is available, and that a disconnection may take place whether or not the customer is home at the time.

#### **Disconnection Procedures – Effective Jan 1, 2011**

Distributors must make a reasonable effort to contact the customer one final time, in person or by telephone, prior to disconnecting service at least 48 hours before the scheduled disconnection date. There is certain prescribed information that a distributor must provide, such as advising of the potential availability of an arrears program.

If a distributor has been unable to contact a customer 48 hours before a planned disconnection, they should generally make a reasonable attempt to communicate with the customer at the door (subject to consideration of the safety and security of utility field staff).

Distributors must, at a minimum, have the facilities and staff available during regular business hours so residential customers can pay overdue amounts by credit card.

When a distributor visits a customer's property to disconnect service, customers must be allowed to pay overdue amounts by credit card (and any other form of payment the distributor wishes to accept).

#### **Suspending Disconnection Action - *Effective October 1, 2010***

If, during the disconnection notice period, a registered charity, government agency or social service agency advises a distributor they are assessing whether a residential customer is eligible for bill payment assistance, the distributor must suspend disconnection action for a period of 21 days after receiving notification from the agency.

If, during the disconnection notice period, a third party who had previously been designated by the customer to receive any disconnection notices, advises a distributor they are attempting to arrange assistance to help the customer pay their bill, the distributor must suspend disconnection action for a period of 21 days.

A distributor must act on the disconnection notice within 11 days of its issuance or the lifting of a suspension. If disconnection does not occur within 11 days from the date of the notice or the lifting of the suspension, the distributor must issue a new disconnection notice and start the process once again.

#### **Security Deposits – *Effective January 1, 2011***

Residential customers can pay a required deposit, an increase in a security deposit or a replacement of a deposit applied against arrears, in equal installments over at least six months.

There must be a review of the security deposit during the year after the first anniversary of the first installment payment. \*

A residential customer's average monthly consumption over a 12-month, consecutive period in the last two years must always be used to calculate the maximum amount a distributor can collect for a security deposit.

Security deposits must be applied against any arrears and be insufficient to cover any amounts owing before a disconnection notice can be issued to a residential customer.

When a security deposit has been applied against any arrears, the customer may have to repay the security deposit, and be allowed to repay in equal installments over at least six months.

#### **Arrears Management Programs - *Effective October 1, 2010***

Utilities must make arrears management programs available to any residential customer unable to pay their electricity charges. In the case of distributors who also collect water, sewer and other charges, these amendments apply only to the electricity charges.

Any security deposit must be applied to the amounts owing before entering into an arrears payment agreement.

Customers may be required to make a down payment of up to 15% of the arrears plus any accumulated late payment charges (not including other service charges such as reconnection

charges) when entering into an arrears management agreement.

If a customer owes less than twice their average monthly bill after applying the security deposit and down payment, the minimum length of time to pay the remaining amount is five months.

If a customer owes more than twice their average monthly bill after applying the security deposit and down payment, the minimum length of time to pay the remaining amount is 10 months.

Distributors can cancel the agreement if a customer defaults on the arrears payment or current bill payment more than once.

Customers must be given 10 days written notice before an agreement can be cancelled, and the agreement must be reinstated if the customer pays in full before the cancellation date.

Customer accounts that have been disconnected due to arrears may have service restored upon agreeing to join an arrears management plan (Effective Jan 1, 2011)

#### **Use of Load Control Devices – Effective October 1, 2010**

If your electricity utility installs a load control device (either load limiter or timed load interrupter) instead of disconnecting you because you owe past due amounts, it must provide a written explanation on how the device works and how it can be re-set and an emergency telephone number you can call for assistance. It must also provide literature from the local fire marshal about the risks associated with disconnecting electricity.

If you enter into an arrears management plan, or after you've paid the full amount outstanding, the load control device must be removed.

For a detailed copy of these amendments go to:

[http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/ Documents/Press%20Releases/bckgrndr\\_dsc.pdf](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/ Documents/Press%20Releases/bckgrndr_dsc.pdf)

## Summary of Customer Service Code Amendments: Low-Income Electricity Consumers (Effective October 1, 2011)

### Eligible Low-income Customer Definition

Eligible low-income customers are residential electricity customers who have a pre-tax household income at or below Statistics Canada's most recent pre-tax Low Income Cut-Off plus 15%, taking into account family and community size and are qualified by a Social Service or Government Agency).

You must be qualified by a Social Service or Government Agency that:

1. partners with your local electricity distributor to assess eligibility for Emergency Financial Assistance; or
2. assesses eligibility for other energy financial assistance or for other low-income financial assistance programs, and partners with your local distributor to qualify customers for eligibility \*

If you have qualified for Emergency Financial Assistance under the Low-income Energy Assistance Program, you will automatically qualify for all of the low-income customer service rules under the codes.

After you've qualified as an eligible low-income electricity customer, your low-income status will remain in effect for purposes of the codes for 2 years from the date you qualified.

You must contact your utility before a special low-income customer code rule will be made available to you.

### Security Deposits

If you are an eligible low-income consumer and have previously paid your utility a security deposit, you may ask for it to be returned, after you've paid any outstanding arrears. Any remaining security deposit returned to you will be credited to your account if the amount due is less than your average monthly bill. If the amount is equal to or greater than your average monthly bill, you could request a refund by cheque.

If you are an eligible low-income customer and your utility requests a security deposit, you may request a waiver.

### Disconnection Period

You must be granted a disconnection suspension for 21 days after your electricity utility is notified by a Social Service or Government Agency that you are eligible for Emergency Financial Assistance.

### Assistance Information before Disconnection

Information provided in the written Disconnection Notice, and in the telephone call 48 hours before disconnection, must include references to the special arrears payment agreement available for eligible low-income customers. The Disconnection Notice, and telephone call 48 hours before disconnection, must also inform customers that emergency financial assistance and other programs are available for eligible low-income customers, and that more information is available from their electricity utility.

### Special Arrears Payment Agreements

A down payment of up to 10% may be requested the first time you enter into a low-income customer arrears agreement or after having successfully completed a previous such agreement.

### Repayment Time Periods

The time periods to repay arrears are extended to:

- 8 months** if the amount you owe is less than or equal to 2 times your average monthly bill;
- 12 months** if the amount you owe is more than 2 and less than or equal to 5 times your average monthly bill; or
- 16 months** if the amount you owe is more than 5 times your average monthly bill.

### Service Charges and Late Payment Charges

Service charges related to collection, disconnection, non-payment and/or load control devices are to be waived when you enter into a low-income customer arrears agreement for the first time or after you have successfully completed a previous such agreement.

Outstanding late payment charges need not be waived by your utility when you enter into an arrears agreement; however, you cannot be charged additional late payment charges after you have entered into a low-income customer arrears agreement.

### Payment Defaults

You must be allowed two payment defaults before a low-income arrears agreement can be cancelled.

The defaults must occur over at least 2 months

### Second or Further Arrears Payment

If you are an eligible low-income customer and you successfully complete an arrears payment agreement, you can request a new agreement anytime needed thereafter. However, if a new agreement is requested within 12 months of the end of the first successfully completed agreement, your utility can offer the new agreement on the same terms as those provided to other residential customers even if you are a low-income customer.

For a detailed copy of these amendments, please visit:

[http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/ Documents/Press+Releases/bckgrndr\\_lowincome.pdf](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/ Documents/Press+Releases/bckgrndr_lowincome.pdf)



## **CHAPTER 8: SMART METERS, SUITE METERING AND TIME-OF-USE RATES**

As part of the Ontario government's plan to address its energy crisis and reduce peak electricity demand, smart meters with time-of-use pricing are required to be installed for all residential electricity LDC customers in the province. As of March 31, 2011, smart meter installation was over 94% complete, with 4,640,439 meters installed, and 2,064,312 customers on time-of-use (TOU) billing.<sup>2</sup>

For the existing multi-residential rental market, the installation of smart meters in-suite is voluntary and landlords must follow new rules that came into effect as of January 1, 2010 if they wish to transfer the responsibility for paying for in-suite electricity use to sitting tenants; there are also rules that landlords must follow if they wish to have new tenants take on the cost of electricity service for their apartment. Sitting tenants do not have to consent to the landlord's request to take on the responsibility for paying directly – and separately from their monthly rent – for the electricity they use in their rental unit. If the sitting tenant does not agree, the landlord will continue to be responsible for providing, and paying for, the electricity service.

A smart meter tracks how much electricity you use and when you use it. The price charged for electricity depends on when it is used, i.e. time-of-use rates – off-peak, on-peak and peak. These prices are reviewed every May 1 and November 1 by the OEB. The OEB reviews the rates based on electricity prices over the previous six months, as well as its forecast of future prices over the next year.

In the summer, on-peak prices apply during the middle of the weekday (from 11am to 5 pm), reflecting the increase in air conditioning use. In the winter, on-peak prices apply in the morning (7 to 11am) and evening (5 to 9 pm), when demand ramps up as residential electricity use increases. During weekends and holidays, all hours of the day are off-peak.

LIEN is very concerned about the impact of smart metering and suite metering on housing affordability for low-income households who already struggle to pay for other basic necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medicine.

The majority of low-income people in Ontario are renters in the multi-residential sector. Having utilities included in rent is a fundamental and valuable term in residential rental contracts, providing tenants with some degree of certainty with respect to expected costs in order to make crucial household budget decisions.

People on social assistance, single-parent families, the elderly, visible minorities, immigrants and persons with disabilities are all over-represented in the population of low-income tenants. They are particularly vulnerable to increases in shelter and utility costs – increases which are difficult to absorb and which could put their housing in jeopardy.

LIEN has continuously questioned whether smart meters and suite metering are the most effective,

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<sup>2</sup> OEB's Monitoring Report, Smart Meter Deployment and TOU Pricing – March 2011, released May 3, 2011.

cost efficient or fair way to reduce energy use in the multi-residential rental sector on an ongoing basis, particularly in view of the split incentive between landlords and tenants. We have raised concerns about the potential erosion of housing affordability for low-income tenants who will be disproportionately affected by rising and volatile electricity costs and who have the least capacity to respond to time-of-use pricing by shifting their energy use. These households are the least likely to have washing machines, dryers or dishwashers in their home – the appliances that consumers are expected to run in off-peak periods in order to respond to price signals.

LIEN has repeatedly requested that the Ontario government thoroughly review whether suite metering can meet the energy conservation, peak demand reduction and GHG emission reduction goals expected from the multi-residential rental sector. At the same time, it should undertake neutral studies on how optimal energy use reductions in this sector can be best achieved without increasing financial burdens on tenants. Such actions are essential and prudent in order to avoid proceeding with what could prove to be a flawed energy conservation strategy.

For more information about the suite metering of electricity service in the rental sector, please visit the web site of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario at [www.acto.ca](http://www.acto.ca)



## **CHAPTER 9: WORKING LOCALLY TO END ENERGY POVERTY IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

### **As an individual**

- Walk the talk. Conserve energy and tell your friends what you do to save money. Positive attitude towards conservation is contagious!
- Become a community champion. Educate your neighbours on ways to save on their energy bills.
- Write letters to the editor. Help spread the facts and make it a priority for politicians to deal with Energy Poverty. Poverty is political. If we speak up we can affect policy.
- Attend all candidate meetings and ask what these politically ambitious people plan to do once elected.
- Talk energy and the need for energy security.
- Volunteer. Organizations dealing with poverty may not have a person dedicated to energy poverty. Maybe you can be the one!

### **As an organization**

- Network with other organizations and individuals: front line organizations such as the Salvation Army, your city, the local Department of Social Housing, people living in poverty, charity organizations and community developers, faith groups, post secondary institutions, schools and school boards, etc.
- Educate including posters, newsletters and courses at: libraries, employment centres, YMCA, OW/ODSP offices, local social housing organizations, foodbanks, notice boards/flyers, tenant associations, New Canadians-How to & Welcome Wagon, immigrant services.
- Hold meetings and work together to put an end to energy poverty in your community.
- Together you can develop an action plan and get started.
- If finances are an issue, start with education
- Workshop/info session on energy conservation-LIEN will share training information.
- Request from utility providers an incentive gift-gift card/discount for resident
- Use multi media including: internet, Facebook, Twitter, social networking sites, community TV etc.
- Newsletters; tips of the month
- Education with kids

### **As a low-income tenant**

- Get to know the organizations working on energy poverty in your area.
- Volunteer and speak up. The more people speak up the more likely politicians will listen.

- Offer your story. A newspaper story telling the reader what it really is like to live in a poorly insulated house and not have the money to pay for utilities may be the start to some real action in your community.
- Unless the community hears from you they will assume nothing is wrong.
- Educate yourself on energy conservation and then share this information with neighbours and friends

Examples of two successful tenant-led energy conservation programs run in Toronto community Housing neighbourhoods: The Brahms Energy Savings Team (BEST) program which resulted in more comfortable units and a 7% reduction in energy use, and the Walpole is Reducing Energy (WiRE) program, an effort in which 88% of participants acknowledged that the program had helped them reduce electricity use.

### **Brahms Energy Savings Team (BEST) Program**

In 2005, two apartment buildings on Brahms Avenue in North York were selected for an energy conservation program. Here, energy costs were included in the tenants' rent, which meant people were unaware of energy usage and were not necessarily motivated to save. When approached about the program, the landlord, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), committed to saving energy in hopes of reducing costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the course of the five-month program run by Public Interest and Toronto Environmental Alliance, the BEST Program had many successes, including a participation rate of over 800 tenants! Needs and challenges were identified, various tenant networks involved, and a mutually beneficial strategy was designed that would motivate tenants to conserve energy.

Introduction

Most important, the landlord got involved in making energy efficient improvements to the building, which included replacing old fridges and stoves with new energy saving models. This meant tenants were more inclined to do something, too. Through energy education activities and tenant-run events, Brahms residents discovered how simple energy saving solutions in their building created a more comfortable home while reducing the number of complaints about the building. The BEST program, along with the help of TCHC, reduced energy consumption by 7%!

### **Walpole is Reducing Energy (WiRE) Program**

In 2007, a similar program was introduced at a TCHC townhouse complex on Walpole Avenue in downtown Toronto. Tenants in this neighbourhood paid for their utilities directly and were dealing with the reality of ever-higher bills. While TCHC had made a number of recent energy efficiency improvements, energy conservation education was lacking. Tenants felt that there were no other ways to save energy in their homes. With the help of some motivated tenant leaders determined to get their neighbourhood more involved, the Walpole is Reducing Energy (WiRE) program was born. By better understanding current tenant conservation activities, the team promoted new energy reducing tips and actions to try. Neighbourhood participation in the program exceeded 70% and nearly 90% of tenants surveyed said they learned new strategies and saved money as a result of the energy education efforts – even those who were frustrated with previous energy efficiency efforts.



## CHAPTER 10: SIMPLE TIPS FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

The media can be a powerful ally in getting the word out about energy poverty. Writing a story for a community paper, submitting an opinion piece or getting interviewed on the local TV news can help raise awareness and educate the public, the media and decision makers. Some organizations proactively seek out media coverage by hosting press conferences and events; others are responsive – providing background information or interviews for media who contact them.

Whether you plan to engage the media or not, it's good to be prepared for any opportunity.

### **RESPONDING TO MEDIA CALLS**

#### **Ask your questions first**

Before you start answering their questions, here are some questions to ask reporters who contact you, and what to look for in the answer:

Are you looking for background information or is this an interview for publication?	You can be a lot more candid and give longer explanations when giving background. For an interview, you want to give short, meaningful answers.
What's your deadline?	If it's a taped interview and you'd like to prepare, this gives you a chance to collect your information and call them back. If you report to a Board, it also gives you a chance to consult if/ as needed.
What's your angle? What type of questions will you be asking?	Knowing the questions (and angle) in advance will help you prepare those short, meaningful answers. You will also have a sense of whether it's a friendly or hostile interview, and adjust your responses accordingly.
When will the story be aired/ published?	So that you can listen/ watch/ cut it out and save it.
Who else are you interviewing?	If there's a message you'd like to push, there may be other people who can support your point of view, that you could suggest as possible interviewees.

#### **Keep it simple**

Got a complicated story? Forget it. What is the one point you want to make? If Bill 142, regulation 293, section 16 fascinates you, keep it to yourself. What is the most important thing about Bill 142? Practice saying everything you want to say about the story in 30 seconds. Then go into it one clear step at a time.

Have a theme – an overarching goal statement - and sound bites to back it up. You may spend 10 or 15 minutes on the phone giving an interview, but the quote they choose may only be one sentence. Make it count!

Example:

Theme: Low income tenants have less access to conservation measures that will significantly decrease their utility costs.

Soundbites:

- When the sidewalks are icy and snow covered in winter, a frail senior is pretty much trapped in her apartment during peak hours. You can't expect her to turn off her heat to save energy!
- A single mother renting a small two-bedroom apartment uses much less electricity than a two-income family in a typical suburban house. But other than small measures like switching to CFL lightbulbs, she's not able to significantly lower her electricity use – it's not like she can buy a new refrigerator or replace her hot water tank in a rental building.

### **Stay calm**

Lots of people get nervous when speaking to the media, but don't let it fluster you. Here are some tips:

- Unless you're doing a TV interview, keep your notes in front of you and refer to them as needed.
- Listen to the interviewers questions.
- Pay attention to your tone - don't get defensive.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, don't feel like you have to make stuff up! You can suggest another source or return the conversation to what you do know.

### **Be indispensable**

Once reporters get to know you, they'll come to rely on you. Always get back to them quickly. Prepare what you want to say, and figure out what facts and documents might be helpful. If they've left you a message and haven't told you what it's about, it's fine to tell them you need to find the right information and will call them back.

If you don't have the relevant information, still call them back. Give them an alternate name and phone number (of someone you trust and who you know is in town!) so that you've still been helpful.

## **CONTACTING THE MEDIA**

### **Don't call a media conference unless you have to**

Often you will just call one reporter about a story, a reporter that you can trust and that you think will be interested in the issue. This also works well for the reporter. They can tell their editor they have an "exclusive".

### **Prepare in advance**

When you've got a hot story, you don't have time to be digging around for contact information. If you don't have a media list ask your local City Councillor or a friendly community organization. Pay attention to which reporters cover social issues. Don't forget the community papers. Inform your allies/network of the date you're going public with the issue.

### **Give them a face**

Having a real person who is prepared to tell his or her story will help illustrate the issue. Make sure that you spend time with the person to help them develop their story – they should have a theme

and sound bites just like you, and should know not to be sidetracked or drawn in to questions they don't want to answer. If the interviewer is making them uncomfortable, they should know how to refocus the interview back to the issue.

Example of an antagonistic question and controlled response:

Interviewer: Why are you on Ontario Works, anyway? You seem like an intelligent, competent person – shouldn't you be at work? Then you wouldn't be in this situation!

Real person: Everyone goes through bad patches, and my story is familiar to thousands of Ontarians who live below the poverty line. The important issue is that we're all forced to make the same hard choices – eat, pay rent, or pay the utility bills; and that's just not acceptable in our rich society.

### **Draw them a picture**

For your background document(s): comparative charts, graphs, percentage increases, etc. Line the facts up the way you want them told. Journalists are pressed for time.

### **Follow-up**

Keep track of what stories are filed. Set up people in advance to monitor. Encourage people who have read the story in the newspaper to write letters to the editor to keep the story alive longer. For the next little while, you can use copies of the articles in correspondence with groups and government, reminding them the issue is in the public eye.

### **Keeping in touch**

If the story has a long time-line, you can periodically get in touch with journalists who showed an interest in the story. A brief, non-demanding e-mail would be fine with an "FYI, know you covered this, thought I'd let you know it's been set for late May and I'll keep in touch".

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Keep it snappy**

If your organization is just about to release your annual report, as you do every year, choose one aspect of the report. The media release should *not* read "ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED" (zzzzz), but could read "DRAMATIC INCREASE IN \_\_\_\_\_ REVEALED".

### **Keep it short**

The media release should only be one page long. One main message with snappy quotes. Clear information at the bottom of the page about who to contact and their work, home and cell numbers. When you're doing your general fax around, just send the one page release. For your personal contacts/reporters who usually cover that issue, you can fax them the release *and* some background material.

### **Call them too**

Follow up by telephone after you have sent the faxes, starting with the people/outlets you'd most like to see there. If you're leaving voice mail, and the individual reporter has covered this sort of thing before, you want to make them feel they have the expertise to cover the story. "... and I thought you might be interested *vis a vis* the story you wrote last week on mutant aphids."

## **MEDIA CONFERENCE**

### **When**

Morning. (Afternoon is too close to deadline, 10-11 is best). Not Friday (Saturday's papers are written well in advance and there won't be any space). When booking your date, find out what else is happening around town so you have a better chance of being covered (competing for attention with a community organization that works on the same issues would be a pity).

### **Where**

Unless it's the second coming, it is difficult to drag the media out of their way. If you need to be at a particular site, the location should have TV journalists salivating at the backdrop. Choose a site that is accessible to most of their offices, has parking, etc. If your civic centre is a hub of activity and one of your councillors can book a room for you, that would work well.

### **The conference/event itself**

Get there early. Make sure someone at your office has all the details. Have a cell phone. Greet the journalists and try to get a card from them or have a media sign in sheet (when the stories are filed, if you like the way the reporter filed the story, you can contact them directly next time). Start promptly. Introduce all participants (best not have more than three) before the first one begins speaking. Take them through the media kit. Let it roll and keep it brief.

### **Media kits**

Your media kits should include a copy of the media release, background materials, a separate sheet listing the correct spelling, title and telephone numbers of all the participants, etc. Use differently coloured paper to differentiate which sheet is which. Make extra copies.

## **OTHER WAYS OF KEEPING IN THE PUBLIC EYE**

- Write opinion/editorial (op/ed) pieces (see sample op/ed below) for your community and mainstream newspapers. Call ahead to find out how many words it should be and stick to that amount. Don't use big words and do explain how the issue would hurt/has hurt an individual. Pepper your piece with facts, but don't make it dull. Worst case scenario? They don't publish it, and you can use it in your own newsletter.
- Call your local radio station and suggest a topic for their phone-in show.
- Don't forget internet world... e-mail lists, blogs, YouTube, Facebook.
- Write a letter to the editor, and encourage your board members and clients to do so.
- Offer yourself up as a public speaker at your local Rotary or other club – these events are often covered by mainstream and community newspapers as well, and at the very least, it'll be covered in the organization's newsletter.
- Speaking of organizations' newsletters – you can also submit brief articles or updates to organizational newsletters – this works best if you have some connection with the organization, and do try to make the connection between the issue and the organization's work.

## **Opinion Pieces**

Opinion pieces can be powerful ways of raising an issue and argument in your community. Most community newspapers accept submissions of opinion pieces. Below is a sample opinion piece. The more you can 'localize' it, the better. You might begin by referring to the specific ways people in your community are struggling with energy bills or are at risk of homelessness. You might also consider revising this piece for use during the provincial election campaign. You could begin by noting which, if any local candidates, are talking about poverty. Is addressing energy poverty part of their platforms? Here's your chance to say why it should be.

Usually, newspapers won't run pieces that are more than 750 words.

### **Sample editorial:**

*Most of us are happy to see the end of seasonal extremes in heat or cold. Many low-income people are particularly relieved because extreme temperatures force them to choose between paying higher energy bills, the rent or buying groceries.*

*Rising energy costs have an impact on all Ontarians, but low-income households are hit hardest because they have the least ability to cope with higher bills. Given that access to energy is a basic necessity and a basic right, how are we going to ensure that low-income people are protected from escalating energy costs – and that they have the tools to use energy wisely and sustainably?*

*The obvious answer that springs to mind is energy conservation. Not only does energy conservation lower energy bills, it is also critical to combating climate change, a priority for everyone in Canada.*

*While switching to energy efficient light bulbs and weather-stripping can help lower energy consumption, many of the more substantial things that can be done - like insulating and upgrading heating systems and appliances – are out of the financial reach of most low-income households. Therefore, one of the most important components of a strategy to address energy poverty is well-funded energy conservation programs available at no-cost to low-income households.*

*To be clear, what are required are not just programs that provide energy-efficient light bulbs, but programs with extended measures that will result in significant reductions in energy use. Access to energy conservation programs is the foundation of a strategy to reduce energy poverty. However, it alone is not the solution. Many low-income households are not going to be able to reduce their bills to an affordable level with conservation alone. We also need to ensure energy rates are affordable to low-income households. Because low-income households have almost no financial cushion to deal with unexpected expenses or emergencies, Ontario also needs emergency energy funds.*

*The costs of failing to address energy poverty are serious. We will see greater depths of poverty (and the associated costs), more homeless people (and the associated costs) and more pollution (and associated costs). Now is the time for action to ensure all people have access to affordable energy and the opportunity to fully participate in the province's "Culture of Conservation". Neither the environment nor low-income people can afford to wait.*



## CHAPTER 11: CONSERVATION TIPS



Conserving energy at home is an easy way to save money and help reduce your environmental footprint. It's not about changing your lifestyle – it's about doing simple things that can make a big difference. Not only can small steps be taken to lighten the "footprints" you leave behind for future generations, but these same steps will lower your utility bills!

### **Lighting**

- Take advantage of natural light as much as possible.
- Turn lights off when room is not in use.
- Replace incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent lights (CFLs), which are four times more efficient and last about eight times as long. They are more expensive to buy but will save you money in the long-term.
- Dust bulbs regularly. A clean bulb is brighter.
- Use LED holiday light strings instead of incandescent light strings.
- Consider task lighting where needed instead of lighting an entire room.
- Use lower wattage lights where you need them instead of lighting up the whole room.

### **Laundry**

- Wash laundry in cold water. This does just as good a job, keeps your colours bright, and saves lots of energy.
- Dry your clothes outside or use an indoor rack set near a sunny window that you can open during the summer. The extra humidity will make your house more comfortable in the winter.
- If you use a clothes dryer, clean the lint trap after every load, and make sure the vent isn't blocked.
- Take clothes out of the dryer and fold them while they are still warm to prevent wrinkling; your iron uses a lot of energy.
- Operate dryer with full loads.
- Time washing/drying cycles so dryer drum stays warm when changing loads.
- Select correct water level for load size when washing.

### **Cooking**

- Use a microwave or a toaster oven instead of the oven to heat up, toast or cook small amounts of food.
- Use an electric kettle for boiling water, instead of a pot on the stove.
- Turn off the stove top or oven before you're finished cooking as the retained heat will keep things cooking for several minutes.
- Use pots the same size as the element, and always use covers/lids.
- Turn on oven light and look through glass window instead of opening door to check food.

## **Dishwasher**

- Washing dishes by hand in a sink (without the water running) and rinsing them in a basin of cold water is the most energy-efficient way.
- Use cold water to rinse dishes.
- Only run dishwasher when full.
- Use dishwasher's shortest cycle.
- Air dry rather than use dishwasher's heat dry feature.

## **Taps and showerheads**

- Take short showers instead of baths. A five-minute shower uses about half as much water as a bath.
- Install a faucet aerator to save on both water and water heating costs
- Install low-flow showerheads and low-flow toilets to reduce water consumption.
- Repair or replace leaky faucets and toilets.

## **Kitchen: Fridges and Freezers**

- Try to avoid standing with the fridge door open.
- Do you really need that second older fridge?
- Vacuum coils on back and/or under fridge regularly.
- Make sure there is enough air space between fridge coils and wall.
- Don't overfill fridge - it impedes air flow causing the fridge to run more frequently.
- Keep freezer as full as possible – it works more efficiently that way.

## **Space heating and cooling**

- Install a programmable thermostat to manage the amount of energy used to heat and cool your home, especially when you are not home and at night while you are sleeping.
- In the winter, open curtains/blinds during the day to let in the sun and close them at night to keep the heat in.
- In the summer, open your windows at night to allow cooler air in, and close them and any curtains/blinds during the day to keep the sun out.
- Keep doors and windows closed when heat or air conditioning is on.
- Use fans instead of air conditioners.
- Put removable, temporary caulking on the inside of your windows that you can peel off in the spring.
- Set ceiling fans to force air down in summer and up in winter.
- Keep lamps, televisions, and other heat-producing appliances away from thermostats – they make air conditioners work overtime.
- Clear away anything blocking heating and cooling vents.
- Replace or clean furnace filters regularly.

## **Around the House**

- Use a power bar for all computers, entertainment and peripheral devices to shut down and power off all equipment when not in use.
- Reduce "standby power" (the energy used while an appliance is switched off or not performing) at home and at work. The easiest way is to unplug appliances that are not being used.

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<sup>i</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. Income Status Before Tax (4), Economic Family Structure and Presence of Children for the Economic Families; Sex, Household Living Arrangements and Age Groups for the Persons 15 Years and Over not in the Economic Families; and Sex and Age Groups for the Persons in Private Households (88) of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2000 and 2005 - 20% Sample Data (table). Topic-based tabulation. 2006 Census of Population. Statistics Canada catalogue no. 97-563-XCB2006017. Ottawa. Released May 01, 2008. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/topics/Print.cfm?PID=94192&GID=837983&D1=1&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0> (accessed May 20, 2011).

Low Income Cutoffs (LICOs) published by Statistics Canada, using pre-tax, post-transfer household income are currently the best approach for defining low income. Post-tax LICOs adjust for federal and provincial income taxes, but do not reflect regressive taxes such as EI and CPP premiums, GST, provincial sales taxes and property taxes.

The pre-tax, post-transfer LICOs vary according to family size and size of community. Persons and families living at or below these income levels are widely considered to be living in straitened circumstances. Both the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and the National Council of Welfare (NCW) have adopted the Statistics Canada pre-tax, post-transfer LICOs as poverty lines.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Survey of Household Spending 2009; Dwelling Characteristics and Household Equipment by Household Income Quintile, Ontario, 2009. Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, custom tabulation compiled for the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (January 6, 2011).

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> According to MMAH staff, based on Rent Registry data transferred to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal in 1998.

<sup>vi</sup> Sub-section 126 (1), paragraph 1, **Residential Tenancies Act, 2006** and Section 28 of O. Reg. 516/06 – General, made under **the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006**

<sup>vii</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. Household Type (11), Housing Affordability (4) and Housing Tenure and Presence of Mortgage (8) for the Private Households with Household Income Greater than Zero, in Non-farm, Non-reserve Private Dwellings of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2006 Census - 20% Sample Data (table). Topic-based tabulation. 2006 Census of Population. Statistics Canada catalogue no. 97-554-XCB2006038. Ottawa. Released May 01, 2008. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/topics/Print.cfm?PID=93622&GID=837983&D1=7&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0> (accessed May 20, 2011).

<sup>viii</sup> <sup>viii</sup> Statistics Canada. 2008. Gross Rent as a Percentage of 2005 Household Income (10), Household Type (11) and Age Groups of Primary Household Maintainer (8) for the Private Households with Household Income Greater than Zero, in Tenant-occupied Private Non-farm, Non-reserve Dwellings of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2006 Census - 20% Sample Data (table). Topic-based tabulation. 2006 Census of Population. Statistics Canada catalogue no. 97-554-XCB2006051. Ottawa. Released May 01, 2008. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/topics/Print.cfm?PID=93655&GID=837983&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0> (accessed May 20, 2011).

<sup>ix</sup> Dunphy, Noreen and Lapointe, Linda. *Where's Home: A picture of housing needs in Ontario*. A Project to raise housing awareness in Ontario, sponsored by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. March 1999. Page 9

<sup>x</sup> Statistics and Analysis Unit, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities Division, Ministry of Community and Social Services December 2010 quarterly report of OW/ODSP cases and beneficiaries by accommodation types

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>xii</sup> Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services; OW rates increased by 1% effective December, 2010, with shelter allowance for single parent with two children (one under 13 years of age; one over 13 years of age) increasing from \$6207 to \$627

<sup>xiii</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Fall 2008 Rental Market Survey Report, Ontario Highlights.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association's **2010 Report on Waiting List Statistics for Ontario**. May, 2010. Page 3.

<sup>xv</sup> CMHC Research Highlight, *2006 Census Housing Series: Issue 2 – The Geography of Core Housing Need, 2001-2006*. Socio-economic Series, 09-005. February 2009.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) considers households to be in core housing need if they do not live in and can not access acceptable housing. The term "acceptable housing" refers to housing that is affordable (i.e. costs less than 30% of before-tax household income), in adequate condition, and of suitable size. According to CMHC, housing affordability is the predominant cause of core housing need.