

**NATIONAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE
DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION**

2018 NATIONAL ENERGY ASSISTANCE SURVEY

Executive Summary

December 2018

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The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association (NEADA), representing the state LIHEAP directors, received funding from the National Energy & Utility Affordability Coalition to update the information about that was collected in the 2003, 2005, 2008, 2009, and 2011 National Energy Assistance (NEA) Surveys. This survey documented the need for LIHEAP, the choices that low-income households make when faced with unaffordable energy bills, and the impact of LIHEAP.

The 2018 Survey included seven states. Stratified samples of fiscal year 2018 LIHEAP recipients were chosen from each of the state LIHEAP databases. This report presents the findings from the 2018 NEA Survey and provides comparisons to the previous NEA Surveys. The survey and report were prepared for NEADA by APPRISE.

During the period of study, low-income households across the country continued to face challenges with their energy bills. While there are many anecdotal stories about households that forego basic needs and face tragedies due to a lack of electricity or heating fuel, this survey quantifies the problem. The survey showed that 26 percent of the LIHEAP recipients were unemployed at some point during the year, 82 percent had annual household income below \$20,000, and that 15 percent had their electric or gas service shut off in the past year.

LIHEAP Recipient Households

The study confirmed that LIHEAP recipient households are likely to be vulnerable to temperature extremes.

- 46 percent had a senior in the household aged 60 or older.
- 52 percent had a disabled household member.
- 36 percent had a child 18 or younger.
- 92 percent had at least one vulnerable household member.

The study also provided information on challenges that these households faced.

- 26 percent were unemployed at some point during the previous year.
- 28 percent used medical equipment that requires electricity.

Energy Costs

LIHEAP recipients reported that they faced high energy costs.

- 39 percent reported that their energy bills were more than \$2,000 in the past year.
- Pre-LIHEAP energy burden averaged 23 percent and post-LIHEAP energy burden averaged 19 percent for these households, compared to 9 percent for all households in the U.S. and three percent for non low-income households in the U.S.¹

¹ Source: 2014 LIHEAP Notebook.

LIHEAP benefits decreased due to the smaller appropriation in FY 2018. Mean heating benefits were \$307 in FY 2018, compared to \$424 in FY 2011.

Inability to Remain Safe due to High Energy Costs

Households reported that they took several actions to make ends meet.

- 37 percent closed off part of their home.
- 25 percent kept their home at a temperature that was unsafe or unhealthy.
- 30 percent used their kitchen stove or oven to provide heat.
- 48 percent of respondents who had utilities shutoff had to use candles or lanterns and seven percent of all respondents had this problem.

Inability to Pay Energy Bills

Many LIHEAP recipients were unable to pay their energy bills.

- 49 percent skipped paying or paid less than their entire home energy bill.
- 34 percent received a notice or threat to disconnect or discontinue their electricity or home heating fuel.
- 15 percent had their electric or natural gas service shut off in the past year due to nonpayment.
- 30 percent were unable to use their main source of heat in the past year because their fuel was shut off, they could not pay for fuel delivery, or their heating system was broken and they could not afford to fix it.
- 27 percent were unable to use their air conditioner in the past year because their electricity was shut off or their air conditioner was broken and they could not afford to fix it.

Housing and Financial Problems

Many LIHEAP recipients had problems paying for housing in the past five years, due at least partly to their energy bills.

- 17 percent moved in with friends or family.
- 6 percent moved into a shelter or were homeless.

In the past year, LIHEAP recipients faced financial problems.

- 13 percent needed to obtain a payday loan.

Food and Medical Insecurity

Many of the LIHEAP recipients faced significant medical and health problems in the past year, partly as a result of high energy costs.

- 36 percent went without food for at least one day.
- 41 percent went without medical or dental care.
- 31 percent did not fill a prescription or took less than the full dose of a prescribed medication in the past five years.

The Need for LIHEAP

Households reported enormous challenges despite the fact that they received LIHEAP. However, they reported that LIHEAP was extremely important.

- 54 percent of those who did not keep their home at unsafe or unhealthy temperatures said they would have done so if LIHEAP had not been available.
- 59 percent of those who did not have their electricity or home heating fuel discontinued said that they would have if it had not been for LIHEAP.

It is clear that many of these households will continue to need LIHEAP to meet their energy and other essential needs.