



LIEN Currents

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

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- **LIEN calls for Systems Benefit Charge to fund low-income bill discounts**

From September 22nd – 25th, LIEN participated in the Ontario Energy Board's stakeholder conference which was convened as the Board's first step in their consultation on Energy Issues Relating to Low-Income Consumers. Over the four-day conference, LIEN had the opportunity to present our case to the Board that it has a mandate take into account the ability of low-income customers to pay when setting gas and electricity rates and terms of service.

In order to ensure affordability for low-income consumers, LIEN recommended that the OEB establish a Systems Benefit Charge to be paid by all consumers (with a defined low-income exemption). The charge would fund both a tiered discount on low-income energy consumers' bills, and low-income conservation and demand-side management programs with extensive measures to deeply reduce energy use, such as the installation of energy efficient appliances, proper attic and wall insulation, and an efficient heating system. Stakeholders at the conference heard from other jurisdictions that such ratepayer-funded programs have been successfully in place for a number of years.

LIEN asked the OEB to hold a generic proceeding on the design of the low-income rate affordability program and to consider minimum terms of service conditions to apply to low-income consumers, including the waiver of security deposits, late payment fees, and disconnection fees. LIEN also addressed issues such as the need for protections for low-income tenants when electricity service is sub-metered in multi-residential rental buildings and the need to waive the early termination fee for low-income consumers who have signed a gas or electricity retail contract without understanding the financial implications and end up paying more than they can afford.

In addition to the presentations, LIEN and other stakeholders made written submissions and are awaiting the release of a discussion paper from the OEB. This process is a significant opportunity to make progress on a comprehensive approach to tackling energy poverty in Ontario. The presentations, submissions and the Webcast of the stakeholder conference are available online at:

<http://www.oeb.gov.on.ca/OEB/Industry+Relations/OEB+Key+Initiatives/Consultation+on+Energy+Issues++Low+Income/>

- **Developing a roadmap for a national low-income energy efficiency partnership**

Time for Action: Tackling Energy Poverty in Canada Through Energy Efficiency, sponsored by Green Communities Canada, was held in Toronto from September 29th – October 1st to identify effective and innovative ways to improve energy efficiency in low-income housing, and develop a roadmap for a national low-income energy efficiency partnership. This landmark conference attracted a diverse group of more than 150 delegates from across Canada. Over three days, delegates explored: the potential for reducing energy costs and achieving other benefits (environmental, health, neighbourhood revitalization) through low-income energy efficiency programs; barriers and solutions for engaging low-income communities, social housing providers and private landlords in these programs; effective program design; and, what energy efficiency program providers, partners, and participants need to work together to become more effective. Delegates heard panel presentations and shared their own expertise in a series of small group discussions, which led to new and strengthened relationships and partnerships. The conference also featured poster sessions, which facilitated direct one-on-one discussions with program providers.

Please visit the Green Communities Canada website at www.gca.ca for information on the upcoming “roadmap” document based on delegate discussions at the conference. The roadmap will be distributed as a broad consensus statement from the conference.

- **Energy poverty on agenda at Housing Help Association of Ontario’s first conference**

On October 20 and 21, 2008, the Housing Help Association of Ontario celebrated its inaugural launch with a conference entitled "One Voice, Many Solutions to Homelessness". This innovative organization aims to strengthen and raise the profile of the homelessness prevention work being done by housing help services across the province. Particular attention was given to energy poverty at the conference because utility costs can undermine the success of tenancies in private and subsidized housing, as low-income people are forced to choose between keeping the heat on, buying food or paying the rent. LIEN was invited to participate on the workshop panel which examined the factors causing energy poverty for clients of housing help centres. The conference was a great opportunity to inform front-line workers about LIEN's strategy to address energy poverty and the progress we have made to date with our advocacy work.

- **Saving Energy - low-income tenant workshops**

LIEN organized two free regional workshops: one in Ottawa on October 9, 2008 and the other in Windsor on October 28, 2008. The workshops, which were facilitated by the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), a LIEN steering committee member, offered great networking opportunities, activities, and an inside peek at how low-income tenants can take the lead to save energy, money, and make their neighbourhoods better places to live.

If you missed the workshops and are interested in starting a tenant-led energy conservation program in your community, check out “Saving Energy: The 6-Step Guide to Tenant Action” for examples and tips based on lessons learned from real-life experiences: http://lowincomeenergy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/savingenergy_6stepguidetotenantaction_final.pdf

- **OPA’s Multi-Family Buildings Energy Efficiency Program launched**

The Ontario Power Authority’s new Multi-Family Buildings Program is offering financial incentives to building owners and property managers wishing to undertake energy efficiency improvements. This program was developed in response to the Energy Minister’s Directive to the OPA to reduce overall electricity consumption and demand by 100 MW by residents of low-income and social housing. Buildings that contain more than 6 housing units are eligible. Financial incentives cover HVAC systems, lighting, appliance replacements, building envelope, controls, water heating, motors, pumps and fans. Energy audit and resident education subsidies are also available.

For buildings inside the 416 area code, contact City of Toronto Energy Efficiency Office at 416-397-9217 for more information.

For buildings outside of the 416 area code, contact GreenSaver at 416-203-3106 ext 304 for more information.

- **LIEN website makeover**

Although the address will remain the same, www.lowincomeenergy.ca, the LIEN website will soon be given a much needed makeover and move to a different host. The new website will have user-friendly navigation, increased functionality and increased content. Please come and check out our new website at the end of November! We hope that you will enjoy the fresh new look and easier navigation through our site pages.

LIEN Currents is issued bi-monthly 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 bhanjiz@lao.on.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

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