

Energy assistance funds for low-income consumers

Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)

The OESP is an Ontario Energy Board (OEB) program that lowers electricity bills for low-income households. The OESP provides a monthly on-bill credit to eligible customers based on household income and household size. It is an application-based program.

Customers can apply online at <https://ontarioelectricitysupport.ca/>. You need to complete the online application, print and sign the consent form, and mail it to the address provided on the website. Alternatively, a paper version of the application can be downloaded from the OESP application website or can be mailed to applicants by the OESP Contact Centre upon request. Customers unable to apply online can contact an intake agency. Designated intake agencies can be searched by region on the OESP application website.

Applications take about 6 to 8 weeks to process. Credits don't take effect until you submit all required information and your application is processed. The program is available to all low-income customers who have accounts with electric utilities, unit sub-meter providers and retail energy companies. For more information, call the OESP Contact Centre at 1-855-831-8151.

Emergency Financial Assistance (LEAP EFA)

The Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA) is a year-round emergency financial assistance program developed by the Ontario Energy Board to assist low-income energy customers who may be experiencing difficulty paying current arrears. It is a grant program intended to provide emergency relief and 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. You can get a one-time annual payment of up to \$500 in emergency assistance for your electricity bill (\$600 if your home is heated electrically) and \$500 for your natural gas bill.

The first step is to contact your electricity or natural gas provider 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 utility provider, is responsible for assessing whether you are eligible for LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance. The lead agency 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.

For more information, visit: <https://www.oeb.ca/rates-and-your-bill/help-low-income-consumers/low-income-energy-assistance-program>

Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)

Starting January 1, 2013, funding for five former homelessness-related programs, including the provincial Emergency Energy Fund (EEF), was combined into one program - the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). The purpose of the CHPI is to provide flexibility for municipalities to provide locally-based solutions that address local homelessness prevention needs. Municipal Service Managers can choose the programs and services they offer in their communities with their consolidated funding and establish their own eligibility criteria. This may include programs and services that assist households at risk of homelessness retain their housing, such as emergency assistance for the payment of utilities arrears.

Contact your local Service Manager for information about the specific programs and services available in your community through CHPI.

Northern Ontario energy credit (NOEC)

The Northern Ontario Energy Credit helps low- to moderate-income individuals 18 years of age and older and families living in Northern Ontario* with the higher energy costs they face living in the north. The credit is part of the Ontario Trillium Benefit. The amounts are adjusted for inflation each year.

You may qualify if at least one of the following conditions applies:

- rent or property tax for your principal residence was paid by or for you, or
- you lived on a reserve and home energy costs were paid by or for you, or
- you lived in a public long-term care home and an amount for accommodation was paid by or for you.

*Northern Ontario means the districts of Algoma, Cochrane, Kenora, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Rainy River, Sudbury, Thunder Bay or Timiskaming.

You apply for the credit by completing the ON-BEN form, which is part of your tax return. You may qualify for this payment even if you do not owe income tax. The deadline for filing returns is April 30 of each year. If you file late, your credit payments may be delayed.

For more information, visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/child-family-benefits/provincial-territorial-programs/northern-ontario-energy-credit-questions-answers.html>

Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit (OEPTC)

This credit helps low- to moderate-income individuals with the sales tax on energy and with property taxes. The credit is part of the Ontario Trillium Benefit. The amounts are adjusted for inflation each year.

You may qualify for the credit if you resided in Ontario and:

- rent or property tax for your principal residence was paid by or for you
- you lived in a student residence
- you lived in a long-term care home, or
- you lived on a reserve and home energy costs were paid by or for you for your principal residence on the reserve

You apply for the credit by completing the ON-BEN form, which is part of your personal income tax and benefit return (return). You may qualify for this payment even if you do not owe income tax. The deadline for filing returns is April 30 of each year. If you file late, your payments may be delayed.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/child-family-benefits/provincial-territorial-programs/ontario-energy-property-tax-credit-questions-answers.html>

Special customer service rules for low-income customers

The OEB has special rules in place to ensure low-income customers are treated fairly. These rules include waiving security deposits, a fee often charged to customers struggling with their electricity bills, allowing longer payback periods under arrears payment plans and offering a longer grace period to customers before being disconnected. For more information, contact your local utility provider.

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★ Note: This summary is not an exhaustive list. It represents LIEN's best efforts to identify available programs to assist low-income consumers and will be updated regularly.