



**Agenda Item Number
4 c.
Energy Assistance (LIHEAP)**

Date: September 28, 2023

Presenter: Stephanie Sheelar, LCOG Senior and Disability Services
Division Director

Subject: Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) Update

Action Recommended: None. Information Only.

Background:

For many years, S&DS has contracted with Lane County as a service provider of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP is a federally funded program that aims to keep families safe and healthy by providing assistance in managing costs associated with home energy bills and other energy-related expenses, while reducing risk from unsafe heating and cooling practices. Lane County's LIHEAP serves low-income households, at or below 60% Area Median Income (AMI), on a first-come, first-served basis.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these funds were available only during a few winter months when temperatures dropped significantly. During the pandemic and due to increased community need, the County expanded LIHEAP to be available during the summer and has now expanded the Program to year-round. Lane County also reached out to S&DS to participate in a new water assistance focused program, Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), which would function as a similar model to LIHEAP on a year-round basis. This made delivering of the program more complicated – and more costly.

LIHEAP has been challenging to deliver due to the limitation on administrative expenses from the County and the workload on S&DS staff to ensure program requirements are met. 85% of allocated funds go directly to the consumer and LCOG receives the remaining 15% for Program Delivery and Administrative Costs. In other words, for every \$100 we provide to a consumer in assistance, LCOG receives \$15. Due to the workload required to provide these services, we have been supplementing the program with Medicaid funds. S&DS' current contract period expires September 30, 2023 and we are working with the County on a new contract.

S&DS served 561 unduplicated consumers during our 20-21 fiscal year, 546 unduplicated consumers between July 1, 2021, and March 31, 2022, and 636 unduplicated consumer this fiscal year so far. The cost of this program is as follows:

At the June 13, 2023 Executive Committee meeting, the Committee recognized LIHEAP as a valuable resource to our consumers, however agreeing that supplementing the program with Medicaid funds is inappropriate. The Committee recommended LCOG continue the delivery of the programs for one year beginning effective October 1, 2023, hiring "up to 0.5 FTE" funded with General Fund dollars with the position being paid to do other work if the entire position is not required to handle the applications. Committee members suggested working with the County to address the administrative issues and working with our Federal Delegation on the reimbursement issue.

Currently:

We received confirmation that the water program has ended. We mapped our current process to identify efficiencies. We met with Lane County to review process and identified additional efficiencies such as utilizing the online application which will reduce administrative costs. Our staff will be scheduled for training on how to utilize the online application.

We will be contacting Campbell Center to review their process as they have a high online application rate. We are also in the process of hiring a .5 FTE.