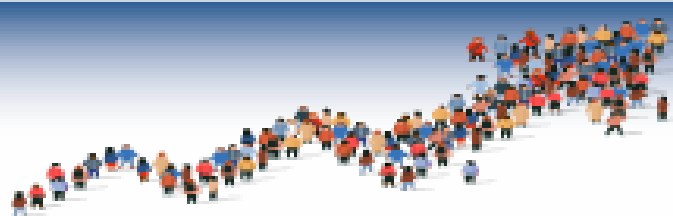


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NATIONAL ENERGY & UTILITY AFFORDABILITY COALITION



LIHEAP & COVID-19: Necessity is the Mother of Invention

Moderator: Heather Jones, APPRISE Solutions

Theresa Kullen, Colorado Department of Human Services

Jane Blank, Wisconsin Division of Energy, Housing, and Community Resources

Tracy Smetana, Minnesota Department of Commerce

Christine Taylor, Iowa Department of Human Rights

Introduction

- ❑ LIHEAP flexibility
- ❑ Adapting due to COVID-19
- ❑ Innovations made due to Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- ❑ Lessons learned can be used for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)

Adapting Due to COVID-19

What changes did you make to the operation of your program in order to navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Adapting Due to COVID-19

Colorado

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- Introduced *Telephonic Applications* with the help of our Call Center
- Revised rules to allow for reopening denied applications vs. requiring reapplication
- Accepting client declaration to verify income when an applicant lost their employment due to COVID and the employer was closed

Presenter:
Theresa Kullen (CO)

Adapting Due to COVID-19

Wisconsin

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- Expedited development and deployment of an online application portal
- Established a procedure for collecting client signatures over the phone
- Deployed a virtual training site with self-directed modules for intake workers

Presenter:
Jane Blank (WI)

Adapting Due to COVID-19

Minnesota

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- Extended our program application deadline
- Disconnect/shutoff notice no longer required for crisis assistance, crisis benefits can be used to pay overdue bills
- Increased communication with local service providers and internal staff
- Implemented virtual audits with local service providers

Presenter:
Tracy Smetana (MN)

Adapting Due to COVID-19

Iowa

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- Waived in-person visit requirements for new applicants and auto-eligible households
- Offered a 30-day look ahead of presumptive income for applicants recently laid off or with hours reduced
- Allowed a verbal declaration stating medical need for air conditioning in lieu of a written statement from a healthcare provider

Presenter:
Christine Taylor (IA)

Adapting Due to COVID-19

Summary

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- Intake and application processes were changed
- Policies including documentation, processing applications and determining eligibility were revised
- Communications were increased through virtual training, and meeting with stakeholders

Presenter:
Heather Jones

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds

How have you, or how are you planning to, adjust your program to facilitate the expenditure of the supplemental funding allocated to LIHEAP by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)?

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds

Colorado

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- CARES Funds:
 - ▣ Used to allow clients to provide a benefit to a secondary utility
 - ▣ Example - electric benefits for non-electric heat households

- ARPA Funds:
 - ▣ Used to run a concurrent arrears program in conjunction with heating program
 - ▣ Arrears program will operate using the general heating assistance application

Presenter:
Theresa Kullen (CO)

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds Wisconsin

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- CARES Funds:
 - ▣ All obligated for FY 2021 Crisis Benefits

- ARPA Funds:
 - ▣ Will be used to set up an arrears program
 - ▣ Possible Summer Fill for Propane and Fuel Oil households

Presenter:
Jane Blank (WI)

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds

Minnesota

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- No separate program component with CARES or ARPA funds
- Using ARPA funds to increase average benefit amount
 - ▣ Using total energy cost vs. heating-only costs for benefit determination
- Working with partners to implement large scale, statewide outreach efforts to reach new households
- Funding research to determine why eligible households don't apply

Presenter:
Tracy Smetana (MN)

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds Iowa

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- CARES funds:
 - Crisis Assistance
 - Assurance 16 activities

- ARPA funds:
 - Program component for paying off arrears
 - Providing larger heating benefits
 - Possibly providing new supplemental benefits

Presenter:
Christine Taylor (IA)

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds

Summary

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- CARES funding was utilized for:
 - ▣ Secondary utility payments,
 - ▣ Crisis Assistance, and
 - ▣ Assurance 16 activities

- ARPA funds are focusing on:
 - ▣ Reducing arrears that have increased during the pandemic,
 - ▣ Increasing average benefit, and
 - ▣ Outreach, including determining why income eligible household are not applying for assistance

Presenter:
Heather Jones

Preparing for LIHWAP

HHS has recently announced the creation of Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)

How will the lessons learned during COVID carry over into this new program?

How are your states preparing for the implementation of Water Assistance?

Preparing for LIHWAP Colorado

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- Water program to run concurrently with heating assistance – shared application
- Hard to contact all 871 water vendors – need to prioritize certain vendors for outreach
- Staff Education – what is the state water infrastructure and water regulations in CO?

Presenter:
Theresa Kullen (CO)

Preparing for LIHWAP Wisconsin

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- Reaching out to water vendors to establish vendor agreements/contracts

- Learning about water infrastructure

Presenter:
Jane Blank (WI)

Preparing for LIHWAP Minnesota

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- LIHWAP will be crisis-based assistance

- LIHWAP to operate as a component of LIHEAP
 - ▣ Same application
 - ▣ Centralized system for processing applications and payments

- Training water vendors to use the centralized system
 - ▣ Adapting training materials for energy vendors to materials for water vendors

Presenter:
Tracy Smetana (MN)

Preparing for LIHWAP Iowa

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- Plan to run the water program as a crisis component
- Discussing best practices and lessons learned with department currently administering the Rent and Utility Assistance Program
- Connecting with vendors and subgrantees

Presenter:
Christine Taylor (IA)

Innovating with CARES and ARPA Funds

Summary

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- Using current LIHEAP structure for LIHWAP including centralized payments, crisis and shared application process
- Vendor outreach to determine water and wastewater providers and providing initial training
- Starting vendor agreement/contract process

Presenter:
Heather Jones

Conclusion

- ❑ LIHEAP flexibility assisted in:
 - ❑ Innovations during COVID-19 while maintaining program integrity
 - ❑ How CARES and ARPA funds will be used
 - ❑ How the lessons learned that can be use with LIHWAP

Continuing the Learning

- Office of Community Services
 - LIHEAP: www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program-liheap
 - LIHWAP: www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/programs/lihwap
- LIHEAP Performance Management Website and the Data Warehouse
 - Performance Management Website: liheappm.acf.hhs.gov/
 - Data Warehouse: liheappm.acf.hhs.gov/data_warehouse/index.php?report=homepage
 - Virtual Library: liheappm.acf.hhs.gov/assessment/#nbb