

**DATE:** September 20, 2016

**OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM #16-09-03**

**SUBJECT:** 2016-2017 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)  
Policy, Procedures and Form Changes

**TO:** Executive Directors  
LIHEAP Coordinators

**FROM:** Inez Titus  
Director  
Bureau of Operations

**PURPOSE**

To provide County Assistance Offices (CAOs) with LIHEAP policy, procedures and form changes for the 2016-2017 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:

- 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 26, 2016).
- Pre-season COMPASS and paper applications will be accepted and the eCIS system will be open for processing (September 26, 2016).
- Mailing of bar-coded applications and COMPASS postcards to remaining households who received LIHEAP during the previous program year (week of October 3, 2016).
- Paper application supply available to CAOs (week of October 17, 2016).

- Cash Component (November 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017).
- Crisis Component (November 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017).

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 beginning September 26, 2016. 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 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. A paper application can be obtained from either the LIHEAP Helpline at 1-866-857-7095 or their CAO. The household's bar-code number must be written on the application when it is provided to the applicant. This bar-code number, found on the mailing lists in DocuShare, will be used to register the completed application when it is received. CAOs in these counties will be supplied with paper applications during the week of September 26, 2016, but staff should encourage applicants who come into the CAO to use the COMPASS kiosk available in the lobby before giving a paper application. A household's COMPASS registration number can also be found on the mailing lists.

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 1, 2016 to apply.

Clients are instructed on the postcard to contact the LIHEAP Helpline 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 that receive bar-coded applications will also have a "COMPASS Registration Number" printed in the red box below the name and address. This allows them to apply on COMPASS if they choose. These households have the option of using the bar-coded application or applying on COMPASS.

## **DISCUSSION**

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

### **I. Parameters**

#### **Income Guidelines**

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

Household	Limit
1	\$17,820
2	\$24,030
3	\$30,240
4	\$36,450
5	\$42,660
6	\$48,870
7	\$55,095
Each additional person	\$6,240

**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 \$200.

**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:

- A supplemental cash benefit will be issued to vulnerable households who qualify for a LIHEAP cash grant. A vulnerable household is defined as a household containing at least one member who is elderly (age sixty or over), has a disability, or age five and under. The age of the household members is determined by their age at the time their LIHEAP cash application is processed.

Supplemental payments will be issued cumulatively, based upon the composition of the household, in the following amounts:

- \$50 if the household contains someone age sixty or over
- \$50 if the household contains an individual with a disability
- \$75 if the household contains a child age five or under

A household can only receive one of each supplement type. An individual can only be counted for one criterion. A household meeting all three criteria above can receive a maximum supplement of \$175.

- LIHEAP defines an individual with a disability as anyone receiving financial assistance for a disability or eligible for Medical Assistance through DHS due to a disability.
- Loans which can be verified with a statement from the lender or a loan document specifying the repayment plan will be excluded when determining income eligibility for LIHEAP.
- Households applying through COMPASS may receive an automated eligibility determination if the following criteria are met:
  - The applicant chooses to use the income which is verified and known to DHS from other benefits such as SNAP, MA or TANF.
  - No changes are reported to the household composition.
  - The household received LIHEAP last year and the LIHEAP payment name, address, heating type, vendor, and account number remain unchanged.

If the household is over-income, COMPASS will reject the application. If the household appears eligible, auto-CP will approve benefits, issue a notice, and create an auto-narrative.

- The CAO can waive verification of heating responsibility if the household received LIHEAP last year and the following remain unchanged:
  - LIHEAP payment name
  - address
  - heating type
  - vendor and account number
- Crisis timeframes have been updated. The CAO should provide assistance to a household that's in danger of being without heat:
  - Within 10 work days of receiving a completed application if a household's fuel supply will run out within 15 days or before the household runs out of fuel, whichever is sooner.
  - Within 10 work days of receiving a completed application if a household has received a shut-off notice or prior to the date of termination, whichever is sooner.

Households without heat must still be assisted within 48 hours or 18 hours if the situation is life-threatening.

- Applicants who live in campers and RVs may be eligible for LIHEAP if the camper or RV is permanently located in Pennsylvania. The CAO should request the following for verification:
  - Applicant's driver's license showing the physical address of the camper or RV.
  - Third-party verification that the household resides in the camper or RV and has no other permanent residence.
  - Proof the household has a heating responsibility and the household's attestation that the camper or RV is being heated in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.
- A majority of the Policy Clarifications have been removed from the OIM Homepage. Many of these have been incorporated into the LIHEAP Handbook, others have been determined obsolete. If there is question regarding a previous Policy Clarification and whether it remains a part of LIHEAP policy, please contact the LIHEAP Policy Team at [RA-LIHEAPTrainPol@pa.gov](mailto:RA-LIHEAPTrainPol@pa.gov)

## II. Cash Component

### Application of the Cash Grant

A household can only receive one cash benefit during the LIHEAP program year. The cash benefit will be applied to the main heating source. The household can choose to 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 1, 2016. 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 existing credit, including the LIHEAP Cash component that has been authorized and not yet received, is considered to be available and must be used first for the resolution of the crisis.
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 1, 2016. Please refer to Section II (K) 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**

### **Form Name Changes**

LIHEAP form names are in the process of being changed from PWEA to HSEA to reflect the Department's name change to Department of Human Services from Department of Public Welfare. The form numbers remain unchanged. At this time, the following forms have been updated:

- HSEA 1- (formerly PWEA 1) LIHEAP Application Form
- HSEA 4 – (formerly PWEA 4) Energy Assistance Affidavit
- HSEA 6- (formerly PWEA 6) LIHEAP Zero Income Statement Form
- HSEA 32- (formerly PWEA 32) LIHEAP Incomplete Notice
- HSEA 36- (formerly PWEA 36) LIHEAP Landlord Statement Form
- HSEA 40- (formerly PWEA 40) DCED/DHS Crisis Interface Referral Form



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

The HSEA 1 was revised as follows:

- Several questions have been reordered and reworded to improve coherence.
- The secondary heat source question has been reworded and moved to a sub question of the main heating source question.
- The crisis question now offers check boxes.
- A question specific to supplemental heating has been added.

## **V. Vendors**

### **LIHEAP Vendor Unit**

The LIHEAP Vendor 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. Emails can be directed to [RA-LIHEAPVendors@pa.gov](mailto:RA-LIHEAPVendors@pa.gov).

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 Vendor 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.

All signed vendor agreements are returned and stored with the LIHEAP Vendor Unit.

### **NEXT STEPS**

1. Implement the policy, procedures and form instructions in this memorandum for the 2016-2017 program year.
2. This Operations Memorandum will become obsolete on June 30, 2017.