



Make Your Voice Heard on Energy Poverty

The Ontario Government has committed to create a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario by the end of 2008, complete with specific targets and timelines.

A Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, chaired by Minister Deb Matthews, is developing the Strategy. More information is available at

www.premier.gov.on.ca/team/committee.asp?Team=15.

The Government's consultations on Poverty Reduction have begun.

- Minister Matthews is holding round-table consultations in 13 cities: Peterborough, Cobourg, Ottawa, Kingston, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Windsor, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Durham, Peel, Hamilton, and Toronto. The meetings began on Monday, May 5 and will continue until the end of June;
- MPPs are expected to hold meetings in their own ridings; and,
- People can contribute their own ideas in writing, either through the government's website at www.growingstronger.ca, or by fax or regular mail.

The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) believes that the province's poverty reduction plan and its long-term affordable housing strategy must both address energy poverty.

When you attend a consultation meeting or send in your ideas, tell the government that these changes should be made to help low-income people who are finding it increasingly difficult to afford their energy bills:

1. **Establish permanent, adequately-funded energy conservation programs for low-income consumers, with targets for the number of homes to be retrofitted annually. Such programs should be available at no cost to eligible participants and be equitably accessible province-wide.**

To achieve deep reductions in energy use, fuel-neutral programs should have a wide suite of measures (draft-proofing, insulation, heating equipment upgrades) and be tailored to distinct low-income consumer groups: homeowners, tenants in private rental housing, and tenants in social housing.

2. **Establish a permanent Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program for low-income consumers.**

Current energy bill assistance programs are ill-suited to address permanent and widespread conditions of rising energy prices and income shortfalls. Many of the assistance programs are seasonal, can only be accessed once per eligible household and funds often run out before all demands can be met. Energy poverty is expected to increase dramatically as costs increase and as tenant rents cease to include utilities.

c/o Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)
425 Adelaide St. West, 5th floor, Toronto, ON M5V 3C1
Phone: 416-597-5855 ext. 5167 1-866-245-4182 Fax: 416-597-5821

LIEN's proposal for an Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program has five major components: rate affordability, arrears management, crisis intervention, conservation and demand management, and consumer protections. It advocates that Ontario's low-income consumers should not be paying more than **6%** of their total household income on energy.

Background

Rising energy costs have an impact on all Ontarians, but low-income households are hit hardest. Reducing energy bills and energy consumption is critical to fighting energy poverty and pollution in Ontario. The Low-Income Energy Network 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.

Energy poverty affects low-income people living in all categories of housing: private rental, social housing and owner-occupied. While energy poverty primarily reflects lack of income, it is also a result of the quality of housing, i.e. lack of insulation and draft-proofing, less efficient heating equipment and other appliances. Low-income consumers are the least able to make up-front investments in energy efficiency retrofits to their homes or to pay for the replacement of energy inefficient appliances such as refrigerators.

Ontario is lagging behind other jurisdictions, like the U.S. and the U.K., in delivering energy efficiency and conservation programs that significantly reduce systemic energy poverty.