

Tip Sheet:

Utility Protection and Fuel Assistance

Cancer can cause financial hardships, including possible loss of income, for patients and families from many economic backgrounds. This can make it harder to pay your utilities (heat, electricity, water bills). A Dana-Farber resource specialist can talk with you about what help may be available depending on your eligibility and state residence.

Overview of Programs

Fuel and Energy Assistance

- Visit www.mass.gov and enter these terms in the search tool:
 - “fuel assistance” – This should lead you to the Health and Human Services section for more information about state programs that can help you pay for heating your home from November to April.
 - “housing energy programs” – This should lead you to the Housing and Economic Development section, where you can learn more about heating programs and energy conservation services.
- **Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)** is a nonprofit agency that helps households in Boston and surrounding communities meet fuel and energy needs. Visit <http://bostonabcd.org> and find the “Energy” section.

Legal Help and Information

Mass Legal Help is an organization that aims to help you find practical information about your legal rights in Massachusetts. Visit www.MassLegalHelp.org and search for “utility shut-offs” to learn how you may be protected against a utility company shutting off or terminating service.

Utility Protection

Utilities are services that include electricity, natural gas, heating oil, and water. Under state law, gas, electric, and private water companies are not allowed to turn off your heat or other services if you or someone in the home is seriously ill **AND** you cannot afford to pay your bills. Here’s what you can do to protect against a shut-off:

- Call your utility company as **soon as possible** and explain that a member of your household is undergoing cancer treatment. Ask for and submit a financial hardship form, including your proof of income level.
- Call a Dana-Farber resource specialist at 617-632-3301 and tell him or her about your situation. If you are eligible, the resource specialist can send a shut-off protection letter to your utility company signed by your Dana-Farber doctor. While it varies by state, the shut-off protection usually lasts 3-6 months before requiring another letter from Dana-Farber. It is your responsibility to let your resource specialist know when you need a new letter. **Please note:** We recommend contacting us at least one month in advance.
- Call the MA Attorney General’s Consumer Hotline at 617-727-8400 for utility bill disputes.

Fuel Assistance

Several programs help Massachusetts households pay their home heating bills and lower energy costs:

- **LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program)** helps cover fuel costs for residents with household incomes up to 60 percent of the state median income. LIHEAP is managed by a network of nonprofit agencies across the state. They make direct payments to residents' heating companies, including oil, gas, electricity, propane, wood, or coal. **This program runs between November 1 and April 30.** To learn more, visit www.mass.gov and search for "LIHEAP." There you will find information about how to apply, income eligibility, and application forms in different languages.
- **Massachusetts Good Neighbor Energy Fund** offers one-time grants for residents who are struggling to pay their energy bills but don't qualify for income-based government energy programs like LIHEAP. The Good Neighbor Fund serves people whose gross household income falls between 60 and 80 percent of the state median income if you qualify. You can receive up to \$300 a year toward your fuel costs. The program is managed by the Salvation Army and sponsored by gas, electric, and oil companies who raise funds from their customers. For more information, visit magoodneighbor.org
- **Reduced rates for utilities**
 - You may qualify for reduced rates from your gas and electric companies, if offered by the company and if your income falls below a certain level. Call your company for more information about the requirements and process.
 - Home heating companies are often flexible about working out discounts and payment plans with their customers. Contact your oil, gas, or electric company to discuss your situation.
 - If you heat with oil, consider joining an oil cooperative (co-op). They often save their members money on services and may offer discounts to low-income customers.

Heating System Repairs

The state's Heating Emergency Assistance Retrofit Task Weatherization Assistance Program (**HEARTWAP**) helps low-income households repair, replace, and maintain their heating systems. In colder months, it helps with emergency no-heat situations or unsafe systems. In warmer months, it offers tune-ups and other maintenance services. The program is managed by local agencies and serves households with incomes up to 60 percent of the state median income. It is focused on homeowners, but some services are also available for renters.

Energy Efficiency

Weatherization Assistance Program (**WAP**) helps low-income households reduce their heating bills through energy conservation steps such as floor, attic, and pipe insulation. Priority goes to households with elderly, disabled, or Native American residents, young children, or high energy costs. Tenants are eligible for weatherization if the landlord gives approval. The program is managed by local agencies and serves households with incomes up to 60 percent of the state median income, or with a member receiving Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

For HEARTWAP and WAP, find your local Community Action Agency, visit www.masscap.org/agencies.

Learn More Online

To access the internet during your visits to Dana-Farber (Longwood), consider using one of the free computer workstations in the Blum Patient and Family Resource Center, or borrow an iPad from the Shapiro Center for Patients and Families. Both centers are on the first floor of the Yawkey Center.