

26.3 APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process for outside agencies consists of assisting clients in filling out applications, verifying income and other information as needed, attaching copies of heating bills to the form, and submitting the application to the local DHHR office for processing in RAPIDS. Clients who have received termination notices or indicate they are experiencing a heating emergency must be referred to their local DHHR office.

For the DHHR Worker, the above action is taken in addition to determining eligibility and the amount of payment and notifying the applicant of the action taken.

When the LIEAP applicant wishes to apply for another benefit in addition to LIEAP, the DFA-2 may be used instead of the DFA-LIEAP-1 form to prevent the need to complete two application forms. Otherwise, the DFA-LIEAP-1 must be completed for all LIEAP applicants.

In order to maintain controls for receiving, processing and completing follow-up on applications to assure that checks are issued, the local office must retain a LIEAP application register or log that indicates, at a minimum, the name of the applicant, how and when the application was received (e.g., mail, office visit or from another agency) and if the application is for Regular or Emergency LIEAP. The DFA-LIEAP-6 form may be used for this purpose.

NOTE: Supervisors or others assigned to follow up on applications should check IQPS or IQPV, as appropriate, before marking the column headed "BIRS or BIRV Completed?" Incomplete payment or voucher screens require immediate corrective action. RAPIDS Help Desk must be contacted to unschedule BIRS or BIRV screens on cases approved in error.

Completed applications received from sub-grantee agencies must be accompanied by a list showing the name and address of each applicant and the total number of applications submitted. This list must be signed and dated by an authorized employee of the sub-grantee agency. The sub-grantee must keep a copy of the list for his records.

A. APPLYING FOR BENEFITS

Although it is not mandatory, the head of household should be encouraged to apply for benefits.

Regular LIEAP applications may be mailed or delivered to the local DHHR office. Applications may also be submitted by use of inROADS on the DHHR website. Additional information may be requested by the Worker if needed for eligibility determination, but incomplete applications must be denied.

Emergency LIEAP applications require a face-to-face interview at a DHHR office, but may be taken in the home for individuals who meet certain requirements.

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Home visits are limited to those persons age 60 and over or disabled persons of any age who live alone and have no means of transportation to the local DHHR office in order to apply for Emergency LIEAP benefits.

It is permissible, but optional, for Community Services Managers (CSMs) to permit outreach workers from a senior citizen center or Community Action agency to take the application and/or DFA-67 forms to the applicant for completion and to obtain the necessary documentation to verify the emergency.

If the CSM permits employees from other agencies to take applications in the home, the employees must be trained to assist the homebound applicant to complete the application form, obtain the required verification and otherwise perform the necessary tasks required for DHHR employees to make a decision on the application.

The Department will make the final decision regarding eligibility for and the amount of Emergency LIEAP benefits. Personnel from other agencies are not permitted to make this decision or inform the applicant about his eligibility.

B. COMPLETION OF FORM DFA-LIEAP-1

The DFA-LIEAP-1 consists of four sections.

1. Section I - Identifying Information

This section collects information about the applicant and the AG and is self-explanatory. All questions must be answered.

2. Section II - Home Heating Information

The applicant circles the correct number which applies to his circumstances. Item F must be completed, regardless of whether or not the applicant's home heating supplier is a PSC-related utility or a bulk fuel supplier.

A LIEAP applicant may indicate a different primary source of home heating from that indicated on previous applications. When this occurs, the Worker must carefully review the reasons for the change. If the applicant is changing heat sources to avoid payment of a home heating bill that exceeds the amount of the Regular LIEAP payment, the LIEAP application must be denied. Otherwise, the difference may result from a change in residence, with the home heating bill at the old residence settled, or a change in the heating source at the same residence. In these situations, the change is permitted.

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Item G must be completed and a copy of the bill or a current receipt or invoice must be attached. Failure to supply this information will result in denial of the application.

NOTE: After processing the application, the Worker must record in case comments the account number, the name on the account and, if not the applicant, the relationship of this person to the applicant. Vendors cannot correctly credit an account when the name of the LIEAP recipient and the name on the account do not match.

3. Section III - Signatures And Statements Of Liability

Items A through G must be completed. If the applicant marks No on any item, the Worker must resolve any confusion or misunderstanding. If the applicant continues to answer No to any item, he should be informed that his benefits may be delayed or possibly denied.

The applicant must sign and date the application. If someone else assisted the applicant, that person must also sign and date the form.

4. Section IV - For Other Agency And DHHR Use Only

This section is provided for the use of the DHHR Worker and, if appropriate, the Worker from another agency. If the application was received by another agency or by mail, the appropriate space must be marked.

When the application is received by the Department directly from the applicant (via mail or office visit), the Worker must complete all items, A through G.

Items F and G are intended for completion after the application is processed in RAPIDS.

When the application is received initially by another agency, items A and B must be answered and the other agency Worker must enter his signature, title and the date before sending the form to DHHR.

In receiving applications for Regular LIEAP benefits, Workers from other agencies must observe the following guidelines:

- All questions on the application form must be answered, and all program policy must be followed.
- The application must be signed and dated by the applicant and the Worker.

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NOTE: If the application is not signed by both parties, it must be returned to the other agency for completion.

- If verification is required, the instructions outlined in item C below must be followed. A copy of the heating bill must be attached to the application.
- Applicants must be allowed no more than 10 working days to submit verification.
- Applications ready for processing by the local DHHR office must be sent to that office on a daily basis with a signed and dated word-processed or typewritten list with the name and address of each applicant.
- Applications held in excess of 30 days by any outside agency are not accepted.
- Applicants must be informed that DHHR staff will determine eligibility, provide written notification of the decision, and make payment to or on behalf of eligible AGs.

C. VERIFICATION

Verification is the process of documenting statements and information provided by the applicant. Although specific guidelines for verifying certain eligibility criteria are indicated below, the Worker may request verification of any information provided by the applicant in determining eligibility for LIEAP benefits.

The responsibility of the applicant in the eligibility determination process includes the effort to obtain required verifications. However, if the applicant is unsuccessful in his attempt to obtain the verification or if he has physical or mental impairments which limit his ability to perform this responsibility and he has no family members or other persons who will help him, the Worker will obtain the verification.

The Worker must decide when and what information must be verified or when additional information must be obtained, particularly when information provided by the applicant is questionable or more information is needed to complete the eligibility determination or payment process.

Failure or refusal on the part of the applicant to obtain verification when required or requested by the Worker as outlined in the instructions below will result in a denial of the application.

1. Income

Income from all sources for the AG must be verified when the applicant indicates a source of earned income for any AG member.

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EXAMPLE: The application form indicates SSI as the source of income for one AG member and employment for another. The applicant must verify the amount of employment and the SSI income.

Documentation may include pay check stubs, award letters, written statements from employers, etc.

Although documentation should include earnings from the month of application, the Worker may use pay check stubs and other documents showing earnings during the month prior to the month of application, provided the applicant indicates no change is expected. No verification from an earlier period is used.

When the applicant reports the AG has zero income during the month of application, he must verify how living expenses of the AG, defined as food, clothing, shelter, light, heat and incidentals, have been paid or how the AG members have managed without income for 30 days prior to the date of application. Form DFA-LIEAP-4, Zero Income Heating Cost Verification Form, must be completed by the applicant.

NOTE: The income verification policy referred to above is not required if current information in an open WV WORKS, Medicaid, SNAP or other DHHR case can substantiate the amount of income submitted by the applicant on the application form. For LIEAP purposes only, current is defined as verified within the 2 calendar months prior to the month of application.

When the LIEAP applicant does not report zero income or income from employment, the decision to request verification is made at the Worker's discretion.

2. Vulnerability

Verification of vulnerability for applicants that have home heating vendors regulated by the Public Service Commission (PSC) is satisfied when the customer account number is entered on the application form and verified by the attached bill, provided the account is active.

This account number must be entered on the application unless the applicant can demonstrate that other circumstances exist (i.e., home heating costs are paid to the landlord).

EXCEPTION: Verification of vulnerability is mandatory for all zero income applicants. Failure to provide this verification will result in the denial of the LIEAP application.

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Bulk fuel users must submit a signed and dated bill from the bulk fuel vendor which indicates that a delivery was or will be made. When such verification cannot be provided, the applicant must submit the name, address or telephone number of a vendor who can verify that fuel deliveries have been made in the past or will be made for the current winter season.

The Worker must obtain written verification of all other arrangements not referred to above. Statements must be dated and signed.

Otherwise, the decision to verify vulnerability is at the Worker's discretion. In some instances it will be necessary for the LIEAP Supervisor or Worker to contact managers of public housing authorities in their areas to determine if the tenants are vulnerable or invulnerable to the cost of home heating. A screening procedure must be established with the Housing Authority to verify whether or not certain applicants live in public housing. The managers should be informed that the applicant signs a release (item C in section III of the application) that protects them from violating confidentiality.

3. Social Security Number (SSN)

Verification of SSNs is at the discretion of the Worker. When an applicant indicates he has no SSN, the Worker must refer that person to the Social Security Administration to apply for a number.

4. Emergency Home Heating Need

An emergency home heating need must be verified with a written notice of termination from a PSC-regulated utility. When the home heating provider is a bulk fuel distributor, verification must be a written statement certifying that no future deliveries will be made without assurance of payment. If the bulk fuel provider refuses to provide such verification, the Worker may contact the provider by phone and note the results of the conversation in the recording block of the application and/or in case comments.

In situations involving bulk fuel users, the Worker may question whether the AG is actually or nearly without fuel. Since there is no written notice of service termination, the Worker may need to check with the vendor to determine when the last delivery or purchase was made. The only other method of resolving this question is to make an on-site inspection of the fuel supply. Such action is permissible at the discretion of the CSM or the person acting on his behalf. Prior to taking such action, the applicant's written permission must be obtained and placed in the case record. It is appropriate at this point to remind the applicant that fraudulent claims could result in loss of future LIEAP benefits.

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When home energy costs are included in the rent or some other special arrangement exists between the tenant and landlord, a written eviction notice that has been dated and signed by the landlord is sufficient.

5. Age Of The Head Of The Household

Verification of the age of the head of the household is also at the Worker's discretion. This information is used solely for statistical purposes and has no bearing on eligibility.

6. Customer Account Number

The applicant is required to submit a heating service bill in order to verify the customer account number. Failure to supply this bill or to otherwise provide this information will result in denial of the LIEAP application.

7. Home Heating Payments In Shared Situations

Customers who indicate they share a utility meter or bulk fuel tank with another AG in a separate dwelling may qualify for Regular LIEAP.

When an Emergency LIEAP applicant indicates he shares either a utility meter or bulk fuel tank, the Worker must have his Supervisor contact the LIEAP Coordinator at the Division of Family Assistance for guidance. In most cases, eliminating the emergency for one will eliminate it for the others sharing the meter or tank, but special circumstances may apply.

D. DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

1. Regular LIEAP Benefits

When the applicant has met all eligibility requirements outlined in Section 26.2,B, and has complied with the verification instructions in item C above, the applicant may be found eligible for Regular LIEAP benefits.

Regular LIEAP payments are intended for the primary source of home heating only. In a heating emergency, however, the payment may be applied to an old bill or to a reconnect and/or deposit to reinstate service, provided the client is guaranteed 30 days of service.

The Worker or Supervisor must contact the State LIEAP Coordinator for approval of Regular LIEAP for any other purpose.

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2. Emergency LIEAP Benefits

When the applicant meets all eligibility requirements outlined in Section 26.2,B, and has complied with the verification instructions in item C above, the applicant may be found eligible for Emergency LIEAP benefits.

Emergency LIEAP payments are intended for the primary source of home heating, as well as for back bills, reconnect charges and/or deposits required to reinstate service, and extra delivery charges, as needed to provide or reinstate service.

NOTE: When a client files a complaint and is granted a temporary suspension of a termination, as a result of a PSC complaint, it does not affect eligibility for Emergency LIEAP and must not be used as a reason to deny an application.

3. Alternate Use Of LIEAP Benefits

With the approval of the State LIEAP Coordinator, an emergency Regular LIEAP or Emergency LIEAP payment may be approved for electricity when termination of this utility will result in a total inability to use the primary source of heat. For example, a gas furnace may not have a manual override to permit its use when electricity is not available.

NOTE: In order to be eligible for an alternate LIEAP payment, the AG must first be vulnerable to the cost of home heating.

EXAMPLE: The applicant reports that his main source of heat is gas but it is free because it is included in their rent. The LIEAP application is made for electric because the gas furnace does not have a manual override. This AG is not eligible for LIEAP because they are not vulnerable.

NOTE: The Worker must make every attempt to verify the AG will be without home heating if the alternate source of heat is terminated.

In addition, Emergency LIEAP payments may be authorized to cover the cost of furnace repair or propane tank replacement when the client reports that there is no acceptable alternate heat source or that space heaters are the only alternate source of home heating and alternate housing is not available.

E. DETERMINING THE AMOUNT OF PAYMENT

After the applicant is determined eligible for LIEAP benefits, the Worker must determine the amount of the LIEAP payment.

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1. Maximum Allowable Payment

The maximum allowable payment of a combined Regular and Emergency LIEAP benefit cannot exceed the maximum per AG established for each program year.

2. Regular LIEAP Payment

The chart in Appendix A shows the base amount of the Regular LIEAP benefit. Regular LIEAP benefits are automatically determined by RAPIDS based upon the income, the number of persons in the AG, and the type of energy used for home heating.

Percentage increments for certain types of energy are applied to the base amount to arrive at the amount of increment for each type of energy. The base amount plus the incremental amount represents the Regular LIEAP benefit. These percentage increments can now be found on the DFA Intranet web site as the FSPU-20 desk guide at <http://intranet.wvdhhr.org/ofs/DeskGuides.htm>.

NOTE: Emergency LIEAP payments are not affected by the percentage increments.

3. Emergency LIEAP Payment

Emergency LIEAP payments cannot exceed the maximum allowable payment for the program year. To determine if a payment can be made, the Worker must compare the amount available to the applicant and the amount needed to eliminate the emergency, as shown in the following examples.

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NOTE: These examples are based on the maximum allowable payment of \$500. The maximum allowable payment is subject to change each program year.

EXAMPLE 1: A client receives a Regular LIEAP payment of \$126 in January. In March, he applies for Emergency LIEAP. The amount required to eliminate the emergency is \$100, and the maximum allowable amount for the AG is \$500.

$\$500 - \$126 = \$374$ (amount available to the AG)

\$100 (the amount of the emergency) is less than \$374.

\$100 is the amount of the Emergency LIEAP payment.

EXAMPLE 2: Same as above except the amount required to eliminate the emergency is \$374.

$\$500 - \$126 = \$374$.

\$374 is equal to the remainder.

\$374 is the amount of the Emergency LIEAP payment.

EXAMPLE 3: Same as above except the amount required to eliminate the emergency is \$550.

$\$500 - \$126 = \$374$.

\$550 is greater than \$374.

$\$550 - \$374 = \$176$. (Client Obligation)

The amount of the Emergency LIEAP payment is \$374, provided the client can pay the \$176 or otherwise obtain that amount from other agencies.

NOTE: A Regular LIEAP payment issued to and correctly credited to the applicant's account is never subtracted from the amount required to eliminate the emergency. Regular LIEAP payments issued to the wrong vendor are likewise not subtracted from the amount of the emergency. If it is determined that the vendor has received the payment but has not yet credited it to the AG's account, the Worker must first try to correct the problem. The vendor must then inform the Worker of the adjusted amount of the emergency.

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When the amount required to eliminate the emergency exceeds the amount of the Emergency LIEAP payment, the application for Emergency LIEAP benefits is denied if the emergency is not eliminated. The applicant must find other resources or negotiate with the home heating supplier to accept the Emergency LIEAP benefit.

F. CLIENT NOTIFICATION

Applicants must be notified of the eligibility decision within 30 days of the date of application. Notification is accomplished by computer-generated letter.

1. Pending Regular LIEAP Applications

Regular LIEAP applicants must be allowed 15 calendar days to respond to requests from the Worker for additional information. Failure to respond results in denial of the application. The Worker must notify the client of the eligibility decision within 30 days of the date of application.

2. Pending Emergency LIEAP Applications

If verification and/or additional information is needed in order to make a decision on an Emergency LIEAP application, the appropriate request form must be completed and given to the applicant at the time of the intake interview. The applicant must be given 5 working days to return the requested information. The applicant must be notified of the eligibility decision as soon as possible but no later than 30 days from the date of application.

NOTE: Copies of all correspondence not completed in RAPIDS must be placed in the case record.