



# National Center for HEALTHY HOUSING

## Using Weatherization and Energy Assistance Programs to Provide Cooling Assistance

### A Technical Assistance Tool

*NCHH created this technical assistance brief to support local and state governments, agencies, programs, and advocates in understanding how home energy assistance and weatherization programs provide support for cooling in homes, especially during high heat and crisis situations. This brief describes how these programs work from the federal level down through local implementation, existing mechanisms for providing cooling, and examples of how states are making these programs work for their communities.*

## INTRODUCTION

As our climate changes, extreme weather is increasing in both intensity and frequency. For many places, this means an increase in extremely hot temperatures. In addition to causing heat stroke, extreme heat conditions can exacerbate many health issues, including respiratory conditions, heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Extreme heat also disproportionately affects other at-risk populations including older adults; young children; residents of low-income communities, who may lack the resources to pay for cooling in their homes; and communities from racial and ethnic minority groups, due to historic policies like redlining that forced these populations to live in substandard housing and neighborhoods that experience higher temperatures.

Keeping temperatures in the home thermally controlled is one of the **Principles of a Healthy Home** promoted by the National Center for Healthy Housing because tenants and homeowners are at heightened risk for various health problems related to prolonged exposure to excessive heat or cold when their homes do not maintain adequate temperatures. Ensuring that everyone has access to heat is an established public health goal, supported by policies including federal programs that assist residents in paying energy bills, **state annual moratoria** on utility shutoffs over the winter or during extreme cold temperatures, and local housing codes that require a minimum temperature to be maintained in homes. As temperatures rise, including in places that are accustomed to cooler year-round climates, there is a growing recognition of the right to cooled air alongside the right to heat, and many of these same policy levers can be expanded and adapted from relief from cold to relief from heat.

This brief covers how one such lever—federally funded weatherization and energy assistance programs—are providing cooling assistance to residents, as well as opportunities to expand these services specifically to confront rising temperatures and frequency of extreme heat events. For more information about the additional policy opportunities in this space, see the concluding section, “Making the System Work: Policy Needs and Opportunities.”

# Table of Contents

THE NEED: GAPS IN ACCESS TO AIR CONDITIONING .....	3
THE PROGRAMS: OVERVIEW .....	3
PROGRAM STRUCTURE.....	5
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDRESSING RESIDENTIAL THERMAL COMFORT .....	8
WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (WAP) .....	8
LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP) .....	9
DELIVERING COOLING BENEFITS: PROGRAM EXAMPLES AND SUCCESSES.....	10
MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK: POLICY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES.....	12
FURTHER RESOURCES .....	13
APPENDIX A: HOW GRANTEEES USE LIHEAP — TYPE OF COOLING ASSISTANCE .....	14

*This resource was made possible through a contract between the National Environmental Health Association and the National Center for Healthy Housing, funded through cooperative agreement NU38OT000300-04-05 between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Environmental Health Association.*

*August 2022; revised May 2023*

# THE NEED: GAPS IN ACCESS TO AIR CONDITIONING

National data provide insight as to how many residents have air conditioning in their homes. One available dataset, the **Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS)**, conducted by the Department of Energy (DOE) **Energy Information Administration (EIA)**, includes questions about air conditioning. The **most recent survey**, published in 2017 using 2015 data, reported that 87% of homes in the United States had some form of air conditioning. The remainder—those lacking air conditioning in 2015—**totaled approximately 15.4 million homes**; of these, 2.8 million homes had an evaporative (“swamp”) cooler, an alternative to air conditioning used in dry climates. Additionally, the 2017 survey noted the following:

- Compared to other types of housing, two- to four-unit buildings are least likely to have air conditioning (80%).
- Among owner-occupied homes, 89% have air conditioning (and 81% have central air) versus 83% (62% central air) of rented homes.
- Of the homes with air conditioning, 74% had central air conditioning, 6% had three or more window units, 9% had two window units, and 11% had one window unit.

These data are also available by region, with air conditioning rates ranging from 95% in the south to 66% in the Pacific Division (the five states abutting the Pacific Ocean).

Perhaps most notably, the data demonstrates a difference by income level:

- Less than \$20,000: 80% of homes have some air conditioning.
- \$20–\$39,000: 84% of homes have some air conditioning.
- \$40–\$79,000: 89% of homes have some air conditioning.
- \$80–\$139,000: 90% of homes have some air conditioning.
- \$140,000 or more: 93% of homes have some air conditioning.

This is particularly important because installing, replacing, or repairing air conditioning units can be expensive. A window air conditioning unit costs between \$150 and \$500, with another \$50–\$100 for installation and \$15–\$40 per month for use, with costs increasing, sometimes exponentially, for more expansive options like installing central air.

Survey data demonstrate how cost is an obstacle to cold air for many households. In 2018, the National Energy Assistance Directors Association conducted a **survey** of approximately 600 households that receive benefits from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) about their energy needs and use and the challenges they faced. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of survey respondents reported that they had been unable to use their air conditioner in the past year, either because the electricity was shut off or their air conditioning was broken, and they couldn’t afford the repair. These percentages of survey respondents without access to air conditioning increased among households with disabled members (30%), children (38%), and those below 50% of the poverty level (39%). Additionally, in a survey of 39 older adults in Arizona, as summarized in CDC’s **MMWR—Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report**<sup>1</sup> in 2022, 44% of respondents reported heat-related medical symptoms during the previous year, and 18% reported that the cost of electricity prevented them from using air conditioning.

## THE PROGRAMS: OVERVIEW

While the programs have different core services, this brief focuses on the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) in tandem because they serve complementary goals and are often administered locally by the same agency or organization. Broadly speaking, LIHEAP can help residents pay utility bills, especially in crisis situations or to remedy or avoid power shutoff, and provide some in-kind benefits and support for weatherization. WAP focuses on increasing energy efficiency in homes through repairs, retrofits, and improvements to the building, providing cost savings to the resident and decreasing energy usage.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mallen, E., Roach, M., Fox, L., Gillespie, E., Watkins, L., Hondula, D. M., et al. (2022, June 17). *Extreme heat exposure: Access and barriers to cooling centers—Maricopa and Yuma counties, Arizona, 2010–2020*. MMWR—Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 71, 781–785. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7124a1>.

Coordination between LIHEAP and WAP is particularly important because discussion of improving access to air conditioning can encourage a tension, real or perceived, with goals around energy use reduction. The most cost-effective ways to deliver cool air to residents, especially in the short term, may have an energy use tradeoff. It is important to identify and prioritize strategies that can serve both goals: recognizing that everyone has a right to cool air and working to provide that relief while also improving home energy efficiency and moving towards clean energy sources.

	WAP	LIHEAP
<b>Year Started</b>	1976	1981
<b>Federal Administrator</b>	Department of Energy (DOE), through the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.	Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Office of Community Services.
<b>Core Program Goal/Mission</b>	WAP reduces energy costs for low-income households by increasing energy efficiency of their homes, while ensuring health and safety.	LIHEAP assists low-income households meet their immediate home energy needs, particularly those with the lowest incomes who pay a high proportion of household income for home energy.
<b>Program Allocation Formula</b>	<p>Funding is provided to all 50 states, DC, five territories, and tribes. States contract with nearly 800 local agencies nationwide to deliver services.</p> <p>Each grantee gets a base allocation that is the same every year, and then additional funds (as appropriations allow) are determined by a formula that is based on low-income population, climate, and residential energy expenditures.</p>	<p>Regular funding is provided in the form of flexible block grants annually to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, five territories, and approximately 150 tribes and tribal organizations.</p> <p>Funds are distributed to states based on the program's "new" formula if appropriations for the program exceed \$2 billion. States receive their funding by a calculation of the ratio of home energy expenses of low-income households for that state compared to national low-income household home energy expenses.</p> <p>State allocations include funding and distribution of funds to eligible tribes within that state. Territories receive their funding amount based on a designated percentage of the regular funds.</p> <p>The program also has an "old" funding formula and allows for emergency contingency funding to be allocated to one or more grantees based on urgency and at the HHS secretary's discretion.</p>
<b>Resident Eligibility Requirements and Application Process</b>	<p>Residents who are at or under 200% of the federal poverty line, have received cash assistance for the last 12 months, or who qualify for LIHEAP, HUD public housing, or HUD means-testing programs are eligible for WAP assistance.</p> <p>Funds can be used for single-, multifamily, or manufactured homes and are available to both owners and renters.</p> <p>Applicants are usually directed to apply through the local provider in their area. Applicants must complete a form and provide proof of income.</p>	<p>Residents are eligible if the household income is at or under 110% of the federal poverty line, or if greater, residents are eligible if the household income is 60% of the state median income. States can choose to adopt higher limits, up to 150% of the poverty line.</p> <p>Funds are available to both renters and homeowners.</p> <p>Applicants can apply through the local LIHEAP agency in their area. Applicants must complete a form and provide required documents including proof of income.</p>
<b>Typical or Majority of Program Services</b>	Funding supports measures that provide mechanical, building shell, electric, water, or health and safety improvements, as well as client education activities.	While most of the program dollars support heating assistance services, funding also supports other heating and cooling program services, including money to cover heating and cooling costs, crisis assistance, and assistance for weatherization. Program services also include other types of aid, like providing counseling to help residents reduce their home energy needs.
<b>Impact</b>	The program doesn't serve a set number of homes each year. In FY 2019, 31,000 homes were weatherized. On average, weatherization services save \$283 annually in energy costs and decrease medical expenses by \$514 per household.	Because states receive their funding based on yearly congressional appropriations and grantees have discretion on how to use their funding, the impact of the LIHEAP program varies from year to year. In its most recent publicly available report to Congress from FY 2015, LIHEAP reported that 6.2 million households received assistance. In FY 2014, LIHEAP reported that the national average heating benefit was \$301, and the national average cooling benefit was \$336.



# PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In addition to being distributed through many of the same agencies, LIHEAP and WAP also operate under a similar structure. This structure means that there are three decision points or places where program policy is determined, and each point includes decisions that influence how funds can be spent. This section outlines each part of this structure and how each decision point relates to health and safety measures.

## DECISION POINT 1: THE FEDERAL PROGRAM OFFICES

The federal offices issue regulations and guidance regarding how the programs operate and how funds may be used. The offices also review state plans and collect reporting data on the programs' national impact.

- Acronyms:**
- Average cost per unit (ACPU)
  - Savings to investment ratio (SIR)
  - Health and safety (H&S)
  - Energy conservation measures (ECM)

### WAP SPECIFICS

DOE issued a program notice in December 2021 updating requirements for the health and safety plans that grantees submit as part of their state plans. Key points of the guidance include:

- Costs must be reasonable and align with the grantee's annual plan.
- The H&S plan must be updated annually.
- All activities conducted must be necessary to complete weatherization of the home or a necessary safety measure.
- Installations must adhere to applicable codes and standards.
- Specific guidance exists for heating, air conditioning, and ventilation measures, including standards and allowable expenses.
- Grantees are permitted to conduct H&S measures in units that are not slated for weatherization (where no ECMs are installed) but are not allowed to count them as weatherized units in their reporting.

Grantees must establish and justify H&S expenditure limits.

Grantees have two options for including H&S measures in their budget:

1. Create a separate budget category, and therefore, do not include H&S in the ACPU and SIR for each project.
2. Include H&S in the program operations budget, therefore including (and justifying) costs in the ACPU and SIR for each project.

DOE encourages grantees to go with the first option because it provides more flexibility and the grantee has an average H&S expenditure limit rather than a per-unit cap. DOE notes that 15% of program operations is a typical limit, and DOE will conduct additional review on budgets over 15%; but it is not a maximum allowable amount.

### LIHEAP SPECIFICS

The federal office located within HHS has established broad guidelines for the LIHEAP program but otherwise allows state grantees great latitude in operating their LIHEAP programs. This includes allowing grantees to decide the amount and range of benefits, how to provide benefits, and which agency administers the program. Grantees may also decide whether benefits will be provided through payments to the recipients' utility provider or directly to the recipient/household. HHS does require grantees to submit their state plans, which provide details of how their program is operated to the federal office each year.

Some specific requirements or assurances include:

- Typically, only 15% of funding may be used for weatherization. With a waiver, the grantee may spend up to 25% of funds for weatherization activities.
- Grantees must reserve funds for energy crisis assistance.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE POLICY

Like any federal program, there are two primary ways for stakeholders to influence policy. First, federal agencies may publish draft rule changes and accept public comments before finalizing the rule. Second, stakeholders can work with congressional offices to suggest specific funding levels or legislative language for the programs.

More information about advocacy around these programs at the federal level is available from these organizations:

- The National Association of State Community Services Programs (NASCS)
- National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA)

*For a full suite of resources and tools on extreme heat and extreme cold, including information on health impacts, how to protect your home before and during events, and other policy levers and opportunities, visit...*

**[bit.ly/NCHH\\_Heat](https://bit.ly/NCHH_Heat)**

**[bit.ly/NCHH\\_Cold](https://bit.ly/NCHH_Cold)**

## DECISION POINT 2: THE STATE PLANS

Both programs require states to submit a state plan to the appropriate federal agency every year. These publicly available plans detail how states will spend their funds and what services they will provide.

### WAP SPECIFICS OR EXAMPLES

The federal office issues annual program guidelines, usually between November and January.

WAP state plans include a budget, an annual file, and a master file. The annual file includes the subgrantees, production schedule, and transcripts from hearings; the master file includes grantee plans regarding eligibility, priorities, type of work to be done, health and safety, and program management.

Grantees choose when to start their program year. While most states and territories begin their program year on July 1, 13 grantees start on April 1.

### LIHEAP SPECIFICS OR EXAMPLES

Grantees provide their state plans to HHS each year. The state plans provide the agency with details about how the state plan was developed, how the program will operate, and how the program will track what kind of assistance was provided.

In addition to this, the state agency that administers LIHEAP must coordinate with WAP and other low-income programs. Because LIHEAP has elements that include weatherization of homes, grantees are encouraged to follow WAP guidelines. In their state plans, LIHEAP grantees may indicate and specify to what extent they follow WAP guidelines and where they differ (e.g., income threshold, allowable health and safety measures).

## OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE POLICY

Both programs mandate at least some level of opportunity for public input on the development of state plans.

For WAP, DOE urges grantees to meet at the beginning of the planning process with their subgrantee network and their policy advisory council (PAC). Additionally, to ensure public involvement and obtain timely suggestions, DOE requires a formal public hearing on the completed final draft grantee plan application. Grantees must provide at least 10 days' notice of a hearing to prospective subgrantees.

LIHEAP state grantees are also required to conduct public hearings to ensure timely and meaningful public participation in state plan development. This includes public participation in the development of the proposed use and distribution of funds.

These hearings are an opportunity for interested parties to learn about or comment on their state's program. Use the [Weatherization and Intergovernmental Program Office Project Map](#) to identify which agency is responsible for each state's WAP grant and the [LIHEAP Clearinghouse's State Snapshots page](#) to identify which agency manages each state's LIHEAP program (they may or may not be the same agency). The specific hearing schedule will differ from state to state.

## DECISION POINT 3: THE LOCAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

States will issue requests for applications or proposals to identify their subgrantees. The specific process or requirements for this part of the program may differ by state. Often, the agencies that administer WAP and LIHEAP will be the same, or the programs may provide links or referrals to each other.

### WAP SPECIFICS OR EXAMPLES

WAP must be administered locally by a community action agency or other public or private nonprofit entity.

Local WAP providers are usually organized by county and can be identified through that state office's website. Some state agencies may provide a way to apply through their websites; others will require participants to apply directly to the local provider.

### LIHEAP SPECIFICS OR EXAMPLES

State grantees are given a large amount of discretion on how to operate their LIHEAP program. This includes deciding the amount and range of benefits, how benefits are provided, and which agency administers the program. Grantees can decide whether benefits will be provided through payments to the recipient's utility provider or directly to the recipient/household.

Grantees can (and often do) decide whether administration of the program will be delegated to local level agencies. Grantees opting to delegate to local agencies are required to prioritize nonprofit organizations as those administrators.

According to the LIHEAP Clearinghouse, community action agencies in 30 states are involved in administering funds, another 13 states have local programs administered by the counties, and the remaining states are either administered at the state level or by nonprofit groups.

### OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE POLICY

Some of the responsibilities and decisions that fall to local-level administration of these programs include the following:

- Making procedural decisions about intake and application processing.
- Conducting outreach with the community to identify and enroll participants in the programs.
- Partnering with other local programs or groups to coordinate services, referrals, or outreach.

Some local programs may be authorized to prioritize specific services to match their community's needs; others may need to seek approval from a state office when activating new services.

As with other state and federally funded programs, local LIHEAP and WAP programs will likely be only one force in a community. Community members and stakeholders may also influence conversations about the role of and need for these services as part of larger opportunities for public input on community efforts (such as through city council meetings, visioning or strategic planning, mayoral challenges, or other efforts where city leaders and agencies seek public comment).

*For additional resources and technical assistance tools related to other valuable local policy change opportunities, visit...*

**[bit.ly/LLSPtoolbox](https://bit.ly/LLSPtoolbox)**  
**[bit.ly/NCHHcoachIAQ](https://bit.ly/NCHHcoachIAQ)**

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDRESSING RESIDENTIAL THERMAL COMFORT

## WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (WAP)

In the most recent H&S guidelines, DOE defined required, allowable, and prohibited heating, air conditioning, and ventilation measures that can count as H&S activities. Under this guidance, measures related to air conditioners are allowable but not required when occupants meet a grantee's definition of "at risk" (see table below).

When grantees submit their H&S plans to DOE, they indicate whether they are concurring with the guidance or using an alternative guidance; for example, grantees using an alternative guidance could choose to disallow air conditioning measures entirely. And even when grantees are concurring with DOE's guidance, they may add additional requirements related to their own program administration: examples include requiring that other sources of funds be used to pay for specific measures, or a cap on cost for a specific type of purchase/service.

Grantees also provide their definition of "at risk" occupants in the H&S plan. Most grantees consider residents to be "at risk" and therefore qualified for air conditioning measures if they are young children (usually under age five or six), older adults (usually over age 60), disabled, or have a medical note stating that they have a health condition which requires an air conditioner or is exacerbated by heat. States with multiple climate zones may also require that the climate conditions warrant air conditioning.

For all heating and cooling system repairs and replacement, if the measure is both an approved expenditure and has an SIR greater than or equal to 1.0, it should be counted and charged as an ECM. If not, it can be charged as an H&S measure if there is an imminent threat to health and it aligns with the grantee's H&S plan.



To find this information in your state's Health and Safety plan, refer to section 7.1.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY ACTIVITIES BY DOE-DEFINED ALLOWABILITY

REQUIRED*	ALLOWABLE	PROHIBITED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replace, repair, or install primary heating systems.</li><li>• Repair or remove unsafe secondary heating systems/units.</li><li>• Replace unvented combustion space heaters if serving as primary heating source.</li><li>• Install adequate combustion air for all combustion appliances.</li><li>• Install ventilation per ASHRAE 62.2 – 2016 requirements.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replacement of unsafe primary solid fuel heating appliances.</li><li>• Repair or removal of primary and secondary solid fuel heating appliances.</li><li>• Minor repairs on electric space heaters.</li><li>• Repair, replacement, or installation of air conditioning when occupants meet grantee's definition of "at risk."</li><li>• Grantees may use a variance on ASHRAE with approval.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replacing or installing secondary heat sources.</li></ul>

*\*If an activity is listed as required, it means that the home must be deferred from weatherization if the activity cannot be completed to meet the requirements.*



## LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)

There are three sections of state LIHEAP plans that can include measures to provide air conditioning assistance:

- **Cooling assistance.** Section 3 of the state LIHEAP plans covers cooling assistance. Like the majority of LIHEAP services, most of the funds provided under this section are for cash assistance for energy costs—supporting residents in paying for costs of air conditioning. As with the rest of the program, states may set different or additional eligibility criteria depending on priorities and community need.

However, in addition to the energy costs, states can choose to provide other forms of cooling assistance (referred to as “in-kind” benefits), such as purchasing and distributing fans or air conditioners. Information about whether a state supports these benefits is available under question 3.7 of the state plan: *Do you provide in-kind (e.g., fans, air conditioners) and/or other forms of benefits?* The administration of these in-kind benefits is frequently left to the local program offices.

- **Crisis assistance.** Section 4 of the state LIHEAP plans covers crisis assistance, providing services specifically to residents who need immediate help, usually due to a disconnection notice or system failure. States can choose to fund cooling as well as heating under this section. Crisis funds are separated into summer, winter, and year-round services.

As with the cooling assistance section, states can choose to provide the same type of in-kind benefits through the crisis assistance section. Question 4.13 of the state plan indicates whether states offer these benefits.

Additionally, states can choose to support equipment repair or replacement through the crisis assistance section. In question 4.14 of the state plan, states indicate whether they fund any equipment work and then fill out checkboxes for allowed services, two of which are *cooling system repair* and *cooling system replacement*.

- **Weatherization.** As described above, states can use a portion of their LIHEAP funds to support weatherization work, including repair and replacement of air conditioning. Section 5 of the state LIHEAP plans covers weatherization, including whether states are transferring the funds to a different weatherization program. Question 5.11 allows states to indicate what services LIHEAP funds may be used for, including *cooling system modifications/repair* and *cooling system replacement*.

LIHEAP COOLING/ AIR CONDITIONING OPTIONS	LIHEAP GRANTEES USING THIS OPTION
Cooling Assistance	<b>30</b> provide cooling assistance, 23 do not.
Cooling Assistance In-Kind Benefits	<b>15</b> provide some in-kind benefit(s) related to cooling; 37 do not.
Crisis Assistance In-Kind Benefits	<b>18</b> provide some in-kind benefit(s) related to cooling; 35 do not.
Crisis Assistance Equipment Repair and/or Replacement	<b>21</b> repair and/or replace equipment (including three that only offer repair); 32 do not.
Weatherization Repair and/or Replacement	<b>38</b> allow LIHEAP funds to be used for cooling systems through weatherization; 14 do not.

The table on the right summarizes how many grantees (encompassing 50 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories) are using the various LIHEAP cooling assistance/air conditioning options. This analysis was done using the 2022 state plans available [from the LIHEAP website](#).

Some examples of state plan language that provides for some or several of these services:

*Fans are distributed through community agencies with LIHEAP reimbursement for fans purchased. Expenditures for fans are included in the cooling assistance totals. Receipt of a fan does not qualify a household for cooling assistance. LIHEAP funds are utilized to provide financial assistance to households meeting the cooling assistance and other eligibility requirements to purchase window air*

conditioning units. In some instances, financial assistance is provided for a portable air conditioner rather than a stationary window air conditioner. DHHS provides financial assistance to eligible households to assist with central air conditioner (cooling system) repair and replacement up to \$750. If extenuating circumstances exist, DHHS may exceed the \$750 maximum. [Nebraska state plan]

North Dakota cooling program (not regularly implemented) does not pay a household's cooling costs. Instead, a LIHEAP-eligible household may qualify for a cooling device (an air conditioner or a fan, as the need dictates) or repair on an existing cooling device, if a member of the household is elderly or has a documented medical need. The household need not be responsible for paying heating costs so tenants in subsidized housing may qualify. [North Dakota state plan]

Non-vulnerable Households may receive service and repair of existing heating and cooling units not to exceed \$7,500 if the Household is experiencing crisis conditions. Vulnerable Households that include at least one member that is Elderly, Disabled, or a Child age 5 or younger, may receive service and repair of existing heating and cooling units not to exceed \$7,500. All Households experiencing a Life-Threatening Crisis may be eligible to receive portable air conditioning/ evaporative coolers and heating units (portable electric heaters are allowable only as a last resort). [Texas state plan]

Each agency determines the needs of their clients and provides blankets, space heaters, fans, window units, and other energy saving tools such as caulking and film for windows. [Utah state plan]

\$150.00 for the purchase of an electric fan, when medically required and certified. \$1,000.00 for the purchase of Energy Star air conditioner unit, when medically required and certified. [Puerto Rico state plan]

## DELIVERING COOLING BENEFITS: PROGRAM EXAMPLES AND SUCCESSES

The following programs shared information about the benefits they provide through LIHEAP, frequent barriers they encounter, and successful strategies or lessons learned as they have increased or improved their programs.

### Arizona

**Cooling and in-kind services provided:** Arizona offers cooling benefits year-round through both the cooling and crisis programs. In life-threatening situations, they may provide residents with fans or portable air conditioning units, which can be delivered faster than weatherization services to repair air conditioning.

**Challenges and barriers noted:** Arizona includes several climate zones. In some traditionally cooler parts of the state, landlords are not required to provide air conditioning, but the program is hearing more requests for portable air conditioning units from area residents as temperatures rise. The state has also seen an increase in demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The needs of two populations in particular contributed to this increase: First, the state has many older part-time residents who usually travel home to the Northeast or Midwest in the summer but ended up staying in Arizona through 2020; second, children staying home from school created higher energy demands on families.

**Successful strategies and lessons learned:** Early intervention is key. The state observes that many older adults who live alone have air conditioning installed in their homes but don't turn it on or only turn it on when guests visit. The state has focused on outreach to this population to communicate the health risks of heat, especially during rising temperatures, and started a senior recertification program in 2018 that works to ensure that this population is in a stable situation with their utilities going into the summer, so they won't be at risk of shutoffs during the warmest part of the year. The state also recommends storing heaters and coolers in advance so that they're easily distributed to residents in crisis.

## District of Columbia

**Cooling and in-kind services provided:** DC provides year-round crisis assistance. They also have an emergency program, which will check to see if your appliances work and if there is a carbon monoxide leak. New or repaired appliances will be installed within three days. Ideally, appliances will be converted to electric, but that is often not possible. Most appliances repaired or replaced through this program are central heating and cooling. DC has also operated a program to provide window air conditioning units to seniors in the past.

**Challenges and barriers noted:** The program can provide assistance to renters but servicing multifamily buildings can be challenging because the building must be at least 66% low-income. They usually refer tenants in multifamily buildings to other DC renter's assistance services. Another barrier is income eligibility (which is currently set at 60% AMI); due to high housing costs in DC, this cutoff can leave out people who are struggling to cover costs and could benefit from these services.

**Successful strategies and lessons learned:** DC is working to simplify and streamline all their application and enrollment processes, so that there is only one application for residents and referrals and so coordination among different programs is easier behind the scenes.

## Missouri

**Cooling and in-kind services provided:** Starting this program year, Missouri has expanded their crisis program to year-round (so both heating and cooling will be available all year, rather than restricted to winter and summer, respectively), increased benefit amounts, and increased income eligibility. The crisis program covers both heating and cooling. This reflects past experience with local agencies requesting to provide cooling benefits before the cooling season had started during times of unseasonably warm weather.

**Challenges and barriers noted:** Prior to increasing benefits (doubling the maximum amounts available), funding was the biggest challenge. They had encountered people with utility bills that were greater than the previous caps, especially since pandemic moratoria had ended.

**Successful strategies and lessons learned:** In addition to increasing benefits and extending the crisis program year-round, the state has worked to streamline the application process and made it easy to read and complete online. They also changed their policy to only require a self-attestation for crisis funding; previously, residents had to provide documentation of a disconnection, but now are just able to state that they are experiencing a crisis situation. This has increased the number of people the program has been able to help. The state also maintains a working group of local agencies that administer their programs, which is an effective way to receive feedback from those groups.

## Washington

**Cooling and in-kind services provided:** Washington state will purchase and provide air conditioning units for residents through the crisis program. Since October 2021, they have provided roughly 400 units. Clients must only provide a signed statement requesting or confirming the need for the service.

**Challenges and barriers noted:** For renters, the state can only provide portable air conditioning units, so they avoid installing a unit that would need to stay behind when renters move. Homeowners can receive either a portable or window-mount unit.

**Successful strategies and lessons learned:** The state used established vendor agreements to purchase and provide the air conditioning units when initiating service.

# MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK: POLICY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Having access to cool air, most critically during extreme heat waves, is a healthy homes issue. It is also an issue that impacts multiple different outcomes: health, housing and utility affordability, and energy usage. The interventions and programs discussed in this brief are only part of the picture. To enshrine air conditioning as an essential need and required component of a healthy home, multiple different policy levers need to be in place, and barriers need to be approached systemically.

The following outline of the escalating challenges to air conditioning access and suggested tools or approaches to address them can help advocates, programs, and policymakers as they consider needs and opportunities in their community or nationally.

**Challenge:** Is there knowledge of programs that offer air conditioning?

**Potential Solutions:** Programs can perform targeted outreach and form close partnerships with local organizations.

**Challenge:** Is there a requirement that landlords must provide air conditioning?

**Potential Solutions:** Local housing codes could require that residences be able to maintain indoor temperatures below a maximum limit. Many codes already include a minimum limit (ensuring that homes cannot get too cold). For example, NCHH's [National Healthy Housing Standard](#) model code includes both a minimum and maximum temperature. Some localities that have adopted these requirements include [Dallas, TX](#) (maximum temperature 85 degrees), [Phoenix, Tempe, and Tuscon, AZ](#) (maximum temperature 82 degrees or 86 degrees if using evaporative cooling), and [Montgomery County, MD](#) (maximum temperature 80 degrees). See also the next section, "Further Resources."

**Challenge:** Are there barriers to access programs that provide air conditioning?

**Potential Solutions:** Currently, most WAP programs in the states that address air conditioning limit their services to certain populations. At a state level, states have some freedom to define their "at risk" populations and could expand these definitions; at a national level, DOE could adjust program regulations to remove the "at risk" requirement or even move air conditioning from an allowable to a required element. The simplified self-attestation model for crisis situations used by the Missouri and Washington LIHEAP programs also works to address this barrier.

Income eligibility requirements can also deter participation. Individual programs could work to streamline application paperwork, and national programs can continue to align eligibility requirements.

**Challenge:** Once an air conditioner is installed, is it maintained and working properly? Can the household afford to run it?

**Potential Solutions:** LIHEAP and other utility assistance programs can continue to expand services to offer cooling assistance and crisis benefits year-round, including equipment repair and replacement.

More generally, alignment and coordination energy efficiency and clean energy efforts will help with addressing this challenge.

**Challenge:** If the household uses the air conditioning and then can't afford to pay their electricity bill, can their electricity be shut off?

**Potential Solutions:** Many states have winter moratoria on energy shutoffs. These can be expanded to cover periods of the year when air conditioning is essential.

Increased funding to support this work is needed to address many of these challenges and expand the programs to meet the total need. Because so much of this work is driven by the LIHEAP and WAP programs, it's important that these programs be fully funded. While this brief focuses on cooling, it's important to note that full funding for these programs and supports means enough funding to provide **both** heating and cooling assistance to those who need it.

In addition to annual appropriations, one or both programs have received supplemental funding in 2020-2021 from the CARES Act, the American Rescue Plan, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (often referred to as the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law”), allowing states to serve an increased need and expand services.

Beyond the federal funding, some states have established supplemental programs and funding sources to provide weatherization and energy assistance. “Bolstering Federal Energy Assistance and Weatherization with State Clean Energy Programs,” published by the National Conference of State Legislatures<sup>ii</sup>, provides an overview of these programs. Some of the funding sources include mandatory utility funding, rates and surcharges, and voluntary contributions from taxpayers. At least 16 states have passed laws to provide this funding.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### FEDERAL PROGRAMS

#### DOE’s Weatherization Assistance Program

- [State weatherization contacts](#)
- [State project map and descriptions](#) (includes both WAP and the State Energy Program)

#### LIHEAP Clearinghouse

- [State Snapshots](#)
- [State and Territory Plans](#)
- [Tribal Programs](#)

#### NASCSP Weatherization Publications

This resource includes annual funding surveys, reports, and fact sheets.

#### National Energy Assistance Directors Association

### CODES

#### Housing Code Tools

#### National Healthy Housing Standard

#### Extreme Heat: Policy Levers and Actions

This resource includes a discussion of the thermal control measures in the National Healthy Housing Standard that relate to high heat.

#### Green Building Code/Standards and Systems: Comparison

This comparison of green building codes to the National Healthy Housing Standard includes measures related to thermal comfort, including minimum and maximum temperatures.

---

<sup>ii</sup>Shields, L. (2021, September 23). *Bolstering federal energy assistance and weatherization with state clean energy programs*. Retrieved from the National Conference of State Legislatures website: <https://www.ncsl.org/energy/bolstering-federal-energy-assistance-and-weatherization-with-state-clean-energy-programs>



## APPENDIX A: HOW GRANTEES USE LIHEAP — TYPE OF COOLING ASSISTANCE

This table summarizes how many grantees (encompassing 50 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories) are using the various LIHEAP cooling assistance/air conditioning options. This analysis was performed using the [2022 state plans available from the LIHEAP website](#).

State	State has a LIHEAP cooling assistance program (Section 3)	State offers kind benefits via cooling assistance program (3.7)	State offers kind benefits via crisis program (4.13)	State supports equipment repair/replacement via crisis program (4.14)	State funds cooling equipment via transfer to Wx program (5.11)
	Yes/No	Yes/No and descriptive text	Yes/No and descriptive text	Yes/No and checkboxes: cooling system repair, cooling system replacement	Checkboxes: cooling system modifications/repair, cooling system replacement, other
<b>Total Yes</b> ●	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Total No</b> –	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>
Alabama	●	–	●	● (cooling system repair only)	●
Alaska	–	–	–	–	–
Arizona	●	●	●	–	●
Arkansas	●	●	–	–	●
California	●	–	●	●	●
Colorado	–	–	–	–	–
Connecticut	●	–	–	–	● (other only)
Delaware	●	●	●	●	–
District of Columbia	●	●	●	●	●
Florida	●	–	●	●	●
Georgia	●	–	–	–	●
Hawaii	●	–	–	–	●
Idaho	–	–	–	–	●
Illinois	–	–	–	● (cooling system repair only)	●
Indiana	●	–	–	–	●
Iowa	–	–	–	●	–
Kansas	–	–	–	–	●
Kentucky	●	●	–	–	●
Louisiana	–	–	–	●	●
Maine	–	–	–	–	–
Maryland	●	–	–	●	●

State	State has a LIHEAP cooling assistance program (Section 3)	State offers kind benefits via cooling assistance program (3.7)	State offers kind benefits via crisis program (4.13)	State supports equipment repair/replacement via crisis program (4.14)	State funds cooling equipment via transfer to Wx program (5.11)
	Yes/No	Yes/No and descriptive text	Yes/No and descriptive text	Yes/No and checkboxes: cooling system repair, cooling system replacement	Checkboxes: cooling system modifications/repair, cooling system replacement, other
Massachusetts	–	–	–	–	–
Michigan	–	–	–	–	–
Minnesota	–	–	–	–	●
Mississippi	●	●	●	●	●
Missouri	–	–	●	●	●
Montana	–	–	●	●	–
Nebraska	●	●	–	–	●
Nevada	–	–	–	–	●
New Hampshire	–	–	–	–	●
New Jersey	●	–	–	–	●
New Mexico	●	–	–	–	●
New York	●	●	–	–	–
North Carolina	●	–	–	–	●
North Dakota	●	●	–	●	●
Ohio	–	–	●	●	●
Oklahoma	●	●	–	–	●
Oregon	●	●	●	●	● (other only)
Pennsylvania	–	–	–	–	–
Rhode Island	–	–	–	–	–
South Carolina	●	–	●	● (cooling system repair only)	●
South Dakota	–	–	–	–	–
Tennessee	●	●	●	–	●
Texas	●	●	●	●	●
Utah	●	●	●	●	●
Vermont	–	–	–	–	–
Virginia	●	–	–	–	●
Washington	–	–	●	●	●
West Virginia	●	–	–	●	●
Wisconsin	–	–	–	–	–
Wyoming	–	–	–	–	● (modifications/repairs only)
Northern Mariana Islands	●	●	●	●	●
Puerto Rico	●	–	●	–	●