

Heating Assistance Program Fee Agent Manual



**State of Alaska
Heating Assistance Program
Division of Public Assistance
Department of Health & Social Services**

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Heating Assistance Program Fee Agent Manual

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Heating Assistance Program Fee Agent Manual

Program Overview

The Heating Assistance Program (HAP) administers the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for households with income up to 150% of the poverty income guidelines and the state-funded Alaska Affordable Heating Program (AKAHP) for households with income between 151% and 225% of the poverty income guidelines, and in some areas, by Indian Tribal Organizations. The same application is used for both programs. The higher income guidelines have been printed on the application. This manual contains policies and procedures of the state-administered heating assistance programs only.

Financial assistance is provided by making a payment or an extension of credit to home heating and electric suppliers on behalf of eligible customers. A one-time direct payment is made to eligible applicants whose heat is included in their rent, or whose fuel is provided by a vendor that does not participate in the program.

The Heating Assistance Program pre-mailed application forms for the 2015-2016 season in August to households with elderly and/or disabled members that received heating assistance last year. Applicants will not have to worry about which program they need to apply for. Eligibility staff will make the determination after they have reviewed and processed the application.

The program begins issuing grants on November 1 of each year.

Applications must be postmarked or received in a Public Assistance office by April 30 to be considered for a heating assistance grant. Information received on pended cases will be accepted after the close of the program year, as long as it is received within the pending time frame.

Eligibility and Benefits

Eligibility for heating assistance and benefit amounts are based on an “energy burden” point system that considers household size and income, fuel costs in the area and type of housing. A household must have a minimum of 2.0 heating cost points to qualify. LIHEAP qualifying income is limited to 150% of the federal poverty guidelines for Alaska. The state-funded program AKAHP is designed to provide benefits to Alaska residents with income from 151% to 225% of the poverty income guidelines. The maximum qualifying income is listed on the Heating Assistance Program application form.

Households seeking heating assistance must contain an Alaska resident, submit a current application and demonstrate that they pay for home heat. They do not have to have overdue bills to qualify.

Homeowners and renters (including those who pay for heating costs as a portion of their rent) may apply. However, renters that participate in a housing subsidy program that pays all home heating costs are not eligible.

Ineligible Households

A household is NOT ELIGIBLE to participate in the heating assistance program if they:

1. are eligible for or have received LIHEAP or State heating benefits from an Indian tribal organization;
2. reside in a crisis center, hotel, motel, tent, or other shelter normally intended for temporary occupancy, and
 - has resided there for less than 60 consecutive days before the date of signature; and
 - is not seeking a utility deposit

3. reside in a hospital, nursing home, state pioneer home, or other public or private institution to receive treatment for a mental or physical illness, student dormitory, correctional facility, or on a military base; or
4. reside in subsidized rental housing and have no direct home heating costs.

Confidentiality

Individuals applying for and receiving heating assistance have the right to keep this information confidential. All information provided by an applicant or that you gather about an applicant must remain confidential. Discussing a case with a home heating vendor in order to complete a determination is acceptable. Discussing a case with family or friends is not acceptable. You must also be careful to avoid leaving applicant information where it can be seen by others.

You may not give any information to an applicant's landlord, or request information from a landlord, unless the applicant authorizes it in writing or has listed the landlord as a collateral contact. People may not want their landlords to know that they have applied for heating assistance and we need to respect their privacy.

It is against the law to use Heating Assistance Program client information for commercial, personal or political purposes; or make information available for legal or other proceedings (except in connection with enforcement for public assistance programs).

Non-Discrimination

You may not discriminate against or deny Heating Assistance Program benefits to any individual on the basis of race, sex, color, religious creed, political beliefs, national origin or physical ability.

Income

The Heating Assistance Program considers total gross household income, received in the calendar month prior to the month in which the application was signed, to determine eligibility and benefit amounts. For seasonal income, a monthly average of the gross income for the past 12 months is used to determine eligibility. For self-employment, a monthly average of the net income for the past 12 months, after business expenses are deducted, is used to determine eligibility. Income of students under 18 who are not the head of household is not considered.

The Heating Assistance Program considers all income received during the entire month prior to the date of application. Expenses are not taken into account unless the applicant is self-employed. For example, if an applicant signs an application any time in November, that applicant's eligibility will be determined based on the total gross income of the household for the month of October.

An applicant may currently be unemployed, but if he or she was paid wages in the prior month, those wages will be counted. Consequently, it may be to an applicant's advantage to wait to apply if they have recently become unemployed. Please explain to applicants that the program accepts applications between September and April 30, and help them decide the best time to submit their application.

You may have to help applicants remember the sources of all income for the prior month. In addition, verification of all income received by all household members during the entire month must be provided by the applicant.

Heating Assistance Requests

There are three levels of assistance that you can provide to those who come to you for information or help in applying for heating assistance:

1. giving out application forms,
2. helping applicants complete the application, and
3. assisting with emergency service requests.

The responsibility for each level of service is explained below.

Giving Out Application Forms and Applicant Interview

Step	Fee Agent Responsibility:
1.	Provide a current year HAP application form upon request.
2.	Applicants may mail their heating assistance applications to Juneau without help from a Fee Agent.
3.	Fee Agents should never tell applicants that a Fee Agent must review and sign off on their application for it to be accepted.
4.	The HAP does not pay Fee Agents for handing out HAP application forms.
5.	Complete and return the Fee Agent Interview Report along with the Heating Assistance Program application and supporting documents.

Helping Applicants Complete the Application

Step	Fee Agent Responsibility:
1.	Ask the applicant if this is the first time they have applied for heating assistance this winter. If they are not sure, call the Information Hotline (see instructions under Information Hotline in this manual).
2.	If they have already applied, advise them of the status of their case. If they are now in an emergency situation, skip to Step 1 in Processing Emergency Service Requests. (see page 6)
3.	If the applicant has not yet applied this season, assist the applicant as needed. Encourage them to fill out as much of the form themselves as possible. However, do not hesitate to assist anyone that is unable to complete the application on his own.
4.	Review the application to be sure that each question has been answered. An incomplete application will delay benefits.
5.	Be sure the person listed as the head-of-household, on page 1, question #2 of the application, signs the application and provides proof of identity (Driver's license, SSA card, passport, etc).
6.	Enclose income verification for all household members and advise applicant of their responsibility to provide missing verification.
7.	Enclose copies of most recent heat and electric bills or advise applicant to provide missing bills. Benefits will not be issued without copies of heat and electric bills.
8.	Enclose copies of most recent monthly rent receipt or rental agreement

	or advise applicant to provide the missing information.
9.	Sign and print your name at the bottom of page 5, date it, and print your daytime phone number, if available. Fill out and mail the Fee Agent Monthly Billing Report Form to the Heating Assistance office once a month.
10.	Record the client's name and the date on your HAP Fee Agent Billing Report. Fee Agents will be paid \$15 for each completed application form.
11.	Send completed applications directly to the Heating Assistance Program office, or return it to the applicant to mail.

Processing Emergency Service Requests During November 1 through April 30 (*previously defined as Expedited Services)

Step	Responsibilities:
1.	If the applicant has already mailed the application to Juneau call HAP at 1-800-470-3058 . Select option 4 for emergency application processing. Be prepared to leave a phone message with the applicant's name, social security number, a description of the emergency, and the amount of money needed to avoid disconnection or obtain fuel.
2.	If the applicant has not yet applied this season, assist them as described in "Helping Applicants Complete the Application" steps 1-11.
3.	Does the household appear to meet the expedite criteria? If not, you should tell them if there is expedite criteria they don't appear to meet, and that HAP is unlikely to expedite their application.
4.	Emergency Service Requirements - <u>all</u> must be met <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant must request emergency service. • The household's gross income must be less than the household's shelter cost. Shelter cost means the sum of the household's regular monthly rent or mortgage obligation for the shelter it currently occupies, the cost of 30 days of heating fuel or the amount of the current natural gas utility bill, and the amount of the current electric bill. • The applicant has suffered, or will suffer within 48 hours, termination of fuel or home heating-related utility services; and • The applicant has submitted a complete, verified and signed application. This includes complete income verification; documentation of the amount owed for the heat or electric

	disconnect; and a copy of the most recent monthly rent or mortgage payment.
5.	Check “I am out of fuel” or “have a disconnect notice” box on the top of the application form or write “Expedite” on the fax cover sheet. Include a contact phone number in case the application does not transmit properly.
6.	Have the applicant fax the completed application to HAP at (907) 465-3319. The fax number is listed on the top of the form. Applications received after 3:00 p.m. will be reviewed for processing on the following business day.
7.	Advise the applicant to call their heating vendor in 6-8 hours to see if a grant has been pledged. If no grant was pledged, you or the applicant should call HAP.

Information Hotline

In Anchorage call: 269-5777

All other areas call: 1-888-804-6330

Fee Agents may call the information hotline to confirm that a client has applied for heating assistance and the date the application was received by HAP. Once the grant is issued, the name of the vendor(s) and the payment amounts will be available. To access case specific information on the hotline you will need:

1. the Social Security Number of the person listed on question #2 of the heating assistance application, and
2. the security code – which is the last 4 digits of the telephone number listed on the heating assistance application. If a telephone number was not listed, the security code is the 4 digit birth year of the person listed on question #2 of the application. For example, 1959.

If a caller gets the message “no information is available” the Hotline may be temporarily inaccessible. Please advise callers to wait at least an hour and then try again.

The following information is provided on the Hotline:

- Application received but not yet worked
The caller will be told the date the application was received
- Application denied
The caller will be told that the application has been denied and that a notice explaining this action has been mailed to them.
- Application pended
The caller will be told the application has been pended and that a notice explaining this action has been mailed to them.
- Application approved
The caller will be told the total grant amount, followed by the amounts and vendors to which the grant has been issued.

Payment for Assisting HAP Applicants

Fill out and mail the Fee Agent Monthly Billing Report Form (FA#48) to the Heating Assistance office once a month. You must also use the HAP Fee Agent Monthly Billing Report to be paid for assisting heating assistance applicants. Do not combine HAP bills with your other Division of Public Assistance fee agent billing reports. Copies of the HAP Fee Agent Monthly Billing Report form are enclosed.

Fax, email or mail HAP Fee Agent Monthly Billing Report forms directly to the Juneau HAP office:

Heating Assistance Program
10002 Glacier Highway, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801
FAX: (907) 465-3319
liheap@alaska.gov

A copy of the Heating Assistance Program Fee Agent Monthly Billing Report is shown on the next page.

STATE OF ALASKA
DHSS / DPA / HEATING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
Fee Agent Interview Report

Applicant Name: _____ **Social Security #** _____
Fee Agent Name: _____ **Phone #** _____ **Date:** _____

Application Information

If gathering all required application information is not possible during this interview, payment for your services will not be affected.

1. Write the name of the person who attended the interview: _____
- | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| | YES | NO |
|--|------------|-----------|
2. Is there anyone who usually lives in the house, but is away from the home?
If yes, list the name(s) and the expected date to return home.
- _____
3. Has the applicant provided proof of the household's gross income received in the prior month before the date of their application? *For example, if someone applies in November, list all gross income received in October, regardless of the pay period. Examples of income: Wages, tips, fishing income, unemployment benefits, Social Security benefits, child support/alimony, VA, self-employment, National Guard pay, bingo/pull/tab winnings, Native cash assistance programs.*
4. Has any household member's employment ended within the last 60 days?
If yes, list the name of the person whose job ended, when it ended and the name and phone number of the employer.
- _____
5. Has anyone in the household been employed in an occupation with a regular work season of 11 months or less during the past 12 months? *If yes, refer to Form B of the Heating Assistance Program packet.*
6. Has anyone in the household been self-employed at any time during the past 12 months? *If yes, refer to Form C of the Heating Assistance Program packet.*
7. Did the household report living expenses on the application? Remember: Ask the household for proof of the expenses along with **heating and electric invoices**, and include them with the application. If they heat with wood, attach at least \$200 in vendor receipts for wood purchased to heat their home. Check the boxes that apply.
 Rent/Mortgage Oil Electricity Propane/Gas Space Rent Wood/Coal
8. Is the applicant's housing cost's subsidized? *If yes, include a copy of their rent change notice, calculation summary sheet and utility allowance sheet.*
9. If the applicant claimed "no income," explain how the expenses have been paid, or note that they are not due or unpaid.
- _____
10. Have you completed the Fee Agent checklist at the bottom of Page 5 of the Heating Assistance Application?

11. For additional comments:

Fee Agent Signature: _____ **Date:** _____