



**DATE:** September 22, 2014

**OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM #14-09-03**

**SUBJECT:** 2014-15 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)  
Policy, Procedures and Form Changes

**TO:** Executive Directors/LIHEAP Coordinators

**FROM:** Tom Strickler  
Director  
Bureau of Operations

**PURPOSE**

To provide County Assistance Offices (CAOs) with LIHEAP policy, procedures and form changes for the 2014-15 program year.

**BACKGROUND**

As in previous years and prior to the start of LIHEAP, staff is provided with an Operations Memorandum that provides policy, guidance, procedures and form changes that concern LIHEAP for the upcoming season.

In addition, below is a timeline for this year's LIHEAP:

- Paper application supply available to CAOs (Week of October 27, 2014);
- Pre-season COMPASS and paper applications will be accepted and the eCIS system will be open for processing (September 22, 2014);
- Cash Component (November 3, 2014 through April 3, 2015);
- Crisis Component (November 3, 2014 through April 3, 2015).
- Mailing of bar-coded applications and COMPASS Postcards to households whose members are currently active in eCIS and who received LIHEAP during the previous program year (week of September 22, 2014);
- Mailing of bar-coded applications and COMPASS Postcards to remaining households who received LIHEAP during the previous program year (week of September 29, 2014).

Once again this year, certain households will receive a postcard in the mail which enables them to apply on COMPASS for LIHEAP instead of receiving a bar-coded application. Each person that receives a postcard will have a special “COMPASS Registration Number” that, along with the social security number of the payment name, will let them apply on COMPASS before the opening of the LIHEAP season. The registration number can only be used one time. If the client starts the COMPASS application using the registration number and does not finish the application, the client will not be able to start over using the same registration number. The client will have to continue with the first application started. The following groups will receive the COMPASS postcard instead of the bar-coded application:

- Households that have applied previously for any benefit through COMPASS or that have a “My COMPASS” account and received LIHEAP during the previous program year.
  
- All households in the following counties that received LIHEAP during the previous program year:
  - Bradford
  - Columbia
  - Cumberland
  - Lancaster
  - Pike
  - Susquehanna
  - Tioga
  - Washington
  - Wayne

Households that receive bar-coded applications will also have a “COMPASS Registration Number” printed in the red box below the name and address that allows them to apply on COMPASS if they choose. These households have the option of using the bar-coded application or applying on COMPASS.

Clients are instructed on the postcard to contact the LIHEAP Helpline at 1-866-857-7095 if they have any questions completing the application. The LIHEAP Helpline will have access to the mailing lists on DocuShare for both the postcards and bar-coded applications if the client misplaces the postcard or application and does not have their “COMPASS Registration Number”.

Households who reside in one of the above-listed counties and do not wish to apply for LIHEAP on COMPASS can receive a paper application at any time and the CAO will use the households’ bar-code to register the application when it is received. CAO staff should encourage applicants who come into the CAO to use the COMPASS

kiosk available in the lobby before giving a paper application. Paper applications will be provided to these CAOs the week of September 22.

For all other households in the state, if they received the COMPASS postcard in the mail and wish to have a paper application, they must wait until November 3, 2014 to apply.

## **DISCUSSION**

LIHEAP has two main components: Cash and Crisis. Following is the specific information regarding this LIHEAP season:

### I. Issues

#### **Income Guidelines**

The income eligibility limit is set at 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (FPIGs).

Household	Limit
1	\$17,505
2	\$23,595
3	\$29,685
4	\$35,775
Each additional person	\$ 6,090

#### **Minimum Cash Benefit Amount**

The system benefit tables were revised to reflect the updated cash component benefit amounts and income eligibility limits. The minimum cash benefit is set at \$100.

#### **Maximum Cash Benefit Amount**

The maximum cash benefit amount is set at \$1,000.

### **Minimum Crisis Benefit Amount**

The minimum crisis benefit is set at \$25. Households who require less than \$25 to resolve their home-heating emergency will not be eligible to receive a crisis grant.

### **Crisis Benefit Amount**

The maximum crisis benefit amount is \$500.

### **Policy Clarifications and Alignments**

The State Plan has the following policy revisions for this year:

- The Department will no longer operate a Crisis Exception Program. Instead, the regular crisis component will begin November 3, 2014, concurrent with the LIHEAP cash season open date and end April 3, 2015. This will allow utilities to receive crisis payments before the winter moratorium begins.
- The parameters of the Heat and Eat Initiative will be revised to remain in compliance with the change in regulations in the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the Farm Bill. The amount of heating assistance issued to SNAP households who have not been approved for LIHEAP in the program year will increase in accordance with the new federal guidelines.

## **II. Cash Component**

### **Application of the Cash Grant**

A cash benefit will be applied to the main heating source. The household may have the cash grant applied to a secondary heating source only if the secondary heating source is needed to run the main heating source (e.g., electricity to run an oil furnace).

### III. Crisis Component

#### LIHEAP Crisis Policy

**CAOs may begin issuing Crisis Payments to households without heat when the LIHEAP cash component opens on November 3, 2014. A household is in a home-heating crisis if:**

- it is out of fuel;
- it will run out of fuel within 15 days;
- it has had its utility service stopped; or
- it has received a written notice that its utility service will be shut off within the next 60 days.

**To apply and be eligible for a LIHEAP Crisis, a household must:**

1. Meet the general eligibility requirements of income limit, responsibility for heating costs, Pennsylvania residency, and citizenship or lawfully admitted non-citizen status.
2. Be without heat or in imminent danger of being without heat because of a weather-related or energy-supply-shortage emergency.
3. Be eligible for a crisis benefit that, alone or combined with other resources available to the applicant household, will resolve the home-heating emergency. Any credit balance with the vendor, including but not limited to LIHEAP cash benefits, is deemed an available resource.
4. Provide proof of the home-heating emergency.

#### Application of the Crisis Grant

A household may receive more than one crisis benefit during the program year, subject to the minimum and maximum amounts allowed under the current LIHEAP State Plan. The amount of a crisis grant cannot exceed the amount necessary to resolve the crisis.

### **Weatherization Referrals**

CAOs can begin making crisis referrals for the Weatherization Assistance Program when LIHEAP opens on November 3, 2014. Please refer to Section II(H) of the [LIHEAP User Manual](#) for procedures related to weatherization referrals.

### **Off-Hour Coverage**

Federal policy mandates that the Crisis component must be available 7 days a week, 24 hours daily. For procedures related to after-hours crisis requests, please refer to Section III(G) of the [LIHEAP User Manual](#).

## **IV. Forms**

### **PWEA 1 - LIHEAP Application Form (Changes)**

The PWEA 1 was revised as follows:

- A new question was added asking the applicant to provide the name and account number of their electric company. This information is being gathered to meet new federal requirements.
- Language in the Certification section was added to inform the applicant that their signature gives the Department of Public Welfare permission to share and receive information from their energy supplier regarding their annual energy consumption or cost and billing information.

## **V. Vendors**

### **LIHEAP Compliance Unit**

The LIHEAP Compliance Unit is available to handle all issues concerning vendors and can be reached at 1-877-537-9517, Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

Vendors have the option to receive payments and/or Remittance Advices electronically. Vendors wishing to sign up for Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) must complete the PWEA 41, which is available on DocuShare. If vendors have any questions concerning EFT or wish to sign up for the Electronic Remittance Advice (RA), please instruct them to contact the LIHEAP Compliance Unit.

Payments to vendors will be made on the 13<sup>th</sup> calendar day after the close of the Voucher for a given week. Since Vouchers close on Thursday evenings, the payment dates should always fall on a Wednesday.

### **Vendor Agreement**

The PWEA 34 Vendor Agreement was revised and updated this year. There were no policy changes addressed in the updated agreement, but it was reorganized for clarity. All signed vendor agreements are returned and stored with the LIHEAP Compliance Unit.

### **NEXT STEPS**

1. Implement the policy, procedures and form instructions in this memorandum for the 2014-15 program year.
2. This Operations Memorandum will become obsolete on June 30, 2015.
3. Please direct questions to your Area Manager.