
ENERGY PROGRAMS
EP-520 PIEDMONT NATURAL GAS (PNG) COMPANY'S SHARE THE WARMTH

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Change #3-2024
September 16, 2024

520.01 GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Share the Warmth is funded 100% from monies contributed by Piedmont Natural Gas (PNG) customers and employees, as well as corporate donations. Allocations are made **only** to counties that have PNG residential customers. (See Figure 520-1.) Allocations are based on the number of PNG residential customers in each county. Counties can utilize Share the Warmth funds until exhausted or until the end of the heating season.

The following sections of the Energy Programs manual also apply to Share the Warmth

	Section	Section Number
1	Contracting and Vendor Agreement	120
2	Retention	125
3	Appeals and Hearing Process	135
4	Overpayments and Fraud	140
5	Household Composition	150
6	U. S. Citizenship and Non-Citizens	175
7	Energy Programs Outreach Plan	200
8	Crisis Intervention Program	400

- B. Explore the possibility of a Share the Warmth payment prior to providing Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) assistance. In order to receive CIP funds, a household must be unable to obtain timely or appropriate assistance from other sources.

NOTE: Native American Tribes who administer their Energy Program do not receive Share the Warmth funds; therefore, those served by Native American Tribes can apply for Share the Warmth funds at local county agencies.

- C. Households do not have to heat with natural gas to be eligible. Households may receive Share the Warmth funds for all types of fuel used. **A household must be experiencing a heating related crisis. A household is in a crisis if it is currently experiencing or is in danger of experiencing a life-threatening or health-related emergency and sufficient, timely, and appropriate assistance is not available from any other source. Life-threatening is defined as a household which has no heating or cooling source or has a disconnect, final or past due notice for their primary heating or cooling service and the health or well-being of a household member would be in danger if the heating or cooling crisis was not alleviated.**

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520.02 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- A. Counties must begin taking applications when their Share the Warmth allocation is received. (See 520.04 below.)
- B. A household does not have to be a PNG customer but must be a residential utility customer. Accept the applicant's statement, unless questionable. If questionable, view a current service bill or telephone your local company to verify that the household is a residential customer.
- C. A household must be experiencing a heating related crisis. Refer to 520.05 below for guidelines on how to assess whether a crisis exists.
- D. A household must have countable **gross** income at or below 150% of the current poverty level. (See 520.06 below.)
- E. Assistance must be authorized within 18 to 48 hours.
- F. Benefits cannot exceed \$200 per application and \$200 per State fiscal year.
- G. There must be a signed agreement with each vendor who receives a Share the Warmth payment. (See 520.03 below.)

520.03 VENDOR AGREEMENT (See Section 120 on Contracting and Vendor Agreements)

The purpose of a vendor agreement is to ensure that the vendor does **not** treat recipients adversely.

County Responsibility for Negotiating Vendor Agreements

When the local county agency chooses to make a payment to a vendor, there must be an agreement with the vendor. In some instances, the payment will be to a landlord which makes the landlord an energy supplier; therefore, a vendor agreement is required.

- A. **Vendor Agreements must be renegotiated each year.** Vendor agreements must be completed annually by the provider in the Energy Provider Portal. If providers need assistance they can email the Energy Business team at energy.providers@dhhs.nc.gov or call the Energy Provider Portal helpdesk at 919-813-5460 Monday through Friday between 8:00 am and 6:00 pm. The Energy Portal website <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/energy-assistance/energy-provider-portal> provides job aids, video guides and other helpful information on the portal.

520.04 APPLICATION PROCESS

Everyone who wishes to apply must be given the opportunity to apply without delay. The applicant must be allowed to sign an application, DSS-8178, on the day he:

- Appears at the local county agency; **or**
- Appears at an agency that is taking applications per the county's plan. (See EP-200.)

A. Acceptance Of Application

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Application taking must begin on the first working day the Share the Warmth allocation is received and continue until the Share the Warmth allocation is exhausted or until the end of the current State fiscal year, whichever occurs first.

1. The applicant or **their** representative must apply for Share the Warmth in the county in which the household resides. The applicant must be a resident of North Carolina.
2. When you receive a request for assistance by mail or telephone and a crisis is indicated, follow-up within **one business day** to schedule an interview. If the request is made by an individual who would have difficulty coming to a local county agency or outpost office, obtain the information for the application by telephone **and complete the application with a telephonic signature. If verification is needed send a DSS-8185 requesting necessary verifications. The date of application is the date the applicant was interviewed and consented to the telephonic signature for telephone applications only.** (See Section EP 400 for more information regarding telephone interviews.) **For any client that declines the option of telephonic signature, mail the DSS-8178, Energy Programs Application to the applicant. Do not key an application in NC FAST until the signed DSS-8178 is returned. The county is responsible for keeping a record of applications being mailed.** If a life-threatening situation exists, a home visit to obtain the needed information may be necessary if the information cannot be obtained by some other means.
3. If the applicant or **their** representative decides not to apply, complete the inquiry. Include as much information about the situation as possible.
4. You must research your county files to determine if anyone listed on the DSS-8178 has previously received Share the Warmth funds.

B. Who must be included in the application?

The same rules apply as those in LIEAP. See Section 150 for instructions on who must be included.

C. Explanation of Rights and Responsibilities

1. Explain to **the applicant**, they have the right to:
 - a. Receive assistance if found eligible.
 - b. Have any person participate in the interview for determination of eligibility.
 - c. Be protected against discrimination on the grounds of race, creed, or national origin by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. **The applicant** may appeal such discrimination through Section 504 of the Disability Act.
 - d. Have any information given to the agency kept in confidence.
 - e. Appeal if:

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- (1) **The applicant** was denied the right to apply for assistance on the same day **they** or **their** representative went to the county department of social services.
 - (2) **The applicant's** application was denied.
 - (3) **The applicant's** assistance was incorrect based on the county's interpretation of State regulations; **or**
 - (4) A decision is not made on **the applicant's** application within 18 to 48 hours.
- f. Reapply at any time.
 - g. Withdraw from the assistance program at any time.
2. Explain to the applicant they have the responsibility to:
 - a. Provide the local county agency the necessary information which can be used to locate and obtain information needed to determine eligibility; **and**
 - b. Report immediately to the local county agency the receipt of benefits, which **the applicant** knows to be erroneous. If **the applicant** does not report such incorrect payments, **the applicant** may be required to repay any overpayment.
 3. Explain the meaning of fraud to **the applicant**.

D. Completion Of the DSS-8178 During the Application Interview

1. Document the applicant's responses to the questions **in NC FAST**.
2. As part of the interview process, determine what other services may be appropriate to meet the crisis. Document **in NC FAST** which services were provided.
3. The applicant must sign the DSS-8178.

Note: Please see CIP policy section 400.03 Application Requirements for signature guidance.

E. Eligibility Determination

When you complete the interview, verify all necessary factors of eligibility to determine if the household is eligible.

The household must meet the following eligibility criteria in order to be eligible for Share the Warmth:

1. Income

Household meets income eligibility if the total household's members' countable income is equal to or less than 150% of the current poverty level. Please refer to CIP Policy Section 400.03 of the Energy Manual for income guidelines.

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2. A crisis situation must exist. See 520.05 below.

Document eligibility verification in **NC FAST**.

Receipt of Share the Warmth benefits does not affect a household's eligibility for LIEAP, CIP, Emergency Assistance, etc.

520.05 CRISIS DETERMINATION AND DOCUMENTATION

A household is in a crisis if the A household is considered to be in a life threatening or health related crisis if the heating or cooling source is disconnected, or the household is currently experiencing or is in danger of experiencing a life-threatening or health-related emergency due to lack of heating/cooling, and sufficient, timely, and appropriate assistance is not available from any other source.

NOTE: Life-threatening is defined as a household which has no heating or cooling source or has a disconnect, final or past due notice for their primary heating/cooling service or is in danger of experiencing a life-threatening or health related emergency if the heating or cooling crisis was not alleviated.

A. Crisis Determination

1. Guidelines For Determining If a Crisis Exists
 - a. Is there no source of heating, or is the source of heating in jeopardy? or
 - (1) The fuel supply is exhausted or terminated;
 - (2) A notice has been received notifying the household of termination of the heating source;
 - b. Once you determine a crisis exists, you must still determine if payment is needed to meet the crisis, or is there some other way to alleviate the situation?
 - (1) Does **the applicant** have sufficient resources, such as a savings or checking account to alleviate the crisis himself? Explore whether other family members may be able to offer assistance or support; **or**
 - (2) Explore with the applicant whether **they** or a member of the household will have income **or resources** that can be used to meet the emergency. **Document in NC FAST what the applicant reports.**
 - (3) Decide whether there are other community resources that can be used to alleviate the crisis.
 - (4) Will the fuel supplier agree to continue service until the applicant receives **their** next check?
 - (5) Explore if the applicant has a history of being in a crisis situation. If so, it is preferable to use other resources to assist in alleviating the situation. To maximize the \$200 limitation in Share the Warmth, explore other resources to assist in alleviating the situation.

Note: History of being in a crisis situation has no bearing on the eligibility of the application. An application cannot be denied for history of crises or if the household does not have income or resources to prevent future crises.

2. Verification and Documentation

a. Verify that a crisis exists by either:

- (1) Accepting the applicant's statement, unless questionable;
- (2) Viewing bills; **or**
- (3) Contacting collaterals, such as vendors, landlords, etc.

b. Documentation should include but not be limited to:

- (1) Date of application;
- (2) Statement of crisis; **and**
- (3) Method of verification.

If you use the applicant's statement, document what they said and the date. When you use other evidence, show the type of document used and the date. When using collaterals, show the collateral's name, date, and statement. **Document in NC FAST.**

B. Time Frames for Authorizing Assistance

1. Time Frame for Authorizing Assistance When Crisis Is Not Life-Threatening

If a household is experiencing a crisis which is not life-threatening, authorize benefits within 48 hours (2 days). This does not mean issuance of benefits, but you must authorize eligibility to alleviate the crisis. These deadlines apply even if another agency is taking the application.

2. Time Frame for Authorizing Assistance When Crisis Is Life-Threatening

Since the household is experiencing a life-threatening situation, authorize benefits within 18 hours. This does not mean issuance of benefits, but you must authorize eligibility to alleviate the crisis. These deadlines apply even if another agency is taking the application.

3. Time Frame for Denying Assistance

If the household is determined ineligible for assistance, applications must be denied within 18 hours if identified as an emergency application or 48 hours if the household is determined to be a non-emergency application.

C. Notification of Eligibility

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1. If assistance is **approved**, use the **NC FAST** System to complete a DSS-8107.
2. If assistance is **withdrawn or denied**, use the **NC FAST** System to complete a DSS-8107.

520.06 BENEFIT LEVELS AND LIMITATIONS

- A. A household may receive benefits more than one time during ~~a calendar~~ the State fiscal year.
- B. The maximum benefit that can be paid to a household during the State fiscal year is \$200. There is no requirement that a household must receive \$200 in a State fiscal year.
- C. Benefits may vary based upon the severity of the crisis and the services needed; however, benefits cannot exceed \$200 per application.

NOTE: If more than \$200 is needed to alleviate the crisis, you may not take another Share the Warmth application to make up the difference.

- D. **If more than \$200 is needed to alleviate the crisis, you must:**
 1. Determine if there are other community resources that can be used in conjunction with the \$200 or including CIP funds.
 2. Negotiate with the vendor to alleviate the crisis for \$200; or
 3. Counsel the applicant on any available options which can be used. However, apply this option only if you are unable to alleviate the crisis using 1 or 2 above.

If you are unable to alleviate the crisis by one of the means listed above, **deny the application**.

E. Heating Assistance

1. Assistance may be provided for eligible households with any bill for usage incurred during the heating season. Use of Share the Warmth funds to pay an old bill from the prior heating year is **not** allowed under this program.
2. At the time of application, a household may be assisted with more than one type of fuel bill as long as the payment does not exceed the maximum benefit allowed per application.
3. Maximum assistance per application is \$200, not to exceed a maximum benefit of \$200 per household during the State fiscal year.
4. Funds can be used to assist households with reconnection charges.
5. Funds cannot be used to prevent a crisis.
6. Funds are not to be used for:
 - a. Paying deposits;
 - b. Paying bills from current or prior residence that are older than 12 months;
 - c. Paying for repairs;

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- d. Purchase of space heaters, etc.; **or**
 - e. Assistance to households whose only crisis is lack of refrigeration.
 - f. Unauthorized or illegal usage fees associated with return checks and/or meter tampering charges.
7. Funds can be used for paying electric or other utility bills.

520.07 METHOD OF PAYMENT

Heating Assistance

Payment must be made in **one** of the ways listed below. **No** other payment method is acceptable.

- 1. County-issued check to the fuel provider; **or**
- 2. **A direct deposit payment that the provider has enrolled through FIS (EBTedge Portal), website link: [Provider Login \(ebtedge.com\)](http://Provider Login (ebtedge.com))**; or
- 3. A voucher/vendor payment.

A household may **never** receive cash assistance to purchase items. All payments go directly to the energy provider. All return payments should be issued back to the local county DSS office and not to the applicant.

520.08 OTHER SERVICES

See Energy Manual Section EP-200, Energy Programs Outreach Plan.