

Keep homes warm this winter with help from LEAP program

Written by Holyoke Enterprise
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Winter has arrived in Colorado bringing cold weather and leaving many Coloradans struggling with the costs of heating their homes.

Colorado's Low-income Energy Assistance Program offers help to eligible Coloradans by providing financial assistance with home heating bills. LEAP began accepting applications Nov. 1 and will continue to accept applications through April 30.

LEAP is a federally-funded program that provides cash assistance to help families and individuals pay a portion of winter home heating costs. The program pays the highest benefits to those with the highest heating bills and lowest incomes by family size.

Applicant income may not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty index which is \$2,882 per month before taxes for a household of four people. The average LEAP benefit is estimated to be \$302 per household.

To qualify for LEAP, applicants must be responsible for paying heating costs directly to an energy provider, fuel dealer or as part of rent and be a permanent legal resident of the United States and Colorado or have household members that are U.S. citizens.

"This season approximately 78,580 Colorado families have applied for LEAP, and the program has helped nearly 55,917 families cover heating costs, ensuring that thousands of Coloradans will remain warm throughout the winter," said Aggie Berens, LEAP manager.

Although LEAP provides assistance with heating bills, there are additional ways to keep a home warm and safe during the frigid winter months. The Center for Disease Control offers the following winter preparedness tips:

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Heat home safely

If it's the plan to use a wood stove, fireplace or space heater, be extremely careful. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and remember these safety tips:

—Use fireplace, wood stoves or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak flue gas into the indoor air space.

—Use only the type of fuel a heater is designed to use—don't substitute.

—Do not place a space heater within three feet of anything that may catch on fire. Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water, and never leave children unattended near a space heater.

Conserve heat

If extra ventilation isn't needed, keep as much heat as possible inside a home. Avoid unnecessary opening of doors or windows. Close off unneeded rooms, stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors and close draperies or cover windows with blankets at night.

Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

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Install a smoke detector and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector in the home. Test them monthly and replace batteries twice yearly.

All Coloradans who think they may qualify for LEAP are encouraged to call 1-866-HEAT-HELP (1-866-432-8435) or visit www.colorado.gov/cdhs/leap to view the most current program application requirements.

LEAP applicants must provide a copy of valid identification and a completed affidavit indicating that they are lawfully present in the United States. Valid forms of identification include, but are not limited to: Colorado driver's license or Colorado identification card, United States military identification card or military dependent's identification card, United States Coast Guard merchant mariner card or Native American Tribal document.

As defined by the Colorado Department of Revenue, other forms of identification may be accepted as well. For more information on lawful presence requirements, contact the DOR or visit www.colorado.gov/revenue .

Completed LEAP applications can be faxed, mailed or delivered to the appropriate county office. Potential program applicants may obtain an application through the following:

—Call 1-866-HEAT-HELP (1-866-432-8435) to have an application mailed.

—Visit any county department of social/human services across the state. To locate a county's office, visit the program's website at www.colorado.gov/cdhs/leap .

—Download and print an application from www.colorado.gov/cdhs/leap .

LEAP eligible households may also qualify for the Crisis Invention Program and Colorado's Energy Office's Weatherization Program. The CIP operates year-round and provides assistance with a home's primary heating source such as a furnace or wood-burning stove. The

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Weatherization Program improves the energy efficiency in homes throughout Colorado, thereby permanently reducing heating costs.

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