

HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (Formerly known as FUEL ASSISTANCE)

- **WHAT IS HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE?**

Home Energy Assistance is a government funded program that helps eligible households pay winter heating bills. Payments are applied towards deliveries made from November 1 to April 30. Action, Inc pays for oil, natural gas, propane, electric, pellets, firewood, and kerosene heat, as well as heat included in rent.

- **WHO IS ELIGIBLE?**

Eligibility is based on the gross annual income and the number of household members. Action, Inc serves Gloucester, Rockport, Essex, Manchester, Ipswich, Hamilton, and Wenham residents who rent or own their home. Applicants may pay for their heat, or it may be included in their rent. **Note:** Applicants with a rental housing subsidy whose heat is included in rent are only eligible if their rent exceeds 30% of their monthly gross income.

- **WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE NEEDED TO APPLY?**

The applicant needs to submit a photo ID and proof of citizenship/legal status for all household members (i.e., birth certificate, unexpired US passport, social security card, US Permanent Resident Card, etc.) Documentation of all sources of income and current heating, gas, and electric bills are also needed. Housing information is required, too. For renters this means a current lease (and/or housing subsidy); homeowners need to provide a mortgage statement, property taxes, and home insurance premium.

**Additional documents may be requested.*

- **HOW DO I APPLY FOR THE FIRST TIME?**

First time applicants must schedule an appointment (Starting October 1st) for an initial intake interview by phone or in person. Interested applicants will be sent a list of what is needed for their appointment and a letter of additional documents, if necessary. Call 978-281-3900. Applicants can also start the application process online at www.toapply.org/ACTION. Per program requirements the intake specialist will reach out to schedule a phone appt to review your online entries before processing.

- **I RECEIVED HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE IN THE PAST. HOW DO I REAPPLY?**

In the fall, applications are mailed to any household that applied in the previous year. Applicants who have previously applied and have not received an application in the mail can call to request one after October 1st. The application will include instructions, and a list of what documents are needed to process your application. Be sure that everyone 18 and older signs the application; then return it to Action, Inc. with the required documents.

- **DO I HAVE TO SEND IN UPDATED DOCUMENTS EACH YEAR I RE-APPLY?**

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities requires income verification and additional information to be updated every year you apply for assistance.

- **ONCE I HAVE APPLIED, HOW DO I KEEP TRACK OF THE STATUS OF MY APPLICATION?**

Please call (978)281-3900; option 1, to hear the status of your application. You will learn when your application was received, the current legal status (Received, Incomplete, Pending Determination, Eligible or Denied), the amount of your benefit (if eligible) and any payments made to your heating vendor.

- **HOW SOON WILL I KNOW IF I AM ELIGIBLE?**

If you have submitted all the necessary documents, you will be notified of your eligibility status by mail within 45 working days of receipt of your completed application. If you are still missing documents, you will be sent a letter within 25 working days that explains what is needed to complete your application. Once your application is completed, you will receive a determination letter and, if eligible, the amount of your benefit as well. You can call your vendor to schedule a delivery once you receive your eligibility notice. We will notify your vendor as well.

- **SHOULD I CONTINUE TO MAKE PAYMENTS ON MY UTILITY BILLS ONCE I AM DETERMINED ELIGIBLE?**

Your Home Energy Assistance benefit is meant to help pay a portion of your heating bills during the winter months. **Action** encourages clients to make at least some payment towards their balance if they are able. It shows good faith and may prevent a shut-off in the future if your utility company sees that an effort has been made to keep current. If you have been paying your monthly bill, your Home Energy Assistance benefit for any usage from November 1 to April 30 will be applied to your account as a credit for future months' usage. If you are having difficulty paying your heating or utility bills, contact your utility company to arrange a payment plan for any outstanding charges not covered by your benefit.

- **HOW ARE HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE BENEFITS PAID TO UTILITIES?**

If you are determined eligible, **Action** will notify your **utility heating vendor** of the amount of your benefit. Payments are made directly to your heating vendor. Your utility will submit billing to Action for deliveries made between November 1 and April 30 and Action will make payments on those bills up to the amount of your benefit. Any outstanding balance not paid by Fuel Assistance is your responsibility. Call: (978) 281-3900; option 1, to keep track of payments made and the remaining benefit you may have.

- **HOW ARE HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE BENEFITS PAID FOR OIL, PROPANE, FIREWOOD and KEROSENE DELIVERIES**

If you are determined eligible, your fuel vendor will be notified of your benefit level. Payments are made directly to your heating vendor. Payments are applied towards eligible heating delivery costs made between November 1 and April 30.

- **HOW ARE HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE BENEFITS PAID TO HEAT INCLUDED IN RENT HOUSEHOLDS?**

If you are determined eligible, Action will mail one check payable to the head of household beginning in February.

- **HOW LONG BEFORE A HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PAYMENT WILL APPEAR ON MY GAS or ELECTRIC BILL?**

The payment on your National Grid or Town of Ipswich utility bills often takes 1-2 statements before they appear as a **HEAP CREDIT**. Payments are made retroactive to November 1st, regardless of when you are determined eligible.

- **HOW DO I BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR NATIONAL GRID GAS or ELECTRIC DISCOUNTS?**

Action notifies **National Grid** of the date of your eligibility. It often takes 1-2 statements before the discount may appear on your bills. **Note:** Bill must be in the name of the applicant in order to receive the discount.

APPLICATION STATUS LINE (978) 281-3900