

## Q and A from LIHWAP update webinar on November 9, 2021

Posted November 19, 2021

### Vendor Service Agreements

- If a utility has not completed a vendor agreement by December 1<sup>st</sup> and a customer applies for LIHWAP before a valid vendor service agreement has been received, will DSS deny the applicant, and will that applicant need to reapply after a vendor service agreement is received?
  - Vendors must have a signed agreement to participate in the program. Yes, if the vendor has not signed an agreement by 12/1 and a customer applies on 12/1, that vendor's customers will be denied.
- Can a vendor submit their Vendor Service Agreement after December 1<sup>st</sup>?
  - Vendor agreements can be submitted 12/1 however, if their customers apply or are matched, they cannot receive payment until the agreement is completed.
- The Vendor Agreement has an issue with the first two lines overlapping—can this be corrected?
  - Yes, the revised agreement with the correction has been issued and was sent to local county DSS offices. Vendor should reach out to their local DSS for the revised agreement.
- What is the definition of the program year?
  - LIHWAP will run from 12/1/2021- 11/30/2023 or until funds are exhausted.
- How does a utility know if they have submitted their Vendor Service Agreement successfully?
  - Vendors should be submitting all agreements to their local county DSS offices. The local county DSS office will confirm if the Vendor Service Agreement has been submitted successfully.
- If the vendor serves multiple counties, how can they confirm who they need to get vendor agreements with (contact info, etc.)?
  - The vendor should reach out to their counties served and submit a vendor agreement to each county DSS office.
- Where should the vendor service agreements be submitted?
  - To the local county DSS office

### Data Sharing Agreements

- Is data sharing required for a vendor to participate in the program?
  - No, but it is encouraged. The only requirement to participate in LIHWAP is the vendor agreement.
- Can we elect to "not" fill out the data sharing form and let the customer apply through the county for needed assistance?
  - Yes, you can elect to not fill out the data sharing agreement. However, the vendor is required to fill out a vendor agreement to participate. The data sharing agreement is intended to help speed up the process of identifying those who are eligible.
- Does the data sharing agreement need to be signed by the utility and the local DSS?

- Yes
- How does a utility know if they have successfully submitted their data sharing agreement?
  - A vendor needs to submit this to their local county DSS and check with them to make sure they received it.
- Where do we send the data sharing agreement?
  - Local county DSS office

#### Data sharing and matching process

- Will there be an extension to when the data match can happen?
  - Yes, the data match information has been extended to 11/19
- How will information be tracked and payments logged for the automatically matched customers?
  - Information will be tracked by the counties by making a note of the automatically eligible customers in NC FAST. Counties will issue checks directly to the vendor and county budget offices will have record of payment.
- Will data need to be submitted more than once?
  - The program is only requesting data once. The data is due November 19<sup>th</sup>. At this time no future opportunities for submitting more data have been determined.
- What is the turnaround time for the data match?
  - The data match will be done November 19<sup>th</sup> and county DSS offices will have information about auto matched customers by the week of the November 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- What data is needed for the data sharing agreement?
  - The spreadsheet listing required data has been provided. You can find it [at this website](#).
- Do we just send the data for the match for our customers that typically have issues with paying their bill or all customers?
  - Vendors should submit data for Priority groups 1 and 2- customers with their water and/or wastewater services already disconnected or in jeopardy of disconnection.
- Where do we send our data?
  - Vendors can submit data to their local county DSS office. The local county DSS office will send data to the secure and encrypted zixmail <https://web1.zixmail.net/s/login?b=ncdhhs>.

#### Distribution of payment

- What if the customer info that was submitted thru the vendor info has paid their account to restore services already prior to the start date of 12-1-2021, will a payment still be submitted, or will you contact the vendor to see if the account is still cut off for nonpayment or not?
  - Counties are encouraged to check with the vendor about the status of the bill.
- How will a vendor know that payments have been made, and for which accounts those payments are made?
  - The county office will send a spreadsheet with the information of payment amounts and to which accounts the payments should be applied.
- Can payments cover charges beyond just the water/wastewater bill?

- Yes, if the amount needed to restore water or wastewater services includes other charges that cannot be separated out, then LIHWAP payments will cover the amount needed to restore service.
- Should we be granting customer refunds if the payment created a credit?
  - ⊖ Vendors should not give refunds to customers. Credits should stay on the account until they are used by a subsequent bill.
- How is the state allocating money to the counties, and when will counties know how much money they will be allotted?
  - The State budget office will calculate county allocations and will send them out before December 1<sup>st</sup>.
- When will payments be made for categorical matches?
  - Each county office has their own payment schedule. Once applicant is approved, the county will issue a check to the vendor within 30 days.
- When will a utility need to return payments that created a credit on the account?
  - Payments that resulted in a credit on an account only need to be returned if the customer becomes deceased, incarcerated, or institutionalized after the LIHWAP payment has been made and the payment results in a credit. If there is another adult remaining in the household, then the credit can remain. If not, then the credit must be fully refunded back to the local county agency.
- Where can utilities check to see if customers are eligible for LIHWAP?
  - Utilities would have to check with local DSS office for LIHWAP eligibility
- How will the payments get applied to the customer accounts?
  - A check from the county DSS office will be sent to vendors.

### Eligibility

- Do all the accounts that qualify have to have water on them? We have some services with sewer only combined with a well.
  - Wastewater only accounts may be eligible for bill payment assistance under LIHWAP.
- Are vendors required to mail information to customers who are not categorically eligible for LIHWAP?
  - The county DSS offices will let the vendor know which customers did not match and are asking that the vendors post information about the program. Flyers and information will be given to vendors from the NC DHHS office.
- Does an applicant need to be the account holder? And do they need to show proof of residence?
  - The applicant does need to be the account holder, but do not need to show proof of residence. They just need to provide the utility bill.
- How far back can delinquent accounts be eligible for funding?
  - Past due bills up to 12 months old can be paid for with LIHWAP funding, even to restore services.
- Is there a way to get repair done to prevent another high bill?
  - LIHWAP does not allow payments for repairs.

- Can funds be made out to an adult that is not in the eligible household if they are responsible for the bill?
  - Yes, as long as the customer can provide proof that they are responsible for the bill.
- Does LIHWAP pay bills from a previous residence if it is needed to start services at a current address? If that is the same city and a customer moved out and then back?
  - Yes
- Are renters eligible for LIHWAP? What if a utility doesn't allow tenants to be account holders? What if multiple tenants share responsibility for the water bill through rent?
  - Renters are eligible for bill payment assistance through LIHWAP. If a tenant is not an account holder, then they will need to submit paperwork that contains specific language indicating that the renter is responsible for the water bill at that address. If multiple tenants contribute to the water payment as part of rent, then the landlord or one of the tenants would need to apply on behalf of the tenants and provide evidence of income eligibility for LIHWAP.

#### General Questions

- Where is the link to the policy?
  - Policy can be viewed here <https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/divisional/social-services/energy-programs/change-notices/2021/efs-ep-cn03-2021a1.pdf/view> but will be posted to manual 12/1/2021.
- Will there be any training on how to do an application in NCFast?
  - Yes, county DSS staff will receive training
- Where is the letter that will be sent to customers that match, and where is the letter that will be sent to customers who do not match?
  - These letters will be provided once the data match is completed
- What information will be needed for the vendor to submit for reporting purposes?
  - All information needed from vendor will be captured through the NC FAST system.