

TITLE: INTAKE, ELIGIBILITY AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE – EXCESS HYDRO/GAS ARREARS	SECTION: ONTARIO WORKS
DATE: September 9, 2004	POLICY NO.: KDSB-OW-IV-20
APPROVED BY: Resolution No. 2004-75	REVISED: August 25, 2005

REFERENCE:

Directive 29.0 – Shelter Costs
Directive 29.0 – 20 Excess Fuel Reimbursement
Directive 31.0 – 19 & 38 CSUB & Discretionary Benefits
Clearinghouse – Community Start-Up Benefit (May 16, 2003)

POLICY STATEMENT:

Ontario Works Supervisors/Administrators have the discretion to approve, on a case-by-case basis, payment required to ensure the continuation of hydro or heating services, payments for low-cost heating energy conservation measures, security deposits and reconnection fees as discretionary items.

POLICY:

As a result of rising utility and gas costs and limited ability for Ontario Works clients to meet their ongoing heating costs, there may be situations in which additional assistance is required to assist with arrears. In some situations, clients may already be in a situation in which their hydro has been terminated due to excessive arrears. Caseworkers should complete the Ontario Works Excess Heating Cost Request form which details their hydro costs, ability to pay, shelter allowances for up to six months to assist in the review of these requests. Upon completion of the form, the following circumstances should be taken into consideration when making an eligibility decision:

1. Were they making payments towards their heating costs?
2. Does their rental/mortgage amount exceed their full shelter allowance or take up a significant portion of it (more than 2/3's)?
3. Were there other circumstances that may have prevented them from making regular payments towards their heating costs, i.e. Car Insurance due, extraordinary health costs not covered by drug card, property tax arrears, etc.?
4. Is their hydro either cut off or about to be cut off?
5. If appropriate, are they prepared to consider relocation to a more financially suitable living arrangement, i.e. apply for a social housing unit?
6. Should they relocate, will this bill impact their ability to establish hydro/gas hook up in future residences?

If they answer "Yes" to two or more questions, consideration should be given to assisting them with their hydro arrears. Assistance can be made through a number of different sources dependent upon their circumstances.

Caseworkers are to investigate all streams of funding to alleviate the problem and ensure that service is not interrupted.

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PROCEDURE

1. Those clients not eligible for Ontario Works may be eligible for Emergency Assistance and/or Emergency Rent and Energy Fund Assistance.
2. If the client is an Ontario Works client several options are available and these should be accessed in the order given.

Increase Shelter Costs (Directive 29.0)

The first priority should be to determine if the client is currently not at maximum shelter. If not, their shelter costs should be increased accordingly. A Caseworker may increase their shelter cost retroactively for up to one year should the client provide supporting documentation for that period of time.

Excess Fuel Reimbursement (Directive 29.0 - 20)

If the client's total hydro bill exceeds their shelter amount, the total heat cost can be issued in place of the normal shelter amount, i.e. maximum shelter is \$602. current hydro bill is \$850. A total of \$850 can be issued in place of the \$602. (This is only of assistance to those clients with no mortgage or rental charges.)

Community Start Up Benefit (Directive 31.0 – 18)

In situations where the client has requested assistance with hydro arrears and they are relocating to more affordable accommodations, up to \$799. for two adult couples and singles and up to \$1,500. for singles and families with children can be issued under Community Start Up Benefit. In order to be eligible for this benefit they do however, have to be establishing a new residence, facing eviction or the discontinuation of their hydro/fuel source. Refer to CSUB policy for eligibility criteria.

Caseworkers should work with Ontario Works clients on an ongoing basis to assist them in ensuring they are in affordable accommodations. Clients should also be encouraged to set up equal billing where possible for hydro bills to avoid excessive bills in the winter months. In situations where no assistance can be offered under any of the above opportunities these cases should be further reviewed with the Ontario Works Supervisor. Where health is in jeopardy and children involved, all efforts should be made to assist the client to avoid tragic circumstances.

Discretionary Benefits (Directive 31.0 - 38)

Under Ontario Works, where coverage through the shelter allowance, and the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit is not available, the Director has approved payments required to ensure the continuation of energy services as a discretionary health related item of assistance.

Payments for low-cost heating energy conservation measure issued as a special item are treated as a health-related discretionary benefit. Administrators/Supervisors are authorized to cover energy conservation costs up to \$200.00. Energy conservation items exceeding \$200.00 require the Director's approval.

Ontario Works provides Administrators/Supervisors the authority to restore regular electricity service (client put on an electricity load limiter) including payments required to ensure the continuation of hydro or heating services as a health-related discretionary item.

Necessary home repairs/replacement of major appliances when proven to be a health related item may be covered under discretionary items and requires the Director's approval.

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Necessary home repairs/replacement of major appliances when proven to be a health-related item may be covered under discretionary items and requires the Director’s approval.

A maximum of up to \$2,000. per year under Discretionary – Health Related can be issued in extreme circumstances for individuals. Up to \$500. through Discretionary – Health Related can be issued under the above noted circumstances without Supervisor approval with the above noted form completed and documentation to support the issuance. Requests over \$500. require Supervisor review and approval.

All requests, recommendations and decisions must be documented in SDMT notes under the appropriate note type.

APPENDIX:

Appendix A: Shelter Costs Request Form

Kenora District Services Board

OW Emergency Assistance with Shelter Costs Request Form

Applicant Name: _____

Member ID: _____

Date of Request: _____

Current Rent/Mortgage: _____ Current Utilities: _____

Current Shelter Allowance: _____ Is it maximum? Yes/No

Month						
Utilities Cost						
Utilities Amount Rec'd From OW						
Amount Paid to Utility Co.						
Difference						

Comments indicating special circumstances:

CM Recommendation:

Date: _____

Authorized by: _____

(Ontario Works Administrator / Director)

Personal information contained on this form is collected pursuant to the Ontario Works Act, 1997, c. 25, Sched. A and will be used for the administration of Ontario Works. Questions about this collection should be directed to the Freedom of Information and Privacy Co-ordinator.