

Frequently Asked Questions: Low-Income Household Water Assistance (LIHWA) Program

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance (LIHWA) Program is a temporary federal assistance program that provides low-income Oregonians with assistance for their drinking water and wastewater service charges. The U.S. Health & Human Services' Office of Community Services (OCS), who funds this program, has designated Oregon Housing & Community Services (OHCS) as the grantee for the State of Oregon. The Community Action Agency (CAA) network will administer the program at the local level.

Topic	Question	Answer
Application Process	Can a household apply for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance (LIHWA) Program more than once?	No, this temporary funding allows for households to receive one LIHWA payment within this funding period. However, if households are experiencing a crisis situation (see "How do households qualify for crisis payments"), they should contact their local Community Action Agency (CAA) office to see if they qualify for additional assistance.
Application Process	Can a household apply for LIHWA and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assistance at the same time?	It is possible to qualify for both programs at the same time, but this is dependent upon the local CAA's application process and availability of funding. Eligibility requirements of each program must be met for households to qualify for assistance, including provisions of required documentation.
Application Process	Can households apply for LIHWA assistance regardless of citizenship or residency status?	The income limit for household size is based on the total number of household members with proof of valid Social Security numbers. At least one household member must have a valid Social Security number to qualify for the LIHWA Program, but all household members are encouraged to provide proof.
Application Process	How do households verify their application status?	Each CAA have its own application process specific to the service territory. Households should refer to their local CAAs for application process and verification.
Application Process	How does someone apply for water assistance through the LIHWA Program?	Households in need of water assistance can apply with their local CAA office. Households can locate their local CAAs by referring to the LIHWA website.
Application Process	How long will water assistance through the LIHWA Program be available?	The CAAs have through September 30, 2023, to accept applications. Once funding is exhausted, however, CAAs will no longer be able to accept additional applications for the LIHWA Program.
Application Process	If a household is going to be disconnected from water service, how can LIHWA assistance help?	Household need to apply for LIHWA assistance with their local CAA. The CAA would inform the household of any required documents or processes to determine eligibility. Once the household is eligible, the CAA would then contact the utility with commitment of the LIHWA assistance payment. This point of contact and commitment of payment serves to avert the disconnection or reconnection of services. If there are other documents or processes required, the CAA would inform the household.
Application Process	What documents should households prepare for their LIHWA application?	At a minimum, households should be prepared with social security cards or numbers for all household members, valid form of identification for all adults, their most recent water and wastewater utility bill(s), and proof of income received in the last 30 days or last calendar month. CAAs may have additional documentation required. Households should contact their local CAAs for more information.

Application Process	When will water assistance through the LIHWA Program become available?	Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) anticipates the LIHWA Program to be live sometime in January 2022. As this is a new program, timelines may change and the start date may vary between CAAs.
Eligibility	Are households eligible for LIHWA assistance if: 1) they have <i>their own</i> water and wastewater meter, and 2) they pay their <i>landlord</i> for services?	These households should apply with their local CAAs for LIHWA assistance. The CAA will require a landlord authorization form (see "What is a landlord authorization") to access the utility account and verify arrearages. An adult member of the household must be listed on the water and wastewater bill(s).
Eligibility	Are households eligible for LIHWA assistance if: 1) they have <i>their own</i> water and wastewater meter, and 2) they pay the <i>utility</i> directly for services?	Yes, these households should apply with their local CAAs for LIHWA assistance. An adult member of the household must be listed on the water and wastewater bill(s).
Eligibility	Are households eligible for LIHWA assistance if: 1) they <i>share</i> a water and wastewater meter, and 2) they pay their <i>landlords</i> for services?	Households should apply through their local CAA. The CAA will require a landlord authorization form to access the utility account and verify arrearages. Households will be considered on a proportionate share basis to determine coverage of arrearages.
Eligibility	Are there any sources of income that are counted towards LIHEAP eligibility but not for LIHWA eligibility?	Yes, there is one source of income that are excluded from countable income with the LIHWA Program, which is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
Eligibility	Can CAAs use express eligibility or enrollment to determine household eligibility for the LIHWA Program?	If the same household received LIHEAP within the same program year, the CAA may automatically qualify that household for LIHWA. Express enrollment for other programs is not allowed.
Eligibility	Can households receive LIHWA assistance for separate water and wastewater bills?	Yes, the LIHWA Program can apply to both water and sewer bills, whether they are combined through one utility or separate through two. This also applies when households have only one bill because of either a well for their drinking water or a septic tank for their sewage.
Eligibility	Do households have to be disconnected or past due to receive LIHWA assistance?	No, households may apply for LIHWA assistance when they have current standing with their water and wastewater utilities.
Eligibility	Do households need to be impacted by COVID to receive LIHWA assistance?	No, households do not need to be impacted by COVID to qualify for LIHWA assistance. However, households may be able to qualify for additional assistance if in crisis, which may include a COVID impact.
Eligibility	Does affiliation with an Oregon Tribe affect a household's eligibility for the LIHWA Program?	There are some Oregon Tribes who have received dedicated LIHWA assistance. Households with member(s) of affiliation with an Oregon Tribe should apply to their local CAA to determine eligibility for LIHWA assistance.
Eligibility	How do households determine if their utilities are eligible for the program?	There is a list of all eligible utilities organized by CAA posted on the LIHWA website. Households are recommended to apply for LIHWA assistance through their local CAA.
Eligibility	How do households know if they are able to qualify for LIHWA assistance?	Households that are low-income and pay a utility or their landlord for water and wastewater services are encouraged to apply. Households who are on subsidized rent and have water and sewer costs included in rent are not eligible for assistance, because they do not have a demonstrated water burden.

Eligibility	How does receipt of LIHWA assistance affect other forms of household assistance (food stamps, rent assistance)?	Receiving LIHWA assistance will not affect previous, current, or future enrollment in any other assistance or utility program.
Eligibility	If a household has infrastructure issues (such as broken pipes) that are preventing the utility from reconnecting service, is the household still eligible for LIHWA Program assistance?	Households may still be eligible for LIHWA assistance in these cases. Households experiencing infrastructure issues (such as broken pipes) are encouraged to reach out to their local CAA to determine if services or a referral of services are available for such repairs.
Eligibility	What is the income eligibility for the LIHWA Program?	Household gross income must be at or below 60% State Median Income (SMI).
Payment	Can LIHWA assistance be applied toward retroactive water and wastewater charges?	Yes, LIHWA assistance can apply to all arrearages and current charges for water and wastewater services.
Payment	Can LIHWA assistance be used on an account that was sent to collections?	If the charges for a water or wastewater account are maintained by an internal collections department with the utility, then LIHWA assistance may be applied to that account. If the charges were sent to a collections agency outside of the utility, LIHWA assistance may not be applied to that account.
Payment	Can LIHWA assistance be used to place a deposit on an account?	Yes, LIHWA assistance can pay for the deposit on water and wastewater accounts.
Payment	Do households have to pay back LIHWA assistance at any point?	No, all payments are considered gifts or grants.
Payment	How can households cover other charges on the water and wastewater bill that LIHWA assistance cannot cover?	OHCS recommends CAAs to work with utilities and eligible households to coordinate payment arrangements on those households' accounts to cover other charges. If this is not possible, households may seek other CAA or community assistance programs to cover those charges.
Payment	How do households qualify for crisis payments?	Crisis situations include, but are not limited to, events or conditions leading to water or wastewater disconnection, pending disconnection, or when disconnection will result in a life-threatening situation. CAAs determine a household's eligibility for crisis payment on a case-by-case situation.
Payment	How much LIHWA assistance can a household receive?	Eligible households may receive standard assistance payments specific to their individual need between a floor (or minimum) of \$100 and a ceiling (or maximum) of \$1,000. Households experiencing crisis (see "How to households qualify for crisis payments") may qualify for an additional \$100 to \$1,000 assistance payment, depending on individual need.
Payment	What are examples of eligible costs and ineligible costs on water and wastewater bills?	Eligible costs include, but are not limited to, charges for water and wastewater, stormwater, reconnection and late fees, and bonds. Ineligible costs include, but are not limited to, charges for electricity or heat, garbage, streetlights, police and fire services and bonds, administration, irrigation, and road construction or maintenance.

Payment	What happens to remaining credit from LIHWA assistance if households move into the service territory of another utility?	CAAs are encouraged to either pay utility accounts to current or, if the account is already current, place a small credit on the account. If a credit still remains and a household member is the account holder, a rebate will be authorized to the household. If the landlord is the account holder, the landlord must pay the credit to the household (stipulated in the landlord authorization).
Payment	Who does the CAA pay when a household qualifies for LIHWA assistance?	CAAs pay the water or wastewater utility directly. Households do not receive direct payments from the CAAs.
Vendor Agreements	As utility information is not considered public record, how can utilities speak with CAAs on behalf of households?	The vendor agreements between the CAAs and utilities grant the CAAs the ability to speak with the utilities on behalf of households in order to acquire account information and provide assistance. Additionally, households sign a LIHWA Program disclaimer to allow the CAAs to speak with the utilities. If the account holder is a landlord, the household also provides a landlord authorization form.
Vendor Agreements	Can utilities provide feedback and modify the vendor agreements to fit their needs?	As the LIHWA Program is an emergency assistance program for low-income households, OHCS vetted the vendor agreement through the Oregon Department of Justice to pare it down while meeting legal requirements. If utilities continue to face hardship, they are asked to seek guidance from OHCS.
Vendor Agreements	How can households obtain water and wastewater assistance if their utility has not signed a vendor agreement with the CAA?	CAAs and utilities should work closely together to execute vendor agreements. However, if this is not possible, households may be referred to other CAA assistance programs for possible water assistance.
Vendor Agreements	How do CAAs ensure LIHWA commitments and payments will reconnect or avert disconnection for households?	The vendor agreement enforces action by the utility to apply the LIHWA commitment in lieu of payment, as it is anticipated.
Vendor Agreements	How long after CAAs make a commitment on behalf of a household will the utilities receive payment?	CAAs will send a bulk payment with an itemized authorization list (household name, account number, and payment amount) at a frequency agreed upon between the service provider and utility, which is no more than 45 days from commitment.
Vendor Agreements	Is there anything that utilities can do to prepare prior to receiving the vendor agreement?	OHCS recommends utilities to begin discussions with their boards or councils who approve legal documents and agreements.
Vendor Agreements	What are vendor agreements and why are they required for LIHWA Program participation?	Vendor agreements serve as the legal agreement required for CAAs to make LIHWA payments to utilities on behalf of their customers. In combination with the LIHWA Program disclaimer, they allow utilities to release customer information to the CAAs, build in protections for all those involved, and assure payments are applied to accounts.
Vendor Agreements	What is the procedure for water and wastewater utilities that provide services in multiple counties?	If those utilities provide services in counties assisted by one CAA, then those utilities must have one vendor agreement in place. If those utilities provide services in counties assisted by two or more CAAs, then those utilities must have one vendor agreement for each CAA.
Vendor Agreements	Who initiates the vendor agreement execution process: the CAAs or the utilities?	OHCS will provide CAAs with vendor agreements, who will then initiate the execution process (i.e., contact and signatures) with the utilities.
Landlord Authorization	What is a landlord authorization?	A landlord authorization is a release between the CAAs and landlords that allows the CAA to speak with the landlord's utility. It also informs the landlord of the LIHWA assistance payment being applied for a specific property or park.

Landlord Authorization	What is the benefit to landlords to sign the landlord authorization form?	Signing the landlord authorization form enables the CAAs to access the landlord's water or wastewater utility account and make a payment on account arrearages on behalf of eligible households.
Landlord Authorization	What should households do if their landlords refuse to sign the landlord authorization?	OHCS understands that this barrier is a problem for this temporary funding, because CAAs are unable to award direct payments to households. Households who are unable to acquire a signed landlord authorization are recommended to seek other CAA or community assistance.
General Program and Administration	As the LIHWA Program extends over two program years, will the funding reflect this in two different program years for eligibility purposes?	No. For accounting purposes if funds remain at the end of the first program year, OPUS documentation may indicate a second stage of funding.
General Program and Administration	Do CAAs need to track both funding allocations of the LIHWA Program separately?	Yes, the CAAs must track the funds separately so that OHCS can meet the requirements for federal reporting.
General Program and Administration	How can CAAs streamline the application process for LIHWA?	Because LIHEAP and LIHWA require very similar documentation, the application processes are parallel and require little modification in OPUS data entry. CAAs may also use receipt of LIHEAP in the same program year for the same household as express enrollment or eligibility.
General Program and Administration	How did OHCS determine the standard payment range?	Oregon does not have an existing statewide water assistance program, so OHCS engaged early with water and wastewater utilities as well as other in-house programs to obtain data. The range is based off of requests for water assistance submitted through Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program (OERAP).
General Program and Administration	How much funding will CAAs have available to administer the program, conduct outreach, and make client payments?	OHCS will allocate CAAs 10% of their budget for administration for costs related to organizational salaries, accounting, grants management, and reporting. An additional 10% will be dedicated for outreach for costs related to coordination with community responsive organizations, advertisement, eligibility determination, and application notification processes. The remaining 80% will be dedicated to vendor payments on behalf of their eligible households.
General Program and Administration	What are the target populations and priorities of the LIHWA Program?	The target population is low-income households with high water burdens. Priorities include, but are not limited to, water and wastewater service continuity through household reconnections, averting disconnections, and paying arrearages. Provision of assistance is based on individual CAA procedures and policy.
General Program and Administration	What database will OHCS implement for data entry?	OHCS plans to administer LIHWA through OPUS, which is our database that already houses information for our energy assistance and weatherization programs.
General Program and Administration	What is the difference between LIHWA and the LIHEAP?	LIHWA provides water and wastewater assistance, does not count TANF as income, and cannot make direct payments to clients. LIHEAP provides home energy (heating, cooling, electricity, etc.) assistance, counts TANF as income, and may make direct payments to clients who qualify.