

Frequently Asked Questions: SELF's Utility Assistance Programs

Q. What is the difference between Winter Crisis Program, PIPP and HEAP?

- **PIPP is only for Regulated Utilities.** (Regulated utilities are for-profit companies subject to the rules of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). In Butler County, the regulated utility companies **are Duke Energy, Dayton Power & Light**)
 - PIPP operates all year around
 - PIPP the Percentage Income Payment Plan Plus helps income eligible households manage their energy bills year round paying their **regulated** utility company only bill based on a **percentage of their income each month. Under this payment plan you are responsible for paying each month.**
- **Winter Crisis Program** – The Winter Crisis Program provides financial assistance to income-eligible households that are
 - First must met eligibility guidelines at or below 175% of the Federal Poverty Line and
 - In disconnect status with your utilities or
 - Applying for new service or
 - Already disconnected and need service restored or
 - Have less than 25% or less fuel in your tank
 - Households that have chosen to secure services from Certified Retail Electric Suppliers (CRES) are eligible for the Winter Crises Program
- **Winter Crisis Program** operates between **Nov. 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016.**
- **Winter Crisis Program is a one-time payment**
- **HEAP** – Heap Program is a **one-time payment** from the State.
 - The program operates between **May-April.** The **rates vary by state** and the application must be submitted to the **state for approval.**
- **Q: Do I have to make an appointment?**

A: **We strongly encourage appointments because we cannot guarantee that walk-ins will be seen.** We see walk-in clients if people do not come to their appointments or as time permits. We cannot guarantee that people will be seen without appointments. Walk-ins are seen on an extremely limited and emergency basis in the Hamilton office.

- **Q: Who do I call for an appointment and what do I need to tell them?**

A: Call **1-513-868-9300** or **1-888-432-7022 Option 1.** You will need to provide your name, address, and utility company and account number. The list of documents needed for the appointment is on the website (see the next question) Appointments will be scheduled at SELF's Hamilton office in the Hamilton Crossings Shopping Center on Route 4, at the agency's Middletown office at 930 9th Avenue or at the Family Resource Center in Oxford.

- **Q: What do I need to bring to my appointment?**

A: You must bring in all the documents listed on the **Utility Assistance main page under 2015 HEAP Winter Application Requirements.** If all the documents are not present you will have to reschedule your appointment.

- **Q: Can I fax or drop off missing documents.**

A: We are no longer accepting faxed or drop-off documents, you must bring them to your rescheduled appointments.

- **Q. Do I need to bring Food Stamp info?**

A. IF YOU RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS, SECTION 8 OR ANY TYPE OF HOUSING ASSISTANCE, AND/OR MEDICAID: YOU MUST BRING A PRINTOUT OF THE LAST THREE (3) MONTHS OF FOOD STAMP ASSISTANCE, A CURRENT SECTION 8 LEASE AND YOUR MEDICAID CARD. See the above section 2015 Heap Winter Application Requirements for a complete list of items you must bring.

- **Q. Do I need to bring a birth certificate?**

A. The items you must bring for identification are: PICTURE ID –AND– PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP for primary applicant and or PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD for documented aliens. SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS (PROOF OF NUMBERS) for all household members. Be able to list DATES OF BIRTH for all household members. See the above section 2015 Heat Winter Application Requirements for a complete list of items you must bring.

- **Q: Why do I have to provide social security cards for my whole family?**

A: This assistance is available to US Citizens and documented aliens only.

- **Q: My client/friend/spouse just got a notice that their heat is going to be turned off soon, what should I tell them to do?**

A: As soon as they receive a disconnect notice, they should call SELF for an appointment. Appointments book up fast and they need to come in as soon as possible to avoid a gap in service.

- **Q: My friend got an appointment but it's not until after the notice says she will be disconnected. What can she do?**

A: If she has regulated utility company like Duke Energy or DP&L AND when she made her appointment, if she provided her account number, the number will be sent to the utility company. Once the utility company knows she has an appointment, they will suspend the disconnect order. If she did not provide the account number, the disconnect will not be stopped. COH (City of Hamilton) will not be suspended.

- **Q: My friend called but didn't have her account number. They told her to call back with it. Does she really have to do that?**

A: Yes. It is the only way to suspend the disconnect. We must have the correct account number. This only works for regulated utilities like Duke and DP&L.

These Questions Apply to the Winter Crisis Program:

- **Q: What is the Winter Crisis Program?**

A: The Winter Crisis Program provides financial assistance to income eligible households that are threatened with disconnection of their heating source; have already had service disconnected; need to establish new service or pay to transfer service; or in the case of bulk fuel customers, only have 25 percent or less of the tank's fuel capacity on hand.

- **Q. When does the season end for the Winter Crisis Program?**

A. The WCP program runs from **November 1 to March 31**. Agencies have **until April 15** to finish processing incomplete or pending applications.

- **Q: Who qualifies for Winter Crisis help through SELF?**

A: Residents of Butler County who have a total household income that is at or below 175% of the Federal Poverty Line can seek assistance through SELF; once per heating season for eligible households.

- **Q: What do you mean by "household income"?**

A: Household income is defined as the gross income of all household members, except wage or salary income earned by dependent minors less than 18 years of age. Heads of households and spouses may never be considered minors. Gross income includes, but is not limited to; wages (excluding Medicare premiums), retirement, employment disability, public assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), alimony, child support, unemployment benefits, Workers' Compensation and any other indirect income such as utility allowance. Other exclusions may apply if documented.

- **Q: What does Winter Crisis pay for?**

Regulated Gas and Electric:

A: Households with both regulated gas and regulated electric are eligible for up to **\$175** for combined fuel types – either gas or electric. WCP

payments can be made up to **\$175** to pay the first PIPP Plus installment, to bring PIPP Plus default current, establish new service, and transfer or restore service.

Non-Regulated Gas and Electric

A: Households with both unregulated gas and electric, or if the household has one unregulated utility, the benefit is up to **\$550**. A WCP payment of up to **\$550** can be made to continue, restore, establish or transfer service. Payment must guarantee service for 30 days.

- **Q: What is the difference between a regulated and a non-regulated utility?**

A: Regulated utilities are for-profit companies subject to the rules of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). In Butler County, the regulated utility companies are Duke Energy, Dayton Power & Light and Glenwood Energy. Non-regulated utilities are NOT subject to the rules of the PUCO. Non-regulated utilities typically are not-for-profit entities. Examples in Butler County include the City of Hamilton, Butler Rural and bulk fuel providers.

- **Q: What is bulk fuel and how much does Winter Crisis HEAP pay for it?**

A: **Bulk fuel** includes propane, heating oil and wood. For propane and heating oil, HEAP pays **\$750** for wood; HEAP pays **\$450** for the **2015-2016 seasons**.

- **Q: My friend has been disconnected and I want to help her. Will it be easier for her to get help from the Winter Crisis Program if I pay off her balance?**

A: No. A zero balance has no effect on your friend's ability to get assistance. Your friend must have a disconnect notice, a zero balance is not in disconnect. Assistance is based on income, not the balance of the bill. If she

visits SELF, there are a number of programs she can enroll in to pay down the balance over time.

- **Q: I owe Duke Energy \$1,500. They say I have to pay the whole amount to get reconnected. What can I do?**

A: Once per winter, you can invoke the Winter Reconnect Rule which has been established by the PUCO. Customers need to pay \$175 to have their service restored for 30 days. Depending on the utility and time of day there may be reconnect and after hours fees. However, it is not necessary to pay the entire balance. This can only be used once each winter.

- **Q. Can I use the Winter Reconnect Order as a City of Hamilton utility customer?**

A: No. The rule is for regulated utilities only.

- **Q: I can keep up with my current bill now, but since I was unemployed for a year, I have a high balance. What can I do?**

A: You might be eligible for PIPP Plus or other payment plans with Duke Energy.

These Questions Apply to the PIPP Plus Program:

- **Q: What is PIPP Plus?**

A: Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus is for customers of **regulated** utilities only. Customers who qualify and have both gas and electric pay 6% of their income to each utility (for a total of 12%) or \$20 a month, whichever is greater. Customers who qualify who have all electric service pay 10% of their income or \$10 each month, whichever is greater, fuel oil is 6% of their income.

- **Q: How do I qualify for PIPP Plus?**

A: Customers must have a total household income of no more than 150% of the Federal Poverty Line and be a customer of a regulated utility company such as Duke Energy.

- **Q: What do you mean by “household income”?**

A: Household income is defined as the gross income of all household members, except wage or salary income earned by dependent minors less than 18 years of age. Heads of households and spouses may never be considered minors. Gross income includes, but is not limited to; wages (excluding Medicare premiums), retirement, employment disability, public assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), alimony, child support, unemployment benefits, Workers’ Compensation and any other indirect income such as utility allowance. Other exclusions may apply if documented.

- **Q. What are the benefits of paying my PIPP Plus account on-time and in-full?**

A. When PIPP Plus payments are paid on-time and in-full customers no longer owe the rest of that month’s bill amount. You also receive a credit toward any old debt. If you make full, on-time payments for 24 straight months, all of your arrearages will be eliminated. There are no fees for late payment but you also will not receive credit benefits.

- **Q: I still have a high balance. How does PIPP Plus help me?**

A: Customers who stay current on their PIPP Plus payments receive credit toward their arrearages and current charges so the high balance is paid down over time and no new arrearages accumulate.

- **Q. When is my first PIPP Plus Payment due?**

A. Your first payment will be due when you enroll in PIPP Plus. If you are unable to pay at enrollment the installment can be added to your next monthly bill, but you will be billed for two payments. We will also lose the

arrearage credit for the first month and have to make up that first payment.

- **Q. Do I have to make a monthly payment if I am a zero income customer?**

A. Yes. You will be required to pay a \$10 minimum monthly payment for both natural and electric. The \$20 payment may be waived for up to 180 days during that time period, however you will not earn arrearage credits.

- **Q. What must I do to remain on PIPP Plus?**

Natural Gas: Every 12 months you must provide proof that your gross monthly household income is at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level to remain a PIPP Plus customer.

Electric: Every 12 months you must provide proof that your gross monthly household income is at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level to remain a PIPP Plus customer.

If you do not provide proof of income you will be removed from PIPP Plus, and your entire bill balance will come due. . At that time, your utility may offer you an extended payment plan to help you avoid disconnection

- **Q. Can I re-enroll in PIPP Plus if I am removed for failure to prove that I am income-eligible? or get disconnected for non-payment?**

Yes. You may re-enroll as long as you still meet the income requirements. To do so, you must provide proof of income, and you must first pay all the missed PIPP Plus payments. In addition PIPP Plus customers are responsible for paying their actual bill amount for the months that they were not enrolled on PIPP Plus.

- **Q. What is my responsibility for reporting changes in my household income?**

A. You **must** report any change in your household income to your local community action agency. If your household income goes down the

amount you must pay each month will also go down; if income goes up then amount you pay each month will also go up. If your household income goes up so much that you are no longer eligible other payment plans may be available.

- **Q. What if I decide to stop participating in PIPP Plus, even though I still qualify.**

A. You may request to be taken off PIPP Plus at any time, just contact SELF