



The seasonal bulletin of the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)

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- **Register now for the LIEN annual conference!**

The LIEN annual conference will be held on Wednesday, March 23, 2016 at Oakham House, Ryerson University. The conference will bring together people who are at the forefront of tackling energy poverty in Ontario. Participants will discuss the work already underway in Ontario to reduce energy poverty, identify potential opportunities to improve on where we are now, and look to the future at what we can do collectively to continue to identify lasting solutions.

Topics of discussion include:

- The new Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)
- Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA)
- saveONenergy HOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM offered by electric utilities
- Low-income weatherization retrofit programs offered by gas utilities

There is no charge to attend the conference. Register now at <http://www.lowincomeenergy.ca/news-events/2016/02/register-now-for-the-2016-lien-annual-conference/>

- **Help spread the word - new program reduces electricity bills for eligible low-income consumers, but they need to apply!**

The new Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) is now accepting applications and will help make electricity more affordable for low-income families. The OESP was developed by the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and is designed to lower electricity bills through an on-bill credit. Starting January 1, 2016, eligible consumers will receive an on-bill credit of between \$30 and \$50 a month.

To qualify, applicants must receive an electricity bill and meet certain household income thresholds. Consumers are encouraged to apply online at <https://ontarioelectricitysupport.ca/> and they can also call 1-855-831-8151 for more information and to be connected with a local intake agency for application assistance. Eligible consumers can expect the credit to appear directly on their bill about six to eight weeks from the date their application is approved.

For some consumers who heat their home with electricity or rely on certain medical devices that use a lot of electricity, the program offers a higher rate of assistance. First Nations and Métis consumers may also qualify for a higher rate of assistance. First Nations electricity consumers should contact the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association (ONWAA) to confirm eligibility and to complete their applications at 1-844-885-3157.

LIEN has been advocating at the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) since 2006, and with the Ontario Energy Minister, for an energy rate affordability program as part of our comprehensive approach to reducing energy poverty in Ontario. This program helps prevent low-income households from defaulting on their electricity bill payments and falling into arrears which could lead to disconnection of their service.

- **Province bans door-to-door energy contract sales**

On June 2, 2015, *Bill 112, Strengthening Consumer Protection and Electricity System Oversight Act, 2015* was introduced in the Ontario Legislature by Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli. The Bill prohibits door-to-door sales by electricity retailers and gas marketers. Bill 112 received Royal Assent in December 2015, but the prohibition on the door-to-door sales is not expected to be in force until later in 2016. In addition to this ban, LIEN has requested the Energy Minister to direct the OEB to implement additional measures aimed at protecting vulnerable consumers from unfair electricity retailer practices, such as:

- restricting energy retailers from enrolling low-income consumers in contracts unless they can provide proof of guaranteed savings over what would be charged by the electricity distributor, and
- a mandatory exemption for low-income consumers from early termination penalty fees, and
- prohibiting the use of bonus incentives, such as gift cards and cheques, which can lure a low-income consumer to sign a contract that may be financially disadvantageous to them.

- **Improvements in gas conservation programs for low-income consumers**

Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. and Union Gas Limited's six-year natural gas conservation and energy efficiency (or Demand Side Management – DSM) plans for 2015-2020 were approved by the OEB on January 20, 2016. Through the OEB's DSM Working Group, LIEN provided input into the consultation process to develop the new DSM policy framework for the new multi-year DSM plans and also participated in OEB's hearing to approve the plans.

The OEB adopted LIEN's recommendation that the gas companies install faucet aerators directly (as opposed to leaving them behind for customer installation), and approved an annual budget increase of \$50,000 to account for the cost direct installation of faucet aerators. Providing installation services removes a potential barrier for the participant and provides greater assurance that the energy efficiency measures will deliver the expected natural gas savings.

Also notable is the Union Gas Furnace End-of-Life Upgrade program. The program allows low-income customers who would not otherwise be able to upgrade their furnace to a high efficiency model to have an opportunity to make that upgrade. Low-income homeowners receive 100% of the incremental cost (the price difference between the high efficiency equipment and the existing base case equipment) of the upgrade. However, if a landlord is upgrading a furnace for a low-income tenant, the OEB finds it appropriate for Union to pay 50% of the incremental cost, the same percentage paid for social housing buildings.

***LIEN Currents** is issued seasonally by the Low-Income Energy Network for members and others interested in solutions to energy poverty in Ontario. For more information, contact the LIEN Coordinator at [info@lowincomeenergy.ca](mailto:info@lowincomeenergy.ca) or 416-597-5855 ext. 5167 or toll-free at 1-866-245-4182 ext. 5167. You can also visit our website at [www.lowincomeenergy.ca](http://www.lowincomeenergy.ca)*

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