

# Energy Affordability Program Roundtable Meeting Notes

## Kick-Off Meeting: June 03, 2021



<b>IESO Presenters:</b>	Nicole Hynum (Supervisor, Business Development) - Chair, Nik Schruder (Director, Energy Efficiency), Stephen Lachan (Program Advisor), Vicki Gagnon (Business Advisor)
<b>Meeting Participants</b>	See attached

#	Item
<b>1.</b>	<b>Introductions</b>
	<p><i>Members of the group shared their name, organization, and experience with Save on Energy Programs.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Participant list to be circulated (complete, attached)</li> </ul>
<b>2.</b>	<b>IESO Presentation and Group Discussion</b>
	<p><i>Nik Schruder, Nicole Hynum and Stephen Lachan shared an overview of the IESO, Conservation and Demand Management and the Energy Affordability Program (EAP). An overview of the EAP Roundtable purpose, goals and format was also provided. Afterwards the discussion was opened for general questions from the group.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A question was raised about program activities during the pandemic             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o IESO: on-site activities for Save on Energy Programs have been suspended since November 2020, and are only returning to market this week as the province moves into phase one of re-opening. The focus in the next few months will be completing the home audits in the pipeline for participants that were waitlisted from the former Home Assistance Program (HAP) (approximately 2,000 homes, plus many additional social housing units).</li> </ul> </li> <li>- A question was raised about translation of educational program materials, particularly into Indigenous languages from Northern Ontario             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o IESO: the program materials have been translated into various languages in the past, but not Indigenous languages</li> <li>o <b>Action:</b> EAP team to follow-up on resources for translation into the most relevant languages/ dialects, and potentially investigate other government agencies that may have may have started to translate their forms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- A related question was raised about the capacity of the call centre to operate in multiple languages
  - o IESO: 10 languages are currently supported in-house by the delivery agent (GreenSaver)
  - o If needed, additional language support may be provided through an agency
  - o **Action:** EAP team to follow up to provide the list of languages currently available (complete)
  - o Languages include:
    - Arabic
    - Bengali
    - Cantonese
    - English
    - Filipino
    - French
    - Mandarin
    - Portuguese
    - Spanish
    - Tamil

### 3. Discussion on reaching moderate income segment, and trends observed during the COVID-19 pandemic

- **Affordability** remains a key driver for the low-income segment. The pandemic has had a two-fold impact as many residents have experienced restricted income, along with increased energy usage due to more time spent in the home
- Moderate-income residents may be more motivated by sustainability and other interests outside of direct bill savings, compared with the low-income residents.
- There has been an emerging trend toward services that are provided at the **community level** (e.g. micro-neighbourhoods, bulk-buying and concierge services, as well as information sharing within COVID-19 cluster groups).
  - o Often, neighbourhoods where homes were all built around the same time, experience similar needs in terms of equipment replacement timelines, and it may make sense to make these purchases as a group
  - o Leveraging these networks could be a possible way to connect with vulnerable communities for legitimate energy services and programs.
- Members of northern and remote communities continue to struggle with services or discounts that require **internet access**
  - o Consistent and reliable computer access is particularly a concern for this segment and adds to their vulnerability

- Ideas were presented for alternate means of engaging with these residents, including: local radio stations (particularly in the far north), newsletters, fliers and social assistance offices
- The value of **in-person education** was also noted as a successful means of overcoming the knowledge barriers around energy processes (e.g. how to set your smart thermostat, understanding on-peak vs. off-peak usage, etc.)
- The **Customer Choice** program that was introduced in 2020 allows for residential and small business customers to opt for Tiered vs. Time-of-Use rates
  - This was mentioned as an option to suggest to community members who are experiencing high electricity bills
  - Potential savings would depend on their usage pattern
  - The OEB has released a calculator to help customers compare Time-of-Use and Tiered rate plans [here](#).
- Participants are still seeing trend of bad actors claiming affiliation with energy programs
  - The promise of a rebate is used as a way of gaining access to homes and selling unaffiliated products
  - This scam has recently been observed over emails and Facebook postings
  - IESO reiterated the importance of awareness and vigilance: key messages should be that the IESO / Save On Energy will never approach potential program participants unless they have expressed interest, and will never need any up-front payment or information (apart from proof of eligibility). The IESO shares on its social media alerts about scams to help inform consumers.

#### 4. Social Housing Breakout Session

*Vicki Gagnon gave an overview of the Retrofit program and Social Housing Adder.*

- Over the past eight years, the Retrofit program has seen over 1,000 social housing applications, with \$7.5 Million in funding
  - The highest application volume was seen between 2016-2018, which coincides with the period in which Ontario's Social Housing Apartment Retrofit Program (SHARP) was in market
  - Since the SHARP funding improved the business case for many social housing energy retrofits, it was suggested that this may have contributed to the high application volume during this time

*The group brainstormed around funding sources that are currently available.*

- Consensus was that nothing is currently available that compares to SHARP funding
- CMHC Co-Investment Fund has a stream for existing housing
- Social services relief fund: the majority has gone to increasing capacity of the shelter system, waiting for next round of funding to be released
- Federal **Greener Homes** initiative: includes a MURB component, but may be difficult for social housing to access
  - Appears to require homeowners in a building to apply as a group
  - New delivery model, and requirements around tenant ownership, may present barriers
  - Further research on this offering is required

*Participants discussed some of the opportunities, barriers and developments from their work in the social housing space, which may intersect with current or future IESO program offerings.*

- **Thermostat controls** at the unit level are an important measure, but incentives with restrictions on the type/ brand of equipment may not be of interest
  - Participant experience indicates it is important for thermostat controls to be able to talk to the building's BAS system (that they own)
  - Participants found that residential focused brands were less expensive up front, but that some required an extra fee for data access
  - Observations were that commercial focused equipment is able to send data back into the BAS and did not require additional fees
- **Heat pumps** (i.e. ductless mini-split) are of increasing interest to this sector
  - IESO: the current framework does not provide incentives for natural gas fuel-switching measures, so IESO cannot incentivize heat pumps for gas-heated homes. Federal programs may be better equipped to fund gas/electric heat pump retrofits on the basis of greenhouse gas emissions reductions goals
  - Electric heat pump retrofits for individual units within a MURB are now available under the Retrofit program, as of January 2021
    - This measure is *not* available for single-family homes
- **Community engagement and education** is viewed as a "soft" measure, and would be helpful to engage tenants
  - There is an opportunity to address **plug load**, which can be difficult to negotiate with residents
    - Space heaters are sometimes given to residents for short-term use, but never collected, creating an ongoing plug load

- Tenants can often bring in old or inefficient equipment (e.g. window AC units, old fridges, etc.) and housing providers have little practical recourse
  - Incentivizing residents to give up this equipment could yield significant savings
- **Window AC units** are being replaced with portable AC units in the facilities of some housing providers
  - Window units can be dangerous and add to maintenance costs
  - One participant mentioned that their facility is being retrofitted with portable units up to EER 11
  - This participant suggested future incentives might focus on making ESTAR rated portable units available
  - It should be noted that IESO programs are for equipment replacement, not for any application that would create additional load (i.e. new equipment)
- There is an opportunity to bolster / augment **capability building support** to better align with the sector:
  - Some participants mentioned that committing staff for the entire 5-day period for building operator training can be a challenge.
  - Content can be too academic / not practical enough for the needs of their staff.
  - TCHC is developing tenant training course (heating, ventilation and tenant comfort) that they will make available to others once complete

## 5. Future Roundtables

Future roundtables will continue to take place in a virtual format, to ensure accessibility. The next meeting will take place in Fall 2021. IESO will contact all meeting participants in August with a meeting date a proposed agenda.