



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201  
www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs

## Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program Information Memorandum

**IM#:** LIHEAP-IM-2021-01  
**DATE:** July 1, 2021  
**TO:** LIHEAP Grantees  
**SUBJECT:** Heat Stress Flexibilities and Resources  
**ATTACHMENT(S):** Attachment 1: CDC Chart on Heat Related Warning Signs

---

Dear Colleagues:

### Current and Future Heat Waves

[Weather reports](#) and [media alerts](#) have highlighted a record high heat wave that recently started in the Pacific Northwest. In many places, the temperatures are well over 100 degrees. What is unique about this particular situation is this extreme weather is impacting a region where many households lack air conditioning and are not able to safely cool their homes.

Moreover, with extreme weather becoming more frequent over the last 20 years, we know that there will be additional, intense heat waves, across the country, throughout the summer months. We also know that extreme heat kills more Americans than any other weather-related disaster and the threat of extreme weather is disproportionately felt by communities of color, lower-income households, and vulnerable populations, such as aging adults, as they are more likely to live in “[urban heat islands](#),” and are often unable to afford adequate air conditioning. For more information on how and why extreme weather disproportionately impacts these communities, please review the Office of Community Services’ most recent blog post on the systemic disadvantages in energy costs faced by low-income households and communities of color, titled [LIHEAP American Rescue Plan Funding: Racial and Economic Justice is Also Equity in Energy](#).

### How LIHEAP Can Help?

LIHEAP, given its block grant structure, gives each of you as grantees broad discretion and flexibility to make adjustments to your program now and throughout the rest of this summer to mitigate the risks of weather related events, including this and future heat waves. You may

adjust your policies now, and if they involve significant changes, you may submit a revised 2021 LIHEAP Plan within a reasonable amount of time after implementing the policy change(s). You do not need our prior approval. You can make changes now.

Examples of ways you can adjust your program now include, but are not limited to:

- **Reopen your program now** and/or **add a cooling assistance component** if you still have Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funding, FY 2021 funding, or American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding available.
- Adjust the benefits allowed under your cooling assistance and crisis assistance components to **allow the purchase of air conditioning units** and/or prioritizing air conditioning equipment over fans alone.
- **Loan or give air conditioning units**, especially targeting vulnerable households that will most likely be homebound or feel the temperature change the greatest, such as seniors, young kids, disabled individuals, and those on ventilators or certain medications such as for diabetes.
- **Increase crisis and/or cooling benefit payments for electric bills** to help off-set the higher demand for air conditioning. Remember that even households that have air conditioning may not have equipment that can handle such high, sustained temperatures. They may need their equipment serviced or replaced with more energy efficient and effective units.
- **Establish cooling centers**, which might include working with other public facilities such as local libraries, community centers, and government buildings to establish a waiting area where people can remain cool during the hottest periods of the day (usually 10 am-4 pm). It might also include coordinating with emergency response teams in states, tribes, territories, and localities to ensure that they are aware of cooling centers, how to refer people to LIHEAP for immediate needs, help move homebound individuals to cooling centers if needed, and other related issues.
- **Create a buddy check system** to have intake staff and/or volunteers check on homebound LIHEAP clients, such as seniors and the disabled, to check on their home cooling situation and try to get them transported to a public cooling center right away.
- **Provide targeted outreach to identify households at greatest risk**, such as those who are homebound, to ensure they are in a temperature safe environment. This may include telephone calls, home visits, public service announcements, etc. Interventions might include making sure they have working air conditioning units, set the thermostat to a temperature that is safe for their medical needs—which might involve them consulting with their nurse or doctor, helping transport them to a cooling center, etc.
- **Provide education to applicants and recipients** about how to keep their homes cool during this time, including safe use of their cooling equipment and setting indoor temperatures sufficient for the make-up of household members, especially those with seniors, young children, and disabled individuals.

### **CARES Act Funding Expiring Soon**

Remember that **September 30, 2021 is the last day you are permitted to obligate (legally commit) any LIHEAP CARES Act funding** that you may have carried forward into FY 2021. ACF awarded all of the LIHEAP CARES Act funding on May 8, 2020. There are many policy and program changes you can make on your own at any time in order to use fully those funds. For example, given the impact of heat stress, you can increase benefits to households, provide a supplemental benefit to households that received a benefit earlier in the year, reopen your program now if it has already closed for the year, and/or add a cooling assistance component, if needed. CARES Act funding, FY 2021 regular block grant funding, and/or ARP funding can all be used to meet these needs. You can contact your LIHEAP liaison in our office if you have a question about whether an action is allowable or not. **Remember, we will not be able to redistribute unused CARES funding, so we encourage you to obligate all funds by September 30, 2021.**

### **Public Health Message for Communities**

Due to the deadly combination of high heat and a lack of air conditioning, it is critically important that LIHEAP staff and partners get messages to households and the community about how to keep themselves and their families healthy and safe.

One suggested message for the public is:

*Be careful about using fans by themselves (without air conditioning) when temperatures are 95 degrees or higher—especially if it is a dry heat (not muggy)! In those situations, fans can actually cause a person to overheat faster. The fans can act similar to a convection oven that heats up quicker because of the fan. A fan is helpful in trying to reduce sweating, but some people don't sweat as easily—especially seniors. That means a fan is not as helpful for those people. The safest cooling method is air conditioning, so please use a buddy system to find and get to a public cooling center near you. You can also take cool showers and baths to help reduce body temperature. Call this national LIHEAP hotline 1-866-674-6327 if you need help paying for an air conditioning unit or paying your electric bill and you will be referred to the local office serving your area.*

Grantees can adapt the message above to include phone numbers and web links to help people obtain cooling assistance, find a local cooling shelter location, access transportation supports, etc.

Additionally, last week, we worked with ACF's emergency response team in the Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response—OHSEPR to post both information about LIHEAP and heat stress reminders. You can find these posts on OHSEPR's Facebook page and Twitter account, using the following links:

- [OHSEPR Facebook](#)
- [OHSEPR Twitter](#)

## Online Information Resources

There are several information resources we think can be helpful to you as you engage in LIHEAP funded outreach, educate clients (assurance 16 activities), negotiate with vendors to temporarily reconnect or delay disconnection, and take crisis applications. For example:

- **Organizational Action:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a guidebook to help community leaders such as yourself plan for and respond to heat stress events. The resource is called the [Excessive Heat Events Guidebook](#).
- **Client Education:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has information to help individuals and community leaders recognize the signs of heat stress, including hyperthermia when the body gets overheated. Attachment 1 of this IM has the CDC's chart of heat-related warning signs. You can distribute this to your intake offices/staff to ensure they are aware of these signs when they are meeting with or talking to applicants. They can also share the chart with applicants as needed. The link to more heat-related health information on the CDC web site can be found [here](#). The federal READY.GOV web site with more tips on extreme heat can be found [here](#).
- **Public Health Research on Fans:** See WebMD's posting on this topic [here](#). Also, a study published in the [Annals of Internal Medicine in 2019](#) suggested that the use of fans might be okay in humid conditions, but not necessarily for vulnerable people such as seniors.
- **Sample Public Messaging:** For one example of how a state has messaged the use of fans during extreme heat, [click here](#).

Here are some resources on our LIHEAP web site that provide more information on how to use LIHEAP to help with extreme heat and other weather-related needs for home energy:

- May 24, 2016 [LIHEAP Dear Colleague Letter on Extreme Heat Prevention](#)
- Standing [LIHEAP Information Memorandum/Special Topic on Disaster Relief](#)

## Take Action

Please contact the [federal LIHEAP liaisons](#) for your region with any questions.

We are counting on you to take additional steps to provide assistance to vulnerable communities during this extreme heat period and other similar heat waves that are likely to hit this summer. ]

Thank you for your attention to these matters. OCS looks forward to continuing to provide high-quality services to OCS grantees.

/s/

Dr. Lanique Howard  
Director  
Office of Community Services

/s/

Lauren Christopher  
Director, Division of Energy Assistance  
Office of Community Services