

## Media Relations

# Carsey Institute: More Families Relying On Federal Heating Assistance To Stay Warm During Winter

May 3, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – More American families are turning to federal assistance to heat their homes during the winter, with many more families eligible for but not taking advantage of the program, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

“President Obama’s 2012 budget proposes cutting \$2.5 billion from the \$5.1 billion energy assistance fund for low-income families at a time when families are struggling with higher energy costs amid a difficult economy,” said Jessica Bean, vulnerable families research associate with the Carsey Institute.

The research relies on data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey’s (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement conducted in March 2004, March 2007, and March 2010. The CPS provides a nationally representative sample of approximately 50,000 households and the individuals in those households, and collects demographic, economic, and employment information, as well as participation in select government assistance programs.

The federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assists vulnerable families in paying their home heating and cooling bills. Low-income households, defined as those with incomes less than 150 percent of the federal poverty threshold, may apply for funds for heating or cooling expenses, crisis intervention to prevent energy-related emergencies such as utility shutoffs, or weatherization and energy-related home repairs.

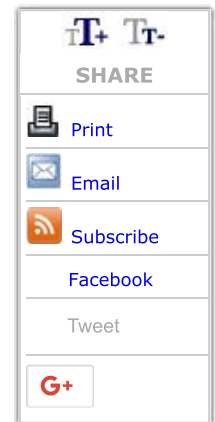
The key findings show:

- Between the 2007 and 2010 surveys, 48 percent more households reported receiving winter energy assistance.
- Many more families are eligible than receive assistance. In winter 2009/2010, only 11 percent of income-eligible households received support.
- Significantly more households in the severe winter regions of the Northeast and Midwest receive assistance than in the warmer regions of the South and West.
- Households headed by a single parent rely heavily on energy assistance, particularly in rural areas where rates of receipt are greater than 20 percent.
- Poor households are more likely to receive energy assistance than other low-income households, suggesting that the neediest households are being reached.

The highest rates of energy assistance are in rural areas, particularly in the rural Northeast and Midwest. In the 2009/2010 winter, New Englanders received the highest average benefit, at \$747.

“This assistance likely covers only a fraction of total home heating costs. About seven in 10 New England homes use heating oil, the most expensive home heating option, and may pay up to \$3,000 in heating costs each winter. Thus, a New England family with an average energy assistance benefit could still face more than \$2,200 in heating costs, or be left unable to adequately heat their home,” Bean said.

“LIHEAP is an important program for millions of households, though there are likely millions more who could benefit from assistance. In particular, households with very young or elderly members should be better targeted, as only 12 percent and 11 percent of these eligible households receive assistance, respectively,” she said.



The complete report about this research is available at  
<http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=160>.

*The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire conducts research and analysis on the challenges facing families and communities in New Hampshire, New England, and the nation. The Carsey Institute sponsors independent, interdisciplinary research that documents trends and conditions affecting families and communities, providing valuable information and analysis to policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the general public. Through this work, the Carsey Institute contributes to public dialogue on policies that encourage social mobility and sustain healthy, equitable communities.*

*The Carsey Institute was established in May 2002 through a generous gift from UNH alumna and noted television producer Marcy Carsey. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to [www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu](http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu).*

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