

Rhode Island Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) State Plan Draft

Section 1 - Program Components

The components of Rhode Island's Heating Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) include grants to low income households for heating assistance, crisis heating assistance, and weatherization. The funding period for HEAP is Federal Fiscal Year 2021 (October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021).

Households applying for HEAP are not categorically eligible. There is an annual nominal payment for SNAP households (\$20.01). All households that receive the nominal payment live in subsidized housing in which the heat is included in the rent, therefore they have energy cost and/or an energy burden.

Gross income is used to determine a household's eligibility for HEAP. Types of income that are counted include:

Types of Income Counted for LIHEAP Households

- Wages
- Self-employment income
- Contract income
- Payments from mortgage or sales contract
- Unemployment insurance
- Strike pay
- Social Security Administration benefits including Medicare deduction
- Supplemental Security Income
- Retirement and pension benefits
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Cash gifts
- Jury duty compensation
- Rental income
- Income from employment through Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
- Income from work study program
- Alimony, child support
- Interest, dividends, or royalties
- Commissions
- Legal settlements
- Veterans Administration benefits
- Funds received by household for care of a foster child
- Ameri-Corp Program payments for living allowance, earnings, and in-kind aid.

Section 2 – Heating Assistance

The current State Median Income (SMI) is used for income eligibility for HEAP (see below for most recent SMI). Renewal applicants are mailed out in late summer/early fall. Households with an elderly member, disabled member, or child or young child are given priority when crisis grants are processed to restore service, prevent a shut-off, or expediate a delivery.

Income, family size, fuel type, and home energy costs are used to determine the benefit level. In FFY 2020, the minimum benefit will be \$75 and the maximum will be \$1354.

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FFY 2021 Rhode Island State Median Income Chart (60%)

Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Weatherization (WAP),
Appliance Management Program

Household Size	12 Month	3 Month	1 Month
1	\$32,265	\$8,066	\$2,689
2	\$42,193	\$10,548	\$3,516
3	\$52,120	\$13,030	\$4,343
4	\$62,048	\$15,512	\$5,171
5	\$71,976	\$17,994	\$5,998
6	\$81,903	\$20,476	\$6,825
7	\$83,765	\$20,941	\$6,980
8	\$85,626	\$21,407	\$7,136
9	\$87,487	\$21,872	\$7,291
10	\$89,349	\$22,337	\$7,446
11	\$91,210	\$22,803	\$7,601
12	\$93,072	\$23,268	\$7,756

**Table shows 60% of State Median Income for Rhode Island. These Income Guidelines are based upon State Median Income calculations, distributed by HHS on May 29, 2020, and calculation methodology as described in 45 CFR 96.85. This is for mandatory use starting from October 1, 2020. Guidelines may be restricted for FY2021 HEAP based on available funding.*

Section 3 – Cooling Assistance

Rhode Island is not planning to offer Cooling Assistance in FFY 2021.

Section 4 – Crisis Assistance

Rhode Island offers Crisis Assistance to households who are unable to maintain heat in their home. A life-threatening crisis is considered to occur when a client is unable to maintain heat in their home and the average overnight temperature is below 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

A crisis and life-threatening crisis may be the result of:

- Heat shut off due to failure to pay a regulated utility bill
- The inability of a client to pay for deliverable fuel
- Breakdown of a heating system

Priority for crisis assistance is given to households with elderly or disabled members, and those with young children. Crisis assistance may be issued if a client has the utility shut off or the client has a ¼ tank or less of heating fuel. Clients must exhaust their primary heating benefit before receiving a crisis.

Section 5 – Weatherization Assistance

Rhode Island has a weatherization program that offers measures including weatherization needs assessments, furnace/heating system modifications and repairs, furnace replacement, energy-related roof repairs, and other measures. Weatherization is available to renters and home owners. Priority is

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given to households with an elderly or disabled member, as well as households with young children. Households applying for weatherization must first apply for heating assistance.

Section 6 – Outreach

Outreach activities for HEAP include the following:

- Sharing announcements with local newspapers and other media
- Including inserts in energy vendor mailings
- Working with Housing Authorities to inform residents of heating assistance
- Working with schools to inform parents of heating assistance
- Mailing to prior year HEAP recipients
- Informing low income applicants of HEAP when taking applications for other low-income programs
- Placing posters/flyers in local social service offices, essential businesses, and other appropriate sites

Section 7 – Coordination

Rhode Island coordinates HEAP with other programs available to low-income households by making referrals to/from other programs at intake and by making information available at one-stop intake centers.

Section 8 - Agency Designation

There are seven community action agencies in Rhode Island that administer HEAP covering each part of the state (Community Care Alliance, Comprehensive Community Action, Westbay Community Action, East Bay Community Action, Community Action Partnership of Providence, Blackstone Valley Community Action Agency, Tri-County Community Action). Agencies determine client eligibility, process benefit payments to vendors (gas, electric, and deliverable fuel), and install weatherization measures. Rhode Island currently uses Delegated Authority for HEAP contracts. The process follows federal guidelines for selecting community action agencies.

Section 9 – Energy Suppliers

Fuel vendors are monitored and required to treat households receiving assistance the same as households not receiving assistance. Fuel vendors charge eligible households the difference between the actual cost of the home energy and the amount of the payment. Fuel vendors must provide a delivery ticket to the community action agency where their customers applied for heating assistance.

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Section 10 - Program, Fiscal Monitoring, and Audit

The HEAP program is audited annually under the Single Audit Act and OMB Circular A – 133.

A portion of Rhode Island’s administrative budget is for a full time fiscal officer to track all HEAP payments. One administrative priority is accurate and timely fiscal reporting. The HEAP software is owned and monitored by the State daily.

Section 11 - Timely and Meaningful Public Participation

Input is obtained from the public in the development of the Rhode Island HEAP plan through the following:

- Public Hearing
- Draft Plan posted to website
- Hard copy of plan is available for public view and comment
- Comments from applicants are recorded
- Request for comments on draft Plan is advertised

Section 12 - Fair Hearings

Rhode Island requires fair hearing procedures for households whose applications are denied. Households determined ineligible are notified in writing by the agency regarding the reason for the denial along with documentation explaining the appeal process. Applicants are given ten days after the receipt of the denial notice to request a hearing. The applicant is first offered a hearing with an impartial representative of the community action agency that processed the application. The applicant has the right to bring a representative and/or present oral or written evidence. The applicant also has the right to review the case file. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached the client has the right for a second appeal with the Rhode Island DHS office.

Clients are informed about the appeal/hearing process on the application and during the application intake appointment. Information is also mailed along with the denial notice.

Section 13 - Reduction of home energy needs

Rhode Island uses HEAP funds to provide services that encourage and enable households to reduce their home energy needs and thereby the need for energy assistance. Recipients are offered home energy assessments, financial literacy, and workforce development assistance. Participants are also helped with outside providers in addressing other needs that can affect their ability to maintain their energy use bills.

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Section 15 - Training

Rhode Island provides training to local agencies and vendors on policies and procedures as needed throughout the year. Policies are communicated through vendor agreements and the policy manual. Training addresses reporting fraud and prevention.

Section 15 - Performance Goals and Measures

Rhode Island collects data and reports to The Office of Community Services at the US Department of Health & Human Services on specific performance measures.

Section 17- Program Integrity

The mechanisms available to the public for reporting cases of suspected waste, fraud, and abuse include:

- Online Fraud Reporting
- Reporting directly to local agency/district office or Grantee office
- Reporting to State Inspector General or Attorney General
- Reporting to local agencies/district offices and vendors