



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Office of the Commissioner

November 17, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

Members, Virginia General Assembly

FROM: Kevin Erskine 

SUBJECT: Biennial Report on the Effectiveness of Low-Income Energy Assistance Programs

This report is submitted in compliance with § 63.2-805 of the Code of Virginia, which states:

5. Report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before October 1 of each year through October 1, 2007, and biennially thereafter, on the effectiveness of low-income energy assistance programs in meeting the needs of low-income Virginians. In preparing the report, the Department shall:

- a. Conduct a survey biennially in each year that the report is due to the General Assembly that shall collect information regarding the extent to which the Commonwealth's efforts in assisting low-income Virginians are adequate and are not duplicative of similar services provided by utility services providers, charitable organizations and local governments;*
- b. Obtain information on energy programs in other states; and*
- c. Obtain necessary information from the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth, as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program,*

to complete the biennial survey and to compile the required report. The Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth, as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program, shall provide the necessary information to the Department.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at (804) 726-7011.

KE/kc

Attachment

cc: The Honorable Janet V. Kelly, Secretary of Health and Human Resources



Biennial Report on the Effectiveness of Low-Income Energy Assistance Programs

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BIENNIAL REPORT ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A Report for the Virginia General Assembly

OCTOBER 1, 2025

REPORT MANDATE

This report is submitted in compliance with § 63.2-805 of the Code of Virginia. The full text of the mandate is included in Appendix A.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, the Department of Social Services (DSS) conducted its tenth biennial survey. The survey's primary purpose was to determine the extent to which the Commonwealth's efforts in assisting low-income households are adequate and not duplicative of similar services provided by utility services providers, charitable organizations, and local governments. This report contains data from the DSS Energy Assistance Program (EAP) database, as well as data compiled in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Dominion Energy (DE), and American Electric Power (AEP). DSS appreciates the contributions made to the report by all people and organizations involved.

The need for utility assistance continues to grow each year. It represents over one-third of all requests received by "211 Virginia." Many low-income households do not receive assistance in meeting these needs. According to the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) and the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), there are 922,930 LIHEAP-eligible households in Virginia; only one-third of these households apply for the EAP despite outreach efforts. For those households who do receive assistance, they are sometimes still forced to make choices about which bills they will pay each month since the assistance does not cover all of their utility costs. Utility costs continue to rise although LIHEAP funding is not increased at the same pace. Additional local programs are created each year but there is still a gap for many of these households, especially the elderly and disabled. The need for continued funding for these programs is clear.

About VDSS and Energy Assistance Programs

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) partners with local departments of social services and community organizations, to promote the well-being of children and families across the Commonwealth. We proudly serve alongside nearly 13,000 state and local human services professionals throughout the Social Services System, who ensure that thousands of Virginia's most vulnerable citizens have access to the best services and benefits available to them.

Together, we work each day to serve, empower, and create opportunities for brighter futures.

The Virginia Energy Assistance Program (EAP) assists low-income households in meeting their immediate home energy needs. The EAP consists of four components: Fuel Assistance, Crisis Assistance, Cooling Assistance and Weatherization Assistance.

DEFINITIONS

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

LIHEAP is a program that provides assistance to families in need to help address heating and cooling needs. The program prioritizes assistance for vulnerable households that contain at least one member who is age 60 or over, under the age of 6, or living with a disability.

Energy Assistance Program (EAP)

The EAP is the name that is commonly used for the program that provides LIHEAP assistance in Virginia.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Virginia Energy Assistance Program (EAP) assists low-income households in meeting their immediate home energy needs. The EAP consists of four components: Fuel Assistance, Crisis Assistance, Cooling Assistance, and Weatherization Assistance.

CONTACTS

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BIENNIAL REPORT ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SECTION 1: LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Virginia's low-income energy assistance programs (LIHEAP) are available through a myriad of public and private organizations. DSS oversees the largest heating and cooling assistance programs for low-income households through the federally funded LIHEAP block grant, sometimes supplemented by the release of LIHEAP contingency funds. Contingency funds are funds released by the President of the United States to address a specific or immediate need.

Various sources fund other energy assistance programs and provide assistance on a smaller scale. For example, funding for the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) is through multiple federal sources, while EnergyShare, Senior Care, and Neighbor-to-Neighbor are utility-funded programs. Programs operated by the Commonwealth, the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) and the WAP, provide statewide assistance.

Programs sponsored by utility companies, including Dominion Energy (DE) and American Electric Power (AEP) provide assistance in their service areas.

The following table outlines the major energy programs and includes the application period, service area, types of services offered, and the intended users of each program.

Program	Application Period	Service Area	Assistance Provided	Intended Users
EAP – Fuel Assistance	2 nd Tuesday in October to 2 nd Friday in November	Statewide	Pays for primary heating fuel delivery, past fuel	Income eligible households
EAP – Crisis	November 1 to March 15	Statewide	Averts no heat situations through heating equipment purchase/repair, and payment of security deposits	Income eligible households with an energy crisis
EAP – Crisis Primary Fuel/Utility	January 1 to March 15	Statewide	Averts no heat situations by securing a fuel delivery or maintaining heat utility	Income eligible households with an energy crisis
EAP – Cooling	June 15 to August 15	Statewide	Purchase and/or installation of a window a/c unit, fan, attic fan or whole house fan	Income eligible households with at least one vulnerable member
EAP – Weatherization	Year round	Statewide	Air infiltration measures and heating systems replacement	Income eligible households
Department of Energy (DOE) – Weatherization	Year round	Statewide	Air infiltration measures and heating system replacement	Income eligible households
Neighbor-To-Neighbor	January 1 to February 28	AEP service area	Pays towards past due AEP electric bills once EAP benefits are exhausted	AEP customers only
EnergyShare – Heating/Cooling	Year round	DE service area	Secures a fuel delivery or maintains a heating utility bill in the winter and pays electric bills in the summer	Elderly, ill, unemployed, in crisis
Senior Cool Care	May 1 to Last Working Day in October	DE service area	Provides single room fans and window or portable air conditioners	Elderly with a cooling need

MAJOR ENERGY PROGRAMS

All low-income energy assistance programs base eligibility on income and energy needs. Some programs have further eligibility criteria such as a vulnerable household member requirement. For the EAP, a vulnerable individual is defined as someone who is: 60 years of age or older, a child under the age of six, or an individual with a disability. In most programs, energy assistance benefits are paid directly to contracted providers who receive authorization to provide assistance to households in their service area.

The following is a summary of services, expenditures, and unmet needs of customers, for the public and private sector programs for state fiscal year (SFY) 2025. Data collection differs among programs as indicated by “N/A” (not applicable) in columns when data is not available.

PARTICIPANTS AND EXPENDITURES BY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SFY25

Program	Participants	Expenditures	Multiple Program Needs	Funds Needed
EAP Fuel	107,549	\$45,094,819	N/A	N/A
EAP Crisis	12,245	\$7,763,892	631	\$56,619
EAP Cooling	84,757	\$51,470,483	771	\$133,930
EAP Weatherization	981	\$14,203,910	N/A	N/A
DOE Weatherization	644	\$6,165,371	N/A	N/A
Neighbor to Neighbor	895	\$232,109	N/A	N/A
EnergyShare – Heating	9,701	\$4,097,367	N/A	N/A
EnergyShare – Cooling	3,632	\$1,069,514	N/A	N/A
Senior Cool Care	922	\$85,000	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	221,326	\$130,182,465	1,402	\$190,549

SECTION 2: PROGRAM SUMMARY REPORTS

During SFY 2025, Virginia's energy assistance programs provided \$104 million in energy subsidies to 204,551 low-income households. An analysis of the program summaries indicates that the number of households assisted during SFY 2025 has decreased slightly since SFY 2023. Administrative data collected from two of the programs (EAP – Cooling and Crisis) indicates that for 1,402 recipient households, the benefits received did not fully meet their immediate need. Even with assistance provided, low-income households were required to spend \$190,549 in additional funding to meet their immediate energy needs.

In addition to the programs summarized in this report, several pilot programs and numerous other small community and faith-based energy assistance programs operate throughout Virginia. These programs provide assistance to households in their communities, offering assistance that helps defray energy costs. For example, DE provides services to veterans and individuals with disabilities through specialized Heating and Cooling EnergyShare programs. DE served 2,736 of these households in SFY 2025 spending \$1,135,300, in addition to their regular EnergyShare programs.

SECTION 3: HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In anticipation of contributions from utilities, businesses, and private citizens, the 2002 Session of the Virginia General Assembly established the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), administered by DSS. HEAP receives annual donations from private citizens.

Beginning in January 2004, the Virginia state income tax form provided a check-off option for contributions to HEAP. In SFY 2025, donations to HEAP through the tax check-off initiative totaled \$3,537. HEAP funds are used to supplement Fuel Assistance and Crisis Assistance. To date, HEAP fund contributions, including interest, total \$341,669. Virginia will continue to promote the HEAP income tax check-off.

SECTION 4: PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND ADEQUACY

For the purposes of this report, the effectiveness of Virginia's energy assistance programs is measured by the percentage of eligible households served, the level to which services meet the needs of the households served, the extent to which energy assistance benefits actually subsidize total energy costs, and the degree to which programs are duplicative. The data used for this analysis is from program administrative data, results from a random survey of low-income EAP applicant households conducted by DSS, census data, data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services LIHEAP Notebook, and data from the National Energy Assistance (NEA) Survey Reports.

PERCENTAGE OF ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS SERVED

Data from “211 Virginia” shows the need for utility assistance was the number two reason for calls to 211, representing 34% of the total requests for the top five needs from individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The remaining top reasons for calls in SFY 2025 were housing, food/meals, community support, and legal/consumer/public safety.

Many low-income households do not receive assistance in meeting their energy needs. The programs outlined in this report provided benefits and services to 221,326 low-income households during the last fiscal year. Some of these programs assist eligible households with income up to 150% of the federally defined poverty limits. According to the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) and the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), there are 922,930 LIHEAP-eligible households in Virginia, with 362,117 of these households containing at least one individual 60 years of age or older. The energy assistance programs in the Commonwealth served 34% of potentially eligible households in SFY 2025.

PERCENTAGE OF VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS SERVED

Many LIHEAP income-eligible households do not receive assistance. For households that do receive assistance, steps have been taken to ensure those with the lowest incomes and the highest energy costs or needs are awarded the highest benefits. The two groups of low-income households identified as having the highest home energy needs are households with vulnerable individuals and households with high energy burdens. Identifying these households is in keeping with the intent of the LIHEAP federal statute. Though Virginia considers a variety of factors in the determination of benefits, priority is given to households with one or more vulnerable members. These individuals include low-income seniors, individuals with disabilities, and children under the age of six. The largest of the three DSS EAP programs, Fuel Assistance, provides a weighted benefit for households containing at least one vulnerable individual. Additionally, due to funding limitations, the second largest program, Cooling Assistance, requires that households include at least one vulnerable individual as a condition of eligibility.

Vulnerable individuals face a number of environmental factors that place them at significant risk of injury or death due to their inability to pay high residential energy costs. Although many low-income households are forced to suffer without air conditioning in the summer or heat during the winter, the effects of energy insecurity can be particularly harmful to children and seniors. Of additional concern are the choices these individuals and families are often forced to make while trying to maintain stable, safe, temperatures in their homes.

MEETING HOUSEHOLD NEED

While Virginia's energy assistance programs provide much needed support to low-income households, energy assistance benefits only cover 35% of heating costs. The DSS 2025 survey found that, among those participating in the EAP, 41% responded that the fuel benefit covered 1.0% to 25 % of their energy bill. Thirty-nine percent of the households reported that the EAP benefit covered 26% to 50% of their residential energy expenses. Eighteen percent of households indicated that the benefit met 51.0% to 75% of their needs, while 2% said it covered between 76% to and 100%.

The results of a survey on energy costs completed in October 2025 indicate that from 2023 to 2025, overall energy costs across fuel types increased by 1.5 %. Many families with low income struggled to pay their monthly energy bills, accruing large unpaid balances, and facing disconnections when moratoriums are not in place. For some Fuel Assistance recipients, the entire benefit was used to eliminate or reduce arrearages or outstanding balances owed to a vendor. These households may seek assistance from other energy assistance programs to supplement additional costs incurred for the remainder of the year.

The average household payment for Fuel Assistance in SFY 2025 was \$419. The hardships encountered when experiencing high home energy costs are even more devastating when combined with drastically lower household income. In Virginia, the annual income of approximately 45 % of recipient households is less than \$10,000. Even though the average benefit subsidy does not fully meet the needs of low-income households, studies show energy assistance programs significantly reduce the energy burden of recipient households. Energy burden is defined as the ratio of household energy expenditures to income. Energy burden is much higher for low-income households than for higher income households. According to HHS, the energy burden for low-income households is twice that of the average of all households and four times that of non-low-income households. For the purposes of the report, severe residential energy burden is defined as energy costs exceeding 11% of income. According to HHS, the net effect of LIHEAP benefits is to lower recipient home heating burdens to levels closer to the levels of the average households. This is referred to as the LIHEAP burden offset.

When evaluating the adequacy of energy assistance benefits, it is important to note that energy benefits positively affect recipient households by reducing the energy burden. With energy subsidies covering approximately 35% of most households' heating costs in SFY 2025, low-income Virginians continue to face significant challenges in meeting their immediate home energy needs while maintaining other basic necessities.

DEGREE OF DUPLICATIVE PROGRAMS

Another important component in assessing the effectiveness of energy assistance programs in the Commonwealth is the degree to which program duplication exists. In examining the major state and utility-sponsored programs, it appears that there is little duplication of services among programs. Each program offers a discrete and complementary energy assistance benefit to low-income Virginians.

The state programs funded by the LIHEAP block grant include the EAP Fuel Assistance Program, the EAP Crisis Assistance Program, the EAP Cooling Assistance Program, and the DHCD WAP. The three DSS Energy Assistance Programs provide subsidies to offset the costs of heating and cooling or to avoid an energy crisis. The Weatherization Assistance Programs serve a very different purpose by helping households make their homes more energy efficient, thus reducing future costs for energy.

An examination of the major utility-sponsored programs indicates that a duplication of services may exist between the EnergyShare Program operated by DE and the EAP. In addition to operating a heating assistance program, DE implemented a cooling assistance program in 2008 expanding EnergyShare to a year-round program. The EnergyShare Program provided subsidies to 13,333 households in the past fiscal year. Some of the households served by DE may have also received EAP assistance. However, given the benefit amounts for various programs do not cover a household's entire cost, while some households may receive assistance from multiple sources, it is unlikely their entire energy costs are covered.

The other major utility-sponsored program is Neighbor-To-Neighbor sponsored by AEP. This program served 29 localities last year and is administered by Dollar Energy Fund, Incorporated. Like EnergyShare it is possible that households served by the AEP Neighbor-To-Neighbor Program are being served by EAP; however, given the benefit levels of these programs, it is unlikely that assistance from multiple sources meets the households' total costs.

VIRGINIA'S LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

At the conclusion of each EAP component, DSS conducts a survey to assess the extent to which the Commonwealth's efforts in assisting families with low incomes in Virginia with their energy needs are adequate and not duplicative of similar services provided by utility companies, charitable organizations, and local governments. The results of the latest survey showed that the majority of households received assistance from only one source, their local department of social services, for heating and cooling needs. Utility payments and fuel deliveries were the primary types of benefits received.

Almost all households surveyed had taken one or more preventive measures to reduce heating costs, such as closing off rooms, adjusting thermostats, covering windows with plastic, and wearing/removing additional layers of clothing. Sixty-six percent of the low-income households stated they had to choose between purchasing groceries, medication, or paying heating and cooling expenses. Twenty-six percent of households reported they were not as warm as needed in the winter or that they were not as cool as needed in the summer because they could not afford to better cool their home.

SECTION 10: THE FUTURE OF LIHEAP FUNDING

Federal funding for federal fiscal year (FFY) 2024 was \$4.09 billion for the LIHEAP block grant. No emergency contingency funds or leveraging funds were provided. Virginia was awarded \$101.73 million for FFY 2024. Supplemental funds of \$100 million were provided under the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Appropriations Act; Virginia was awarded \$2.34 million.

Federal funding for FFY 2025 was \$4.09 billion for the LIHEAP block grant including various Supplemental funds of \$1.11 million. No emergency contingency funds or leveraging funds were provided. Virginia was awarded \$99.63 million total funds for FFY 2025.

Uncertainty remains over the exact timeline for FFY2026 appropriations due to organizational changes and the federal shutdown. Significant lobbying efforts by the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association and numerous utility and fuel funds are underway to ensure LIHEAP funding continues to be included in the federal fiscal appropriations bills. For 2025, \$4.02 billion has been requested by the Senate. We do not know the amount requested by the House at this time.

APPENDIX A: LEGISLATIVE MANDATE 63.2-805

§ 63.2-805 of the Code of Virginia

- s. Report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before October 1 of each year through October 1, 2007, and biennially thereafter, on the effectiveness of low-income energy assistance programs in meeting the needs of low-income Virginians. In preparing the report, the Department shall:*
 - a. Conduct a survey biennially in each year that the report is due to the General Assembly that shall collect information regarding the extent to which the Commonwealth's efforts in assisting low-income Virginians are adequate and are not duplicative of similar services provided by utility services providers, charitable organizations and local governments.*
 - b. Obtain information on energy programs in other states; and*
 - c. Obtain necessary information from the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth, as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program, to complete the biennial survey and to compile the required report. The Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Energy, and other agencies of the Commonwealth, as well as any nonstate programs that elect to participate in the Home Energy Assistance Program, shall provide the necessary information to the Department. The Department is authorized to assume responsibility for administering all or any portion of any private, voluntary low-income energy assistance program upon the application of the administrator thereof, on such terms as the Department and such administrator shall agree and in accordance with applicable law and regulations. If the Department assumes administrative responsibility for administering such a voluntary program, it is authorized to receive funds collected through such voluntary program and distribute them through the Fund.*
- D. Local departments may, to the extent that funds are available, promote interagency cooperation at the local level by providing technical assistance, data collection and service delivery.*
- E. Subject to Board regulations and to the availability of state or private funds for low-income households in need of energy assistance, the Department is authorized to:*
 - 1. Receive state and private funds for such services; and*
 - 2. Disburse funds to state agencies, and vendors of energy services, to provide energy assistance programs for low-income households.*
- F. Actions of the Department relating to the review, allocation and awarding of benefits and grants shall be exempt from the provisions of Article 3 (§ 2.2-4018 et seq.) and Article 4 (§ 2.2-4024 et seq.) of Chapter 40 of the Administrative Process Act (§ 2.2-4000 et seq.).*

G. No employee or former employee of the Department shall divulge any information acquired by him in the performance of his duties with respect to the income or assistance eligibility of any individual or household obtained in the course of administering the Home Energy Assistance Program, except in accordance with proper judicial order. The provisions of this section shall not apply to (i) acts performed or words spoken or published in the line of duty under law; (ii) inquiries and investigations to obtain information as to the implementation of this chapter by a duly constituted committee of the General Assembly, or when such inquiry or investigation is relevant to its study, provided that any such information shall be privileged; or (iii) the publication of statistics so classified as to prevent the identification of any individual or household.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON MAJOR ENERGY PROGRAMS

EAP Fuel Assistance

This aids with purchasing primary home heating fuel or paying primary home heating utility bills. Eligible households receive benefits based on individual household conditions such as primary energy type, climate zone, income, energy burden, vulnerability conditions, and household size. The average household payment was \$419 in SFY 2025.

EAP Crisis Assistance/Crisis Primary Fuel/Utility

This aids in meeting a household's immediate emergency heating needs. To be eligible for Crisis Assistance, the benefit provided must ensure the crisis is averted. Types of Crisis Assistance include one-time heat security deposit; portable space heater for temporary use; buying home heating fuel; paying a primary heat utility bill; and purchasing and installing or repairing heating equipment. The average household payment was \$634 in SFY 2025.

EAP Cooling Assistance

This provides for the purchase or repair of cooling equipment, the one-time payment of cooling utility security deposit, and the payment for electricity to operate cooling equipment. The average household payment in SFY 2025 was \$607.

EAP WAP

This applies energy efficiency measures to the housing structure to decrease home energy consumption for families with low income. After an inspection process using energy efficiency technologies and testing protocols, air sealing, insulation, heating system tune-up or replacement, and health and safe efficiency measures are completed. The DHCD administers this program with 15% of the LIHEAP block grant.

DOE WAP

This is regulated by the United States Department of Energy (DOE) and administered by DHCD. DOE WAP installs cost-effective energy efficiency measures to decrease home energy consumption. The WAP enables families with low income to decrease their energy bills permanently by making their homes more energy efficient. Funds are used to improve the energy performance of dwellings of families in need of assistance using the latest energy efficiency technologies and testing protocols available in the housing industry.

Neighbor-To-Neighbor Program

This provides assistance with payment of electric bills for AEP customers in 29 localities. The average household payment was \$259 in SFY 2025.

EnergyShare (Heating Program)

This program provides assistance with heating costs for any energy type to residents in DE's service area. For SFY 2025, the average payment was \$422.

EnergyShare (Cooling Program)

This program aids with cooling costs for electricity to residents in DE's service area. For SFY 2025, the average payment was \$294.

Senior Cool Care Program (formerly Fan Care)

This program purchases fans and air conditioners for the elderly. The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) administers this program with \$85,000 provided by DE. For SFY 2025, the average household payment was \$92.