

# Pandemic Utilities Relief Guidance for Low-income Households

## What bill payment help is available to low-income renters?

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- Home Relief Grant
- Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
- Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP)
- EnergyShare Program (Salvation Army)
- Utility Fuel Funds

Due to COVID19, low-income renters are even more vulnerable to utilities shut-off. While many utilities suspended utilities shut-offs earlier in the year in response to COVID, most of the shut-off suspension periods have expired. Here are some resources and guidance to avoid these shut offs and better understand available services. You can also visit [the Ohio Consumers Counsel's utility assistance page](#).

## SHUT-OFF SUSPENSION INFORMATION

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**COVID19-Related Changes:** While a number of utilities initially suspended disconnections and reconnecting disconnected customers in response to COVID19, **most of the regulated utility companies have started to resume shut offs** unless the Winter Reconnect Order is invoked or the disconnect paid. Some may offer payment plans, but that is specific to each provider (regulated and unregulated)

### PROCESS OF UTILITY SHUT OFF

Residents will not automatically be enrolled in available programs, and must apply to receive the benefits available. If a resident is unable to make a payment, **they need to call their service provider directly**. Otherwise, the process for shut-off will proceed, and the energy company will:

- Send a notice in the resident's next bill
- Send a written notice of disconnection to the resident
- Visit your home to inform of the disconnection (unless you have a smart meter and are a customer of AEP or Duke)
- Disconnect service

## BEHIND ON UTILITIES?

### PAYMENT ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS:

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#### [Home Relief Grant](#)

**COVID19-Related Temporary Program:** The state of Ohio, working with local Community Action Agencies, is temporarily helping eligible Ohioans who are behind on rent, mortgage, and water and/or sewer utility bills catch up on past payments back to April 1, 2020. This additional assistance may be **available through December 2021**.

**Eligibility:** Ohio households with an annual income at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines will be eligible for assistance. Apply for assistance through your [local Community Action Agency](#).

### **Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)**

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is a federally funded program that provides eligible Ohioans assistance with their home energy bills. This one-time benefit is applied directly to the customer's utility bill or bulk fuel bill.

Two additional seasonal programs are available to qualifying individuals, both offer one-time payment assistance for utilities:

- [HEAP Winter Crisis Program](#) (Available now through March 31)
- [HEAP Summer Crisis Program](#) (Available July 1-August 31)

**Eligibility:** Ohioans with a household income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for the program. Assistance is provided on a sliding scale (e.g. households with elderly adults or children under six may receive more assistance). NOTE: Eligibility may change to include more Ohioans if additional funding is made available. [Click here to start the application process.](#)

**COVID19-Related Changes:** The HEAP Winter Crisis program typically runs from November 1 until March 31, but last year was extended to May 1. While no formal changes have been announced for this year, it is possible that the program date gets extended again this year.

### **Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP)**

The Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) helps eligible Ohioans manage their energy bills year-round. Payments are based on a percentage of household income and are consistent year-round. If your home is heated with gas, you will have a monthly payment of 6% of your household income for your natural gas bill, and 6% of your household income for your electric bill. If you heat with electric, your monthly payment is 10% of your household income. The balance of your utility bill is subsidized by the state of Ohio. There is a minimum monthly payment of \$10.00.

**Eligibility:** Household income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and have utility service from an electric or natural gas company regulated by the Public Utility Commission of Ohio are eligible for the program. *Both homeowners and renters are eligible for assistance.* [Click here to start the application process.](#)

### **EnergyShare**

EnergyShare is an energy assistance program for anyone who faces financial hardships from unemployment or family crisis. It is a heating assistance program that pays for Dominion Energy gas bills for customers in Ohio. Payments go directly to energy vendors and every cent donated goes to benefit those in need because Dominion Energy and social service agencies pay for the program's administrative expenses.



**COVID19-Related Temporary Expansion:** For the 2020-2021 Winter Heating Season applications will be accepted up until May 31st, 2021 or until funds are depleted. For those who qualify, could be eligible for up to \$800 in assistance.

**Eligibility:** Household income eligibility has been increased to include customers up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. [Contact the Salvation Army](#) for more information.

## Fuel Funds

Utility customers can receive help paying their electric or natural gas bills from their utility company. These payment programs are known as fuel funds, and they offer payment arrangements to low-income customers.

**Eligibility:** Income eligibility varies by program. View the [Consumer Fact Sheet](#) for additional information.

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## DON'T FALL FOR SCAMS OR PREDATORY RECRUITMENT; KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

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Earlier in the pandemic, energy suppliers had been banned from doing door-to-door or in-person marketing to avoid unnecessary social contact, but *have since been allowed to resume door-to-door solicitation*. However, beware that there have been reports of door-to-door solicitations from individuals dishonestly holding themselves out as energy suppliers and threatening shut-offs if they do not see the resident's energy bill.

If customers of PUCO-regulated electric and natural gas utilities desire price comparisons among competitors, they continue to have the option to enroll with a competitive supplier of their choosing. The Energy Choice website at [energychoice.ohio.gov](http://energychoice.ohio.gov) allows customers to compare offers from competitive suppliers.

If you have questions or concerns regarding your utility service, [contact PUCO](#).

[Learn more about your rights as a consumer](#), provided by the Ohio Consumers' Counsel.

## HELP US GET THE WORD OUT!

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[Order marketing materials](#) for the various energy assistance programs available to low-income households directly from the Ohio Development Service Agency to put in your organization's lobby or to send to your constituencies.