

Meeting minutes

RE: *Emergency Financial Assistance Working Group - Meeting 1*

Date: June 30, 2009 Time: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Location: OEB Office, 2300 Yonge St., 25th floor

Attendees: **Emergency Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG)**

- Julie Girvan, Consumers Council of Canada (CCC);
- Gord Eamer, Cornerstone Hydro Electric Concepts (CHEC);
- Jack Lenartowicz, Coalition of Large Distributors (CLD);
- Chantelle Bramley, Direct Energy;
- Manny Sousa, Enbridge Gas Distribution (Enbridge);
- Mary Anne Rowlands, Housing Help Association of Ontario;
- Barb Allen, Hydro One Networks (Hydro One);
- Sarah Blackstock, Low Income Energy Network (LIEN);
- Jennifer Lopinski, Low Income Energy Network (LIEN);
- Chris Goethel, Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MEI);
- John Bagnall, Neighbourhood Information Post (NIP);
- David Whitehouse, Peterborough Distribution Inc. (PDI).
- Debra Johnston, Salvation Army Centre of Hope;
- Patricia Phillips, Union Gas (Union);
- Jackie Caille, Union Gas (Union);
- Michael Buonaguro, Vulnerable Energy Consumers Coalition/Energy Probe (VECC)

Board Staff

- Takis Plagiannakos,
- Alison Cazalet,
- Guy Halpern,
- Rachel Anderson

IndEco Staff

- Judy Simon,
- Shona Adamson,
- Patti Campbell

Regrets:

- Gladys Wong, Neighbourhood Information Post (NIP);
- Steve Lavery, United Way;
- William Harper, Vulnerable Energy Consumers Coalition (VECC)

Next scheduled meeting: July 7, 2009

Welcome and introductions - All

- Board staff welcomed the group to the kick off meeting of the Emergency Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG)



- Each participant provided a brief introduction including the stakeholder group each represents and a very brief overview of their interest/position and objectives for the Working Group sessions
- Some members expressed concern with the name and acronym used for the Financial Assistance Working Group and requested that it be changed.

Logistics – Alison Cazalet, Board Staff

- Reviewed meeting logistics (e.g. security, facilities etc.)
- Reviewed the OEB cost award decision related to LEAP and this working group

Review of the meeting agenda – Judy Simon, Facilitator

- Reviewed the meeting agenda to ensure that participants understood the information and activities taking place over the course of the day
- Reviewed the purpose and activities of the FAWG subgroups. FAWG members will break into subgroups for part of each FAWG meeting

Setting the context – Alison Cazalet, Board Staff

- Reviewed the timelines and events that led to the development of the Board report on the Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) and the formation of the Conservation Working Group (CWG) and emergency Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG)

Purpose of the Emergency Financial Assistance Working Group – Judy Simon, Facilitator

- Reviewed the purpose of the FAWG, which is to develop a framework for the delivery of emergency financial assistance to low-income energy consumers. The group is also tasked to develop a framework for the long-term coordination and administration of LEAP including both the conservation and emergency financial assistance streams

Guiding principles – Alison Cazalet, Board Staff

- Reviewed draft guiding principles to inform the development of the emergency financial assistance framework and held a roundtable discussion on revisions to these guiding principles



Round table

- Each FAWG participant provided a brief oral overview of their interest/position on the emergency financial assistance framework and coordination function. Below is a brief summary of their comments

Organization	Comments
CCC	Ratepayer funds must be used in the best way possible; looking forward to developing a program that works
CHEC	Ensure that the program is kept simple and easy to administer, and that the funding reaches the small local LDCs and their customer base in need of emergency financial assistance; map outlining who the agencies are across the twelve LDCs represented by CHEC to ensure an efficient rollout of program would be helpful
CLD	Efficiency of implementation, especially if there is a transition between Winter Warmth and LEAP to avoid market confusion, should be addressed in design of the emergency financial assistance framework
Direct Energy	Want to be part of the low-income energy emergency assistance solution; Direct Energy can make an effective and meaningful contribution to the program
Enbridge	November 1 st launch is an ambitious target given the ramp up requirements of both the gas and electric utilities and social agencies; providing year round emergency funding may present challenges to both gas and electric utilities; need to ensure the design of emergency financial assistance framework and overall program coordination is completed with the assistance of the social service agencies to minimize administrative burden

Housing Help Association of Ontario	Lack of capacity to administer and deliver the programs is a key issue; emergency funding will return to the utilities in the form of decreased credit/disconnection activities; look to public for contributions/donations to increase amount of available funding
Hydro One	Increased administration within Hydro One to deliver the program because of the number of communities covered and expanse of geographic territory; need to ensure that there is provincial coverage; need to take into account that some customers of electric utilities such as Hydro One may use wood, propane, or other fuels for home heating; would be helpful to know where all the social service agencies are across Ontario
LIEN	<p>Coordination of program with other agencies should be considered in designing the emergency financial assistance framework; want to reach the largest number of people requiring assistance – have the largest impact - with the best use of resources available; perhaps Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) can be the launch pad for this program; the EEF could be used for the other fuels not covered by LEAP</p> <p>Emergency financial assistance is good for a quick fix; unfortunately the financial indebtedness of low income consumers is greater than the funds available; need to have consistency in program administration because agencies vary in size and capacity to deliver program; need to allow low income consumers to maintain their utilities while negotiating payments</p>
MEI	Recognize that energy bills will automatically increase by 8% next year with the implementation of the harmonized sales tax; group needs to be creative in design of emergency financial assistance and also to ensure that there are no unintended consequences that may negatively impact low-income energy consumers

NIP	Ramp up time required, especially for smaller utilities with constrained resources, to administer the program year round needs to be addressed; consider the enhanced role of re-payment negotiations and conservation programs in framework development
PDI	Availability of sufficient funding is key to the success of a year round emergency financial assistance program
Salvation Army Centre of Hope	Year round program is ideal however additional funding is needed as the need for emergency financial assistance is rapidly increasing; integrate programs and capacity to deliver programs as agencies are stretched to the limit in their capacity to deliver additional programs
Union Gas	<p>Keep it simple, do not reinvent the wheel; keep implementation of the program viable and possible to administer across a large service area; Winter Warmth has good brand equity which is important and should be retained; Union has a program that works now and just needs to be tweaked to meet LEAP requirements</p> <p>Coordinate access to the program to help low-income energy consumers have a central point of access to funds, thereby avoiding the need to call both gas and electric utilities; easy to access for social service agencies; privacy legislation requires consideration in the context of this program</p>
VECC	Keep low-income energy consumers connected to their utilities; recognize they are paying for the program through the utilities rates; make access to emergency financial assistance easy; reduce the overhead costs of utilities by keeping low-income energy consumers connected; use discretion in the distribution of funding to keep low-income energy consumers viable customers



Elements of the emergency financial assistance program, Judy Simon, Facilitator

- Reviewed the elements of the framework for the emergency financial assistance program and held a roundtable discussion on the elements

Eligibility criteria – Judy Simon, Facilitator

- Reviewed a range of eligibility criteria from low-income emergency financial assistance and DSM/CDM programs as a starting point for discussion among the subgroups

Subgroup discussion – eligibility criteria – Judy Simon, Facilitator

- Provided a description of the objectives of the subgroups, the materials to be provided, the schedule of activities, and the assigned subgroups. Members were asked in this first subgroup session to focus on developing eligibility criteria for the emergency financial assistance framework
- Over the course of the FAWG meetings, the broad objectives of the subgroups are to:
 - *Develop a framework for the delivery of emergency financial assistance to low-income energy consumers*
 - *Develop a framework for the long-term coordination and administration of LEAP*
 - *Reach consensus on all of the elements of the emergency financial assistance framework, including coordination and administration, to the extent possible*

The material provided included:

- *Eligibility criteria template*

- FAWG members were assigned to following subgroups:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLD – Jack Lenartowicz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hydro One – Barb Allen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PDI – David Whitehouse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHEC – Gord Eamer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union Gas – Patricia Phillips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIEN – Jennifer Lopinski
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Help Association of Ontario – Mary Anne Rowlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Energy – Chantelle Bramley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enbridge - Manny Sousa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union Gas – Jackie Callie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIP – John Bagnall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VECC –Michael Buonaguro
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salvation Army Centre of Hope – Debra Johnston 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIEN – Sarah Blackstock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEI – Chris Goethel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC – Julie Girvan 		

Subgroup report back

- Each subgroup reported back to the plenary on progress of their discussions regarding eligibility criteria
- Below is a short summary of each subgroup report:

Group 1

- i. Emergency financial assistance funding should be administered at the discretion of the social service agency
- ii. The applicant must be a customer of the utility, as either primary or secondary name on the account; the applicant must reside at the address for which there are in arrears
- iii. LICO rate for urban area over 500,000 plus 15%
- iv. Eligibility assumed if in receipt of any social assistance
- v. Must be in threat of disconnection or disconnected; can be a reminder notice, not necessarily a disconnection notice



- vi.** Assistance must result in reconnection of utility; must be a way, either through other social assistance or through the applicant paying, to raise enough of a payment to get reconnected
- vii.** Funding available once per year; even if it less than the maximum allowable amount
- viii.** Must have demonstrated attempt to pay utility bill within the last four months – either partial payment or proof of payment history

Group 2

- i.** Agreed with many of the criteria stated above; only presented those that were different or additional
- ii.** Historical income levels should be examined not just those in the last month
- iii.** Access funding once every twelve months per commodity (gas and electric)
- iv.** Additional hardship criteria to access funding more than once every 12 months (e.g. health issues, etc.)
- v.** Cap of \$450.00 per commodity
- vi.** Some attempt to pay within the last six months, partial payment or payment arrangements made, or call centre called
- vii.** Must demonstrate sustainability/future ability to pay through income budget review

Group 3

- i.** Agreed with many of the criteria stated above; only presented those that were different or additional
- ii.** Flexibility for social service agencies is required
- iii.** Demonstrated attempt to pay the utility bill
- iv.** Accessible twice per year within the cap; the subgroup recognized that this comes with administration issues; other subgroup members pointed out that this could be considered a subsidy
- v.** Demonstrating sustainability through an income budget review is key

Review of the day and overview of next meeting – Judy Simon, facilitator

- Reviewed the day and, in particular, the issues and suggestions raised as part of the subgroup discussions and report back



Action Items

The following actions were identified throughout the FAWG meeting:

- Board Staff to report back on the cost allocator for the funding (0.12% of revenue requirements)
- Board Staff and IndEco to amend slides presented at the first Working Group meeting to reflect the program focus on emergency financial assistance
- Housing Help Association of Ontario to provide draft list of all Housing Help members in Ontario
- Board Staff to extend an invitation to the Ministry of Community Social Services (MCSS) and Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) to present to the FAWG
- Board Staff to provide to the Working Group members a list of each member's name, title, organization, and contact information
- Board Staff to provide a list, as comprehensive as practical, of all the emergency financial assistance programs related to energy available across the province
- Board Staff to include the number of customers (residential, business) for each utility along with their contribution to LEAP
- All participants are to review the revised guiding principles and come to the next meeting to discuss substantive changes