

\$21 Million to Help Wisconsinites Pay Overdue Utility Bills

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin
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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/family-worried-bills-s5.jpg>



More than 36,000 Wisconsinites will receive additional benefit from Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, together with the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) and the Public Service Commission (PSC), announced Wednesday more than \$21 million to cover utility bill arrearages for more than 36,000 qualifying utility customers across Wisconsin through the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP).



“This year has been tough for folks and families, and we know there are so many who’ve struggled to make ends meet,” said Gov. Evers. “That’s why we’re working every day to ensure families, our state, and our economy can bounce back from this pandemic, and part of that is making sure households across the state can keep their lights on and their utilities running.”

The more than \$21 million for WHEAP to fund this initiative comes from Wisconsin’s federal FY21 allocation for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

“I’m pleased that DOA in partnership with the governor could help alleviate this burden for so many families that are dealing with so much right now,” said Joel Brennan, DOA Secretary. “Providing this funding through an already successful program ensures that the funds can be distributed quickly and efficiently without creating additional burdens to the utility customer. This was an easy decision by the Administration and is another example of the governor’s continued commitment to serving Wisconsin’s most vulnerable citizens. We will continue to advocate for initiatives, including the more than a dozen specific proposals in the Governor’s budget, that keep families in their homes, safely and securely.”

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DOA's Division of Energy, Housing and Community Resources (DEHCR) administers WHEAP. To assist eligible households impacted by the pandemic, the arrearage on accounts as of April 9, 2021, were paid off based on information provided by utility customers on their previously submitted Program Year 2020-2021 Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) application. Eligible households did not need to apply to receive this assistance.

"At the outset of the pandemic, Wisconsin was one of the first states in the country to put consumer and financial protections in place for customers and utilities alike so everyone could continue to receive vital utility services and stay safe, stay at home, and stop the spread of the disease. Now that we are carefully emerging from the pandemic, Wisconsin is again one of the first to provide meaningful financial assistance to those who were hit hardest, allowing customers to keep their lights and water on and stay warm," said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. "Thanks to Governor Evers' action today, and in partnership with our state's utilities, thousands of utility customers who suffered severe financial hardship over the past year will see dramatic relief."

In March 2020, following Governor Evers' "Safer at Home" order, the Public Service Commission (PSC) ordered several consumer protections allowing people to stay safe in their homes and maintain utility service even if their financial situation prevented them from paying their utility bills on time. Later, the PSC provided direction to utilities on how to account for the COVID-19-related expenses, allowing utilities to maintain their financial strength and continue to provide reliable service to customers. These actions ensured people could stay at home to prevent the spread of the pandemic without fear of disconnection of electricity, natural gas, or water; and that utilities could maintain and continue to provide safe, reliable, and affordable utility services.

For more information on the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP), visit <http://www.homeenergyplus.wi.gov/>

Utility customers experiencing other housing or home energy needs should contact 1-800-506-5596 or support@wheap.help

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