



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

Volume 3, No.3, Summer 2008

- **Ontario Energy Board to examine low-income energy consumer issues**

Due in part to the May 16<sup>th</sup> decision in LIEN's Divisional Court appeal that found the OEB does have jurisdiction to implement rate affordability programs for low-income residential consumers, the Board announced on July 2<sup>nd</sup> that it was starting a consultation process to examine energy issues associated with low-income consumers, such as rate assistance, arrears management, disconnection procedures, emergency assistance, service charges (i.e. late payment fees, reconnection charges), and low-income conservation and demand management programs. Despite the Divisional Court appeal decision, however, the Board still has not decided about whether or how they should exercise their jurisdiction to consider the ability to pay when setting utility rates.

The first step in the consultation is a stakeholder conference beginning September 22<sup>nd</sup>, for which a report will be prepared summarizing the types of instruments and programs used by energy regulators in other jurisdictions in addressing issues of concern to low-income consumers. LIEN will be participating in this important consultation and will focus on rate assistance as a crucial component of comprehensive provincial strategy for reducing energy consumption and costs for low-income consumers.

Information about the OEB's low-income energy consumer consultation can be found at

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

- **Fall conference to work on roadmap for national low-income energy conservation program**

From September 29 to October 1, 250 delegates from across Canada will gather in Toronto 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. ***Time for Action: Tackling Energy Poverty in Canada Through Energy Efficiency***, sponsored by Green Communities Canada, will be held at the Courtyard Marriott Toronto Downtown. *Time for Action* builds on the success of a February 2005 national symposium in Halifax, sponsored by Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. For more information and to register, please visit: <http://www.gca.ca/indexcms/index.php?news>

- **Affordable energy and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy**

The Ontario government has committed to developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy by the end of 2008. A series of government consultations were held across the province in May and June, and Ontarians were invited to submit ideas and comments either through the government's website at [www.growingstronger.ca](http://www.growingstronger.ca), or by fax or regular mail.

LIEN believes that the province's poverty reduction plan and its long-term affordable housing strategy must both address energy poverty. The LIEN submission to the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction recommended that the following changes 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; and (2) establish a permanent Ontario Home Energy Affordability Program for low-income consumers.

LIEN has also made these recommendations in meetings held with the former Energy Minister Gerry Phillips and with policy advisors to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty. LIEN has requested to meet with George Smitherman who was appointed the new Minister of Energy and Infrastructure in June 2008, and expects to meet with Deb Matthews, the Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction.

- **LIEN's annual conference highlights opportunities to end energy poverty**

The Low-Income Energy Network hosted its fourth annual conference on June 10<sup>th</sup> in Toronto. The conference, entitled ***Making Connections: Green Pathways out of Energy Poverty***, involved over 50 participants representing a range of organizations from the anti-poverty, affordable housing and environmental communities, as well as representatives from energy utilities. Participants focused on the opportunities presented by Ontario's poverty reduction and long-term affordable housing strategies, and climate change plan to address energy affordability for low-income consumers.

- **Smart sub-metering of electricity in high-rise rental buildings - lost conservation opportunities, missing tenant protections**

Many tenants in high-rise apartment buildings where landlords are installing smart sub-meters are being asked or told to pay for electricity service separately from their monthly rent without protections in place, such as:

- Specific energy conservation obligations that landlords must meet before smart meters are installed in rental units, including requirements for energy efficient appliances, and other energy conservation aspects relating to the rental unit such as heating systems and weatherization,
- Detailed, clear rules for reducing the rent fairly by an amount that accounts for the cost of electricity consumption and related costs, and
- Disclosure to prospective tenants of electricity consumption information for a rental unit before a tenancy agreement is signed.

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, a legal clinic and one of the LIEN founding steering committee members, has produced an information flyer for tenants being pressured to sign contracts with smart sub-metering companies, and want to know what their rights are. The flyer is available at the following link:

<http://www.cleonet.ca/resources/1644>

- **Guide helps low-income tenants take action to save energy and money**

LIEN is pleased to announce a great new resource called "Saving Energy: The 6-Step Guide to Tenant Action"! Offering a simple 6-step approach to get neighbourhoods organized and working towards common goals, the Guide can help kick start tenant-led energy conservation activities and more. In this Guide you will find key advice every 'Step' of the way, examples and tips based on lessons learned from real-world experiences, and a helpful 'Info & Ideas' resource section at the end.

This Guide, written by the Toronto Environmental Alliance, is part of a 3-part project in partnership with LIEN to provide resources, workshops, and program opportunities for low-income tenant neighbourhoods to work together, take action and save energy.

We hope you will benefit from this Guide and share it with others. Get your own FREE copy online by visiting <http://lowincomeenergy.ca/A55AB4/lien.nsf/All/TEAguide> OR <http://torontoenvironment.org/campaigns/climate/guide>

*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](mailto: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](http://www.lowincomeenergy.ca)

*LIEN would like to express its appreciation to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for supporting this initiative*