

Working to End Energy Poverty in Ontario



LOBBY TOOL KIT

Produced by the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)



Heat, Eat or Pay the Rent?

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This lobby kit has been compiled with the assistance of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), Share The Warmth (STW), Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC).

All materials can be downloaded from the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) website. Please feel free to photocopy and distribute.

Please contact LIEN if you have any questions about these materials, or require additional information.

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This lobby kit

There has been some response to reducing energy poverty and removing the barriers to energy conservation faced by low-income people. However, Ontario does not have a long-term, comprehensive strategy in place to ensure low-income people have affordable access to:

- the energy they need to have a decent standard of living, and
- the tools and measures they need to conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

This lobby kit offers an introduction to the problem of energy poverty and some simple templates which you can use locally in your advocacy work with politicians and your community.

To help you in your lobbying efforts, the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) has designed a Lobby Kit. Inside the kit you will find:

- a backgrounder on energy poverty that outlines the problem
- a fact sheet on energy poverty with some startling statistics
- tips for lobbying your MPP, including a sample letter which could be easily revised and sent to candidates in the next provincial election
- tips for dealing with your local media, including a sample opinion piece that can be tailored
- a one-pager to help you advocate in the provincial election for commitments from political parties to address energy poverty

ABOUT LIEN

The Low-Income Energy Network was formed in 2004 by anti-poverty, affordable housing and environmental groups in response to the impact of rising energy prices on low-income Ontarians.

We seek to raise awareness of energy poverty and propose solutions by:

- i) working with decision-makers at the various levels of government, as well as at the Ontario Energy Board, the Ontario Power Authority and with the utilities sector,
- ii) outreach to community groups to develop policies and programs, and
- iii) conducting public education.

LIEN is directed by a Steering Committee made up of representatives from Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC), Share The Warmth (STW), Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC).

Energy Poverty – Backgrounder

What is energy poverty?

Rising energy costs have an impact on all Ontarians, but low-income households are hit hardest. The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) uses the term “energy poverty” to describe this disproportionate burden of electricity, natural gas and other utility costs on low-income households which reduce the funds available for food, clothing, medicine and other basic necessities.

Energy poverty affects low-income people living in all categories of housing: private rental, social housing and owner-occupied. While energy poverty primarily reflects lack of income, it is also a result of the quality of housing, i.e. lack of insulation and draft-proofing, less efficient heating equipment and other appliances.

High energy costs and low incomes are a painful combination. In the cold winter months, when energy bills can sometimes be greater than rent, poor families have to choose between food, clothing, and keeping themselves warm. They may be forced to live in moderate to extreme discomfort. Health can be affected. Higher summer temperatures, prolonged heat waves and more episodes of extreme heat can combine to deadly effect.

According to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), housing is a vital platform for individual health and well-being. “Housing in disrepair leads to higher risks of injury and accidental death in the home and unhealthy, indeed sometimes fatal, exposure to extremes of heat and cold. Exposure to dampness, moulds, fungus (e.g. from poor insulation ... poor heating and ventilation systems) can cause a wide range of pathologies, including asthma and other respiratory diseases.”¹ Although these health risks apply to all people, seniors, children and those who are disabled or have a long-term illness are especially vulnerable.

There has been an increasing awareness of the impact of high energy costs on low-income consumers and a variety of responses to address the impact. However, we still do not have a comprehensive, environmentally sustainable strategy in place to reduce energy poverty.

Access to energy is a basic right. In order to adequately heat our homes, prepare food and live in safe conditions, we need energy. Of course, we are all also aware that climate change is a serious threat requiring serious attention.

¹ *Home Truths: Why the Housing System Matters to All Canadians*, Andrew Jackson, CHRA, 2004, p.37-38.

Reducing our energy consumption is a critical component any climate change strategy. Low-income Ontarians want to be able to conserve energy where possible. However, low-income people do not have the money available to invest in energy conservation and efficiency. Measures are required to ensure low-income people are able to gain access to effective conservation programs.

Existing programs in Ontario

a) Energy bill assistance

Energy bill assistance programs are funded and delivered by the provincial and municipal levels of government, utility companies, community groups, and charities. These programs are designed to address individual household crises when a household is unable to meet the financial demands of energy bills. As such, energy assistance programs provide invaluable relief. However, they are ill-suited to address permanent and widespread conditions of rising energy prices and income shortfalls. Many of the assistance programs are seasonal, can only be accessed once per eligible household and funds often run out before all demands can be met.

Some of the major bill assistance programs are the provincial Emergency Energy Fund, Share the Warmth and the Winter Warmth Fund.

b) Energy bill rebates

The provincial and federal governments use energy bill rebates - cheques or bill credits to energy consumers - to provide immediate relief, but they are an expensive, short-term solution. In addition, rebates do not always reach low-income consumers.

Recent rebates have included the Ontario Home Electricity Relief program and the federal Energy Cost Benefit.

c) Energy conservation programs

Conservation is the fastest, cheapest and cleanest solution to our electricity crisis, but the up-front investments are often out of the reach of low-income consumers. Energy efficiency programs provide permanent reductions in energy use and costs through measures such as building envelope improvements, heating system upgrades, education, and replacement of inefficient energy- and water-consuming appliances. They include programs supported by governments, utility companies, and community organizations. Energy efficiency programs are an important part of a comprehensive approach to energy poverty. However, there is no permanent, province-wide program in place.

Currently, some local distribution companies (LDCs), as well as Union Gas and Enbridge Gas Distribution, offer energy conservation programs to low-income consumers. Additionally, a few pilot projects are being funded by the Ontario Power Authority.

Most of the programs provide conservation measures such as programmable thermostats, low-flow showerheads, pipe insulation and CFL light bulbs. A few programs offer measures such as attic and wall insulation and replacement of inefficient appliances that are likely to result in more significant energy savings.

d) Ontario Power Authority

The Ontario Power Authority (OPA) is responsible for developing energy conservation programs to dramatically reduce the province's energy consumption. Currently, the OPA is rolling out programs in response to the Minister of Energy's directive to reduce electricity consumption by 100 MW in the low-income and social housing sectors.

What we need

Currently, there is a patchwork of programs to help low-income people manage their energy bills with varying criteria and assistance levels. Energy conservation programs specifically designed to assist low-income people significantly decrease their energy use are not available in all communities across Ontario.

The Low-Income Energy Network advocates for a province-wide, comprehensive approach to low-income energy conservation and assistance. LIEN believes the greatest emphasis and resources should be dedicated to long-term, environmentally sustainable measures to reduce energy consumption and costs for low-income households.

Specifically LIEN is calling for: i) targeted low-income energy conservation/efficiency programs, at no-cost to participants, that provide extensive measures to provide deep reductions in energy use, ii) extensive consumer education about energy conservation and existing programs, iii) low-income rate assistance, and iv) adequately funded emergency energy assistance to help low-income households in crisis.

Fact Sheet

Compiled by the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)

Revised: June 2007

Low-income consumers and electricity service

- 14.4% of Ontario's population (1,611,505 persons or 759,590 households) are living at or below the "poverty line".ⁱ The majority of these persons live in tenant households.
- In 2005, Ontario households in the lowest income quintile spent 11.5% of their pre-tax income on utilities (water & sewage, electricity, natural gas and other fuel). In comparison, average household spending was 4% of pre-tax income.ⁱⁱ
- The lowest household income quintile in Ontario is more than twice as likely as the average income household to heat with electricity (30.7% compared to 14.4% for the average income household).ⁱⁱⁱ
- The lowest household income quintile in Ontario has a far greater proportion of households that use electricity as principal heating fuel for hot water (36.2% compared to 13.2% for the highest quintile and 25.2% for the average income household).^{iv}
- Approximately 23% of tenant households pay for utilities (hydro, heating, water) directly and separately from their rent.^v For the majority of tenants whose rent includes utilities, landlords can apply, under the *Residential Tenancies Act*, to pass on utilities cost increases when they are one and a half times greater than the Annual Rent Increase Guideline (i.e. Ontario CPI)^{vi}.
- 42% of Ontario tenant households (564,735 households) pay 30% or more of their household income on shelter costs.^{vii}
- 20% of Ontario tenant households (265,995 households) pay 50% or more of their household income on shelter costs.^{viii}
- The risk for homelessness increases where rental costs consume more than 50% of pre-tax household income for a tenant household.^{ix}
- 96% of Ontario Works' beneficiaries are tenants, but only 17% of these OW beneficiaries who rent live in subsidized housing - the vast majority live in the private rental market.^x

- 76% of Ontario Disability Support Program beneficiaries are tenants, but only 22% of these ODSP beneficiaries who rent live in subsidized housing.^{xi}
- A single mother with two children on social assistance in Ontario receives a maximum shelter allowance of \$583^{xii}. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Toronto CMA is \$1,073; in the Ottawa CMA, it's \$961.^{xiii} Over half of Ontario's tenant households live in the Toronto and Ottawa CMAs.
- There were 123,182 low-income households across Ontario on the active waiting lists for social housing at the beginning of 2007.^{xiv} Among the 34 Service Managers which track applicant incomes, on average 76% of the low-income households on their waiting lists had gross incomes below \$20,000.^{xv}
- According to CMHC's 2001 Census-based Housing Data, while Ontario renter households accounted for 31% of all Ontario households, they comprised 66.4% of Ontario households in core housing need - a significantly disproportionate share.^{xvi}

Why Lobby Your MPP?

MPPs are important whether they are in government or in opposition. Members of the government obviously have a greater chance of affecting government policy. However, opposition MPPs often successfully raise the profile of an issue and pressure the government to take action. (See the sample letter in this kit on energy issues).

What can your MPP do?

- Hold community meetings in the riding
- Mail out information to the constituency
- Deliver petitions to the legislature
- Raise questions in the house
- Invite guest speakers (you!) onto the local cable channel
- Introduce private members' bills
- Hold media conferences with partners on key issues
- Get access to research
- Call for an investigation
- Get public profile for an issue

LOBBYING YOUR MPP

Background

In order to decide how best to approach politicians to highlight your issue, it is important to research your riding and politician. Look at the various party sites, as well as the legislative web site (www.ontla.on.ca). Also, see if your MPP has her or his own web site. Look for newspaper articles (including community newspapers) for information about his or her public positions. You can find census data by riding at:

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/fedprofile/index.cfm>

Lobbying starts with your first contact

Be nice to the receptionist, and the administrative and executive assistants! This cannot be stressed enough. They are the gatekeepers - the nicer and more respectful you are to them, the more likely they'll want to go to bat for you to meet with the politician and raise your issue.

Meeting/telephoning politicians:

Setting up the appointment

1. Often, you will want to/only be able to meet with her or his staff - that's just fine.
2. Be prepared to make a number of phone calls in order to set up the appointment (or at some point you can just cut your losses and have and try to get it all said over the phone). It is important to stress how many people you represent and/or are affected by the issue you wish to discuss with the politician/staff.
3. After you have an appointment, make sure to confirm the date, time and who will be at the meeting three to five days before the meeting.
4. Most appointments will last 15-30 minutes only, so you need to know exactly which messages you want to convey. Make sure to do your research so that you are well prepared for the meeting.
5. If, for any reason, the appointment needs to be rescheduled, be gracious.

Written materials

A written brief (3-5 pages, easy to read, double-spaced) should be prepared and given to the MPP's office a week before the meeting (bring a copy with you to the meeting).

The brief should include:

1. Who you are
2. Brief history of your group/coalition/issue
3. What are the identified **needs in the riding** (stats and anecdotes), as well as the larger provincial needs
4. What it is you are asking the politician to do (introduce a bill, change a policy, champion a cause publicly, etc.)

Meeting the politician:

Who should attend

Decide well in advance who from the riding should attend the meeting, as well as other key "experts". Identify 2-4 people to meet with the politician. It is important that everyone is well briefed and that they convey the same message (this is not as easy as it seems!).

The most appropriate people would include people who work directly your issue and have a firm grasp of the facts. If you think it would be helpful, you can get a local "VIP" (known to be a supporter of the politician) to go with you.

What to say

Before the meeting, the group should meet and decide who is going to say what and for how long. Stating the obvious (which has escaped many an experienced lobbyist), be friendly, comment on what you've heard/seen that you can support (e.g "loved

the stand you took on fluffy bunnies for children”) - establish you can work with them.

1. An internal agenda should ensure you cover all the points in the time allotted. It will stop people from covering the same ground or missing key points. Pick one person who will be the “chair” or lead.
2. Leave about 5 - 10 minutes for the politician to ask questions. Decide in advance who is going to take the lead on answering questions.
3. Make sure that the politician understands what you are asking him/her to do and that you will be following up.

Follow-up to meeting

1. Send a letter to the politician, thanking him/her for his/her time and offering any additional information.
2. Ask to be notified in advance if the politician plans to make a statement about issue.
3. Keep in regular contact with the MPP’s staff. Even if it’s just a quick e-mail with a report attached saying “fyi, thought you’d be interested”

Companion pieces:

- Media strategy - know who covers your issues and keep them informed
- Community allies - know who they are and how to reach them quickly
- Opposition - know who they are and how to counter their message(s)
- Get your facts straight and keep them simple and graphic - charts and specific numbers are good
- Know the decision-making timelines - upcoming legislation, budget, etc.

Keep it in perspective - if you don’t “win” your first round, you’ve still made progress!

Sample letter to your MPP

Dear [name of MPP],

We are writing on behalf of [name of organization, if applicable].

We are deeply concerned about energy poverty in Ontario and the need for a well-coordinated and comprehensive strategy to address the problem.

Rising energy costs have an impact on all Ontarians, but low-income households are hit hardest. We use the term “energy poverty” to describe this disproportionate burden of electricity, natural gas and other utility costs which reduce the funds available for food, clothing, medicine and other basic necessities.

As you know, 14.4% of the population in Ontario are living in poverty. **[Insert local poverty rate.]** Many of these families already struggle to pay for the basic necessities of life. They have little, if any, capacity to absorb increases in their energy costs. Indeed, increases in energy costs often mean low-income people are forced to choose between heating, eating or paying the rent.

[If possible, insert local examples of how energy poverty is being experienced.]

While there has been increased attention on energy conservation as a means for consumers to manage energy bills and participate in Ontario’s ‘culture of conservation’, low-income Ontarians do not have the financial resources to invest in conservation measures. Furthermore, the majority of low-income households (65%)² are renters and have little control over components of their housing, such as the building envelope, appliances and fuel type, that play a significant role in determining levels of energy consumption.

Currently, there is a patchwork of programs that provide low-income people with energy conservation and bill assistance. The criteria and levels of assistance vary across the province.

² According to 2001 Census custom tabulation from Statistics Canada prepared for Green Communities Canada, there are 759,590 households in Ontario with at least one low-income person present (using Statistics Canada’s pre-tax, post-transfer payment Low-income Cutoffs or LICOs to define low income. Persons or families living at or below these income levels are widely considered to be living in straitened circumstances. Both the Canadian Council on Social Development and the National Council of Welfare have adopted the Statistics Canada pre-tax, post-transfer payment LICOs as poverty lines).

Of the 759,590 low-income households, 490,485 (or 65%) are tenant households and 269,095 (or 35%) are homeowner households.

The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN), with which we work, advocates for an Ontario-wide, comprehensive approach to low-income energy conservation and assistance. LIEN believes the greatest emphasis and resources should be dedicated to long-term, environmentally sustainable measures to reduce energy consumption and costs for low-income households.

Specifically LIEN is calling for:

- i) targeted low-income energy conservation/efficiency programs, at no-cost to participants, that provide extensive measures to provide deep reductions in energy use,
- ii) extensive consumer education about energy conservation and existing programs,
- iii) low-income rate assistance, and
- iv) adequately funded emergency energy assistance to help low-income households in crisis.

A long-term, comprehensive plan requires significant government commitment and funding. However, low-income Ontarians who are face dire risks as a result of increased energy costs, and all Ontarians who depend on our shared environment deserve and expect no less.

We are calling on your government/your party to support the comprehensive plan to address energy poverty we have outlined above.

We would be happy to further discuss this important issue with you.

Sincerely,
[insert name]

Simple Tips for Dealing with the Media

MEDIA TIP SHEET

DON'T CALL A MEDIA CONFERENCE UNLESS YOU HAVE TO

Often you will just call one reporter about a story, a reporter that you can trust and that you think will be interested in the issue. This also works well for the reporter. They can tell their editor they have an “exclusive”.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

When you've got a hot story, you don't have time to be digging around for contact information. Prepare a priority short list and an 'every media outlet but the kitchen sink' list. Pay attention to which reporters cover social issues. Don't forget the community papers. Inform your allies/network of the date you're going public with the issue.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Got a complicated story? Forget it. What is the one point you want to make? If Bill 142, regulation 293, section 16 fascinates you, keep it to yourself. What is the worst thing about Bill 142? Practice saying everything you want to say about the story in 30 seconds. Then go into it one clear step at a time.

GIVE THEM A FACE

Yes, you may be pandering to the worst aspects of tabloid journalism. While it may be distasteful, having a “victim” who is prepared to tell his or her story will help illustrate the issue. All those stories about emergency room chaos inevitably start with “Bill Smith's nightmare began ...”

DRAW THEM A PICTURE

For your background document(s): comparative charts, graphs, percentage increases, etc. Line the facts up the way you want them told. Journalists are pressed for time.

FOLLOW-UP

Keep track of what stories are filed. Set up people in advance to monitor. Encourage people who have read the story in the newspaper to write letters to the editor to keep the story alive longer. For the next little while, you can use copies of the articles in correspondence with groups and government, reminding them the issue is in the public eye.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

If the story has a long time-line, you can periodically get in touch with journalists who showed an interest in the story. A brief, non-demanding e-mail would be fine with an “FYI, know you covered this, thought I'd let you know it's been set for late May and I'll keep in touch”.

BE INDISPENSIBLE

Once reporters get to know you, they'll come to rely on you. Always get back to them quickly. Prepare what you want to say, and figure out what facts and documents might be helpful. If they've left you a message and haven't told you what it's about, it's fine to tell them you need to find the right information and will call them back.

If you don't have the relevant information, still call them back. Give them an alternate name and phone number (of someone you trust and who you know is in town!) so that you've still been helpful. If you can't comment on something, you still have to call them back - and don't say "no comment"! Call back and say you are extremely sorry, and you feel terrible and wish you could help them, but you are unable to say anything publicly at this time - and then explain why you can't. Then tell them that the minute you are able to say anything you will make absolutely sure that they will hear from you first.

IF SENDING OUT A MEDIA RELEASE:

KEEP IT SNAPPY

If your organization is just about to release your annual report, as you do every year, choose one aspect of the report. The media release should *not* read "ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED" (zzzzzzzz), but could read "DRAMATIC INCREASE IN -----S REVEALED".

KEEP IT SHORT

The media release should only be one page long. One main message with snappy quotes. Clear information at the bottom of the page about who to contact and their work, home and cell numbers. When you're doing your general fax around, just send the one page release. For your personal contacts/reporters who usually cover that issue, you can fax them the release *and* some background material.

CALL THEM TOO

Follow up by telephone after you have sent the faxes, starting with the people/outlets you'd most like to see there. If you're leaving voice mail, and the individual reporter has covered this sort of thing before, you want to make them feel they have the expertise to cover the story. "... and I thought you might be interested *vis a vis* the story you wrote last week on mutant aphids."

IF HAVING A MEDIA CONFERENCE:

WHEN

Morning. (Afternoon is too close to deadline, 10-11 is best). Not Friday (Saturday's papers are written well in advance and there won't be any space). When booking your date, find out what else is happening around town so you

have a better chance of being covered (competing for attention with a community organization that works on the same issues would be a pity).

WHERE

Unless it's the second coming, it is difficult to drag the media out of their way. If you need to be at a particular site, the location should have TV journalists salivating at the backdrop. Choose a site that is accessible to most of their offices, has parking, etc. If your civic centre is a hub of activity and one of your councillors can book a room for you, that would work well.

THE CONFERENCE/EVENT ITSELF

Get there early. Make sure someone at your office has all the details. Have a cell phone. Greet the journalists and try to get a card from them (when the stories are filed, if you like the way the reporter filed the story, you can contact them directly next time). Start promptly. Introduce all participants (best not have more than three) before the first one begins speaking. Take them through the media kit. Let it roll and keep it brief.

MEDIA KITS

Your media kits should include a copy of the media release, background materials, a separate sheet listing the correct spelling, title and telephone numbers of all the participants, etc. Use differently coloured paper to differentiate which sheet is which. Make extra copies.

OTHER WAYS OF KEEPING IN THE PUBLIC EYE

- Write opinion/editorial (op/ed) pieces (see sample op/ed below) for your community and mainstream newspapers. Call ahead to find out how many words it should be and stick to that amount. Don't use big words and do explain how the issue would hurt/has hurt an individual. Pepper your piece with facts, but don't make it dull. Worst case scenario? They don't publish it, and you can use it in your own newsletter.
- Call your local radio station and suggest a topic for their phone-in show.
- Don't forget internet world... e-mail lists, blogs, YouTube, Facebook
- Write a letter to the editor, and encourage your board members and clients to do so.
- Offer yourself up as a public speaker at your local Rotary or other club - these events are often covered by mainstream and community newspapers as well, and at the very least, it'll be covered in the organization's newsletter.
- Speaking of organizations' newsletters - you can also submit brief articles or updates to organizational newsletters - this works best if you have some

connection with the organization, and do try to make the connection between the issue and the organization's work.

Opinion Pieces

Opinion pieces can be powerful ways of raising an issue and argument in your community. Most community newspapers accept submissions of opinion pieces. Below is a sample opinion piece. The more you can 'localize' it, the better. You might begin by referring to the specific ways people in your community are struggling with energy bills or are at risk of homelessness. You might also consider revising this piece for use during the provincial election campaign. You could begin by noting which, if any local candidates, are talking about poverty. Is addressing energy poverty part of their platforms? Here's your chance to say why it should be.

Usually, newspapers won't run pieces that are more than 750 words.

Sample editorial:

Most of us are happy to see the end of seasonal extremes in heat or cold. Many low-income people are particularly relieved because extreme temperatures force them to choose between paying higher energy bills, the rent or buying groceries.

Rising energy costs have an impact on all Ontarians, but low-income households are hit hardest because they have the least ability to cope with higher bills. The average Ontario household spends 4% of their total pre-tax income on utilities. Low-income households spend 11.5% - almost three times as much.

Given that access to energy is a basic necessity and a basic right, how are we going to ensure that low-income people are protected from escalating energy costs - and that they have the tools to use energy wisely and sustainably?

The obvious answer that springs to mind is energy conservation. Not only does energy conservation lower energy bills, it is also critical to combating climate change, a priority for everyone in Canada.

While switching to energy efficient light bulbs and weather-stripping can help lower energy consumption, many of the more substantial things that can be done - like insulating and upgrading heating systems and appliances - are out of the financial reach of most low-income households. Therefore, one of the most important components of a strategy to address energy poverty is well-funded energy conservation programs available at no-cost to low-income households.

To be clear, what are required are not just programs that provide energy-efficient light bulbs, but programs with extended measures that will result in significant reductions in energy use. Currently, the Ontario Power Authority, which is responsible for developing the province's energy conservation programs, is funding a number of pilot projects targeted at the low-income residential sector. The expectation is that the programs will be rolled out to include the entire province at the end of the pilot phase.

Access to energy conservation programs is the foundation of a strategy to reduce energy poverty. However, it alone is not the solution. Many low-income households are not going to be able to reduce their bills to an affordable level with conservation alone.

We also need to ensure energy rates are affordable to low-income households. As part of the Ontario Energy Board's (OEB) regulation of the electricity and natural gas utilities, they are to set "just and reasonable rates." The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) is challenging the OEB's recent decision not to get involved in creating an **Ontario Home Energy Rate Affordability Program**, under which low-income consumers will not pay more than 6% of their gross household income for all their home energy use.

Because low-income households have almost no financial cushion to deal with unexpected expenses or emergencies, Ontario also needs emergency energy funds. The provincial government created the Emergency Energy Fund (EEF) in 2004 to help low-income households - including social assistance recipients - pay for utility arrears, security deposits and reconnection costs for electricity, hydro, natural gas, oil and other forms of energy. The provincial government doubled the Emergency Energy Fund to \$4.2 million for the 2006/07 fiscal year.

The EEF is delivered by municipalities across the province and by the Ontario Native Welfare Administrator's Association on behalf of First Nations. While it may make good sense to have local officials distributing the funds, the eligibility criteria and the amounts available to people in financial crisis vary from municipality to municipality and more work needs to be done to ensure equitable access to assistance under the Fund.

The costs of failing to address energy poverty are serious. We will see greater depths of poverty (and the associated costs), more homeless people (and the associated costs) and more pollution (and associated costs). Now is the time for action to ensure all people have access to affordable energy and the opportunity to fully participate in the province's "Culture of Conservation". Neither the environment nor low-income people can afford to wait.

Tackling Energy Poverty

Many organizations have made poverty an election issue. The Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) is focusing on energy poverty. Access to electricity and heat is a basic necessity and we need to ensure universal, non-discriminatory access to these services for all Ontarians, including low-income consumers. Low-income households bear a disproportionately high energy cost burden and lack the financial resources to undertake the retrofits that would reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

We need a comprehensive plan to address energy poverty which includes rate assistance for low-income consumers, emergency assistance and sufficient funding for energy conservation programs that are accessible to low-income consumers and that provide measures for deep reductions in energy use. This plan would also help low-income households do their part to help stop global warming.

No one deserves to live in poverty. And no one has to. With the right policies and programs in place, we could ensure that everyone in Ontario has a decent standard of living. The provincial election is a good opportunity to ask candidates what they will do to reduce energy poverty and improve the lives of low-income people in Ontario.

Help LIEN advocate in the provincial election for commitments from the political parties to address energy poverty, particularly for energy conservation and rate assistance programs for low-income households.

You could attend an all-candidates meeting or contact party leaders and candidates by phone, email or letter. The election is an opportunity to raise public awareness about energy poverty, particularly through the media, for example, you could write an opinion editorial for your local newspaper (see page 17 of the lobby kit for a sample opinion editorial piece).

Below are three questions you could ask the candidates:

- Do you and your party support the implementation of a comprehensive low-income energy strategy that includes affordable energy rates for low income consumers, adequately-funded emergency financial assistance, and energy conservation programs – available at no cost to low-income households – that result in deep energy savings?
- Will you work with all stakeholders to set firm annual targets and timelines for eliminating energy poverty?
- Will you ensure that there are mandatory energy conservation and energy efficiency standards in place for multi-residential buildings that will help low-income tenants reduce their energy use?

Fact Sheet Footnotes

ⁱ Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Population. Incidence of low income among the population living in private households, provinces - Ontario.

Low Income Cutoffs (LICOs) published by Statistics Canada, using pre-tax, post-transfer household income are currently the best approach for defining low income. Post-tax LICOs adjust for federal and provincial income taxes, but do not reflect regressive taxes such as EI and CPP premiums, GST, provincial sales taxes and property taxes.

The pre-tax, post-transfer LICOs vary according to family size and size of community. Persons and families living at or below these income levels are widely considered to be living in straitened circumstances. Both the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and the National Council of Welfare (NCW) have adopted the Statistics Canada pre-tax, post-transfer LICOs as poverty lines.

According to 2001 Census custom tabulation prepared for Green Communities Canada, there are 759,590 households in Ontario with at least one low-income person present (using Statistics Canada's pre-tax, post-transfer payment LICOs to define low income). Of the 759,590 low-income households, 490,485 (or 65%) are tenant households and 269,095 (or 35%) are homeowner households.

ⁱⁱ Survey of Household Spending 2005; Detailed average household expenditure by household income quintile, Ontario 2005. Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, custom tabulation compiled for the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario and the Income Security Advocacy Centre (December 12, 2006).

ⁱⁱⁱ Survey of Household Spending 2005; Dwelling Characteristics and Household Equipment by Household Income Quintile, Ontario, 2005. Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, custom tabulation compiled for the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario and the Income Security Advocacy Centre (December 13, 2006).

^{iv} Ibid.

^v According to MMAH staff, based on Rent Registry data transferred to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal in 1998.

^{vi} Sub-section 126 (1), paragraph 1, *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006* and Section 28 of O. Reg. 516/06 – General, made under *the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*

^{vii} Table: Household type (4), Tenure (5) and Housing Affordability (4) for Private Households with household income greater than zero, in non-farm, non-reserve private dwellings, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2001 Census - 20% Sample Data. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, May 13, 2003. 2001 Census of Canada. Catalogue number 95F0444XCB01004.

^{viii} Table: Gross Rent as a Percentage of 2000 Household Income (10), Age Groups of Primary Household Maintainer (8) and Household Type (4) for Private Households With Household Income Greater than Zero, in Tenant-occupied Private Non-farm, Non-reserve Dwellings, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2001 Census - 20% Sample Data. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, May 13, 2003. 2001 Census of Canada. Catalogue number 97F0021XCB01008.

^{ix} Dunphy, Noreen and Lapointe, Linda. *Where's Home: A picture of housing needs in Ontario*. A Project to raise housing awareness in Ontario, sponsored by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. March 1999. Page 9

^x Statistics and Analysis Unit, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities Division, Ministry of Community and Social Services - December 2006 quarterly report of OW/ODSP cases and beneficiaries by accommodation types

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services

^{xiii} Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Spring 2007 Rental Market Survey Report, Ontario Highlights.

^{xiv} Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association's 2007 Report on Waiting List Statistics for Ontario. August, 2007. Page 8.

^{xv} Ibid, Page 7.

^{xvi} Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) considers households to be in core housing need if they do not live in and can not access acceptable housing. The term "acceptable housing" refers to housing that is affordable (i.e. costs less than 30% of before-tax household income), in adequate condition, and of suitable size. According to CMHC, housing affordability is the predominant cause of core housing need.