

Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)



Mission Statement:

LIEN aims to ensure universal access to adequate, affordable energy as a basic necessity, while minimizing the impacts on health and on the local and global environment of meeting the essential energy and conservation needs of all Ontarians.

LIEN promotes programs and policies which tackle the problems of energy poverty and homelessness, reduce Ontario's contribution to smog and climate change, and promote a healthy economy through the more efficient use of energy, a transition to renewable sources of energy, education and consumer protection.

Background

LIEN was formed in 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 60 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), Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), A Place Called Home (APCH), Neighbourhood Information Post (NIP), Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul and Kinna-aweya Community Legal Clinic.

We seek to raise awareness of, and propose solutions to, energy poverty through:

- Outreach to community groups to involve them in LIEN;
- Outreach to the public, e.g. through the media;
- Participating in OEB hearings and legislative processes;
- Working with policy-makers and local utilities.

Advocacy

LIEN's activities have included:

- A proposal for an **Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program** was developed for LIEN by Roger Colton, U.S. low-income energy expert, and submitted to the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) in 2006. The proposal advocates that low-income consumers should not pay more than 6% of total household income on energy bills. 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 and won. The Court ruled on May 16, 2008 that "the OEB has the jurisdiction to establish a rate affordability assistance program for low-income consumers."

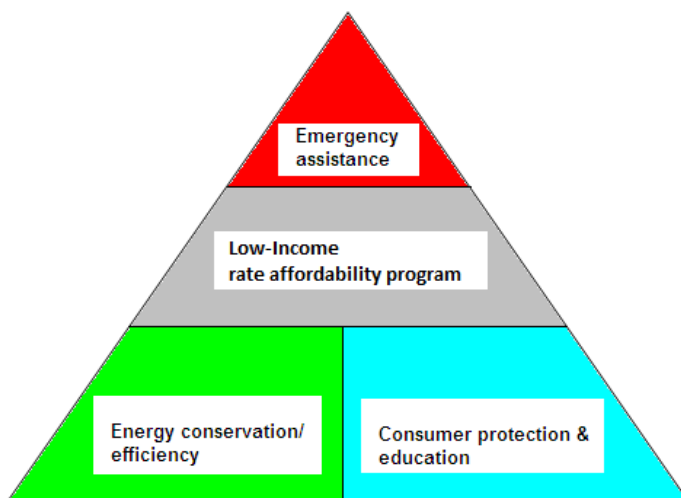
Following the Divisional Court decision, the Board initiated a consultation process on energy issues relating to low-income consumers, after which it released a report laying out the groundwork for a comprehensive assistance program for low-income energy consumers. The **Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)** proposed a number of measures, including financial assistance and customer service practices, designed to help low-income Ontarians better manage their electricity and natural gas bills. The LEAP initiatives have been rolled out in stages, starting with Emergency Financial Assistance in January 2011 and the electricity customer service rules for eligible low-income consumers in October 2011. LIEN participated in the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG) which was responsible for developing guidelines relating to the delivery of emergency funding to low-income energy consumers. LIEN continues to participate in FAWG to address ongoing delivery and implementation issues associated with the roll-out of the LEAP initiatives. LIEN participated in the OEB's Low-Income Assistance Strategy Review.

As a result of LIEN's advocacy, Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli announced the establishment of an electricity rate affordability program for low-income consumers – the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) – to be in place by January 1, 2016.

- The majority of the electricity Local Distribution Companies (LDCs) contracted with the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) to deliver the **saveONenergy HOME ASSISTANCE Program** (HAP) for low-income residential consumers from 2011 to 2014. HAP was developed in conjunction with local LDCs and in coordination with Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. and Union Gas Limited. The OPA consulted with LIEN and other stakeholders in the development of HAP. LIEN has provided input into the re-design of HAP for the six-year CDM plans for the period of 2015-2020. LIEN also participated in the development of the OEB's new Demand Side Management Framework for Natural Gas Distributors that sets out the Board's policy on all the major elements of gas utilities' DSM activities for the period of 2015-2020.
- Ongoing consultations with Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. and Union Gas Ltd. on the development and delivery of their low-income demand-side management (DSM) programs. LIEN recommended the delivery of low-income DSM programs with energy audits and the installation of extended energy saving measures – such as weatherization and replacement of energy inefficient appliances and heating equipment – that would provide the benefits of deeper reductions in energy use and costs for low-income consumers, as well as reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- LIEN has hosted nine annual conferences, the most recent on April 16, 2015 in Toronto with financial support from Legal Aid Ontario. The conference, entitled "**Closing the Gap on Energy Affordability**", involved over 50 participants representing a range of organizations from the anti-poverty, affordable housing and environmental communities, as well as representatives from local utilities, the Ministry of Energy, and the Ontario Energy Board (OEB).

LIEN's Low-Income Energy Conservation and Assistance Strategy

LIEN's strategy to addressing energy poverty 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.



- Targeted low-income energy conservation/efficiency programs, at no-cost to participants and with as extensive measures as practicable to provide deep reductions in energy use
- Conditions of service that provide for security deposit exemptions, waiver of late payment fees, affordable arrears repayment programs
- Extensive consumer education about energy conservation and the available programs to support conservation activities
- Low-income energy rate affordability program
- Adequately funded emergency energy assistance to help low-income households in crisis

For information on, and to download, LIEN publications and media releases, please visit www.lowincomeenergy.ca or contact the LIEN Coordinator at tel. (416) 597-5855 ext. 5167; fax (416) 597-5821; or by email at info@lowincomeenergy.ca

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