

Water and Internet Assistance Applications

By the GWAAR Legal Services Team (for reprint)

Two new assistance programs are available to help Wisconsin residents pay for home water utilities and internet service, but the application process can be challenging. Knowing what to expect in advance can help save time and frustration when applying for these benefits.

The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) is a federally funded grant program being administered in Wisconsin by the Department of Administration through a contract with Energy Services, Inc. (the same organization that manages the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP)). The LIHWAP program can provide funding directly to water utilities to pay past-due residential water bills and prevent service disruptions. Depending on funding availability, some applicants may also qualify for prospective payments to prevent future service disconnections.

Applications for LIHWAP can be submitted by telephone at 833-426-9472, by email to support@wisconsinwater.help, or through an online application at <https://wisconsinwater.help/>. Applicants will need to be ready to complete an application for WHEAP assistance and will need to provide a Social Security number, proof of income, verification of rent expenses if applicable, and a copy of their most recent water bill. The online application allows for uploading of scanned documents, but also offers an option to receive an email link for uploading documents at a later time or from a different location. The upload link does expire after a time, so it's best to be prepared with scanned verification documents at the outset of the application process. Income eligibility limits are \$2,591.92 for a single person household and \$3,389.42 for a household of two.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is an offshoot of the Emergency Broadband Benefit program that can help low-income households pay for internet service and connected devices. Program benefits include a \$30/month discount (\$75/month for residents of qualifying tribal lands) on internet service and a one-time discount of up to \$100 toward the purchase of a connected device such as a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer. A household is eligible if a member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPL);
- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP (FoodShare in Wisconsin), Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline;
- Participates in Tribal specific programs, such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- or Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income program.

Households can apply for ACP through the website at <https://acpbenefit.org/>. Applicants will need to create an account and set up a user name and personal password. Once the household is determined eligible, the system will provide an ID code that applicants will need to write down. Applicants will then need to search by location or zip code to find a list of participating service providers. Applicants may then need to complete an additional application form through the selected provider and may need to be

able to receive additional verification codes through text or email to complete the application process. Users with existing accounts may need to call the service provider directly to recover forgotten login or password information. Once eligibility is established, applicants should receive a confirmation email or text message.

Anyone who was already enrolled in the earlier Emergency Broadband Benefit program as of December 31, 2021 will automatically continue to receive their current monthly benefit until March 1, 2022. These individuals will need to take steps to stay enrolled after March 1. Although the application process can be cumbersome, advance preparation can help streamline efforts and get households connected to important cost-saving benefits.

More information is available here: www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit .

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