Income-qualified customer engagement: Solution provider panel

Ben Nathan, Director

Webinar

LowIncome Energy Issues Forum

E Source
POWERING WHAT'S **NEXT**

Mission and challenge statement

The mission of the E Source Low Income Energy Issues Forum (LIEIF) is to conduct research on utility bill affordability, share information, and identify solutions among a diverse group of professionals.

Created in 2013, we adopted this challenge statement:

Propose innovative and integrated policies and approaches that help close the widening gap between what vulnerable energy consumers can pay and their current utility bills.

LIEIF is a unique group of professionals focused on energy affordability. Our members work for utilities (municipal and investor owned); state regulatory agencies; social service agencies; research institutes; consumer organizations; national associations and other nonprofit organizations; and creative, analytical, and software businesses.

June 20 LIEIF exchange recap

Deploy layered solutions to help low- and moderate-income customers

Low- and moderate-income (LMI) customers face a variety of hurdles when it comes to paying their utility bills, affording other necessities, and navigating a complex web of assistance programs. **How can you better serve these customers? Offer layered solutions to those layered challenges.**

We explored:

- How utilities are bundling LMI solutions (bill payment assistance, payment arrangements, energy efficiency and weatherization, and external assistance partnerships)
- Common challenges utilities face when administering assistance
- Ways utilities are addressing challenges for LMI customers
- Future solutions utilities are considering

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Today's webinar

It's critical to engage your customers, especially those who struggle to pay utility and other bills and can benefit greatly from utility assistance and affordability programs. Utilities can work with a variety of third-party organizations to reach their low- and moderate-income (LMI) customers and encourage enrollment in utility and other assistance programs.

In this webinar, we'll highlight three utility solution providers that are helping utilities improve engagement with LMI customers around income-qualified assistance programs.
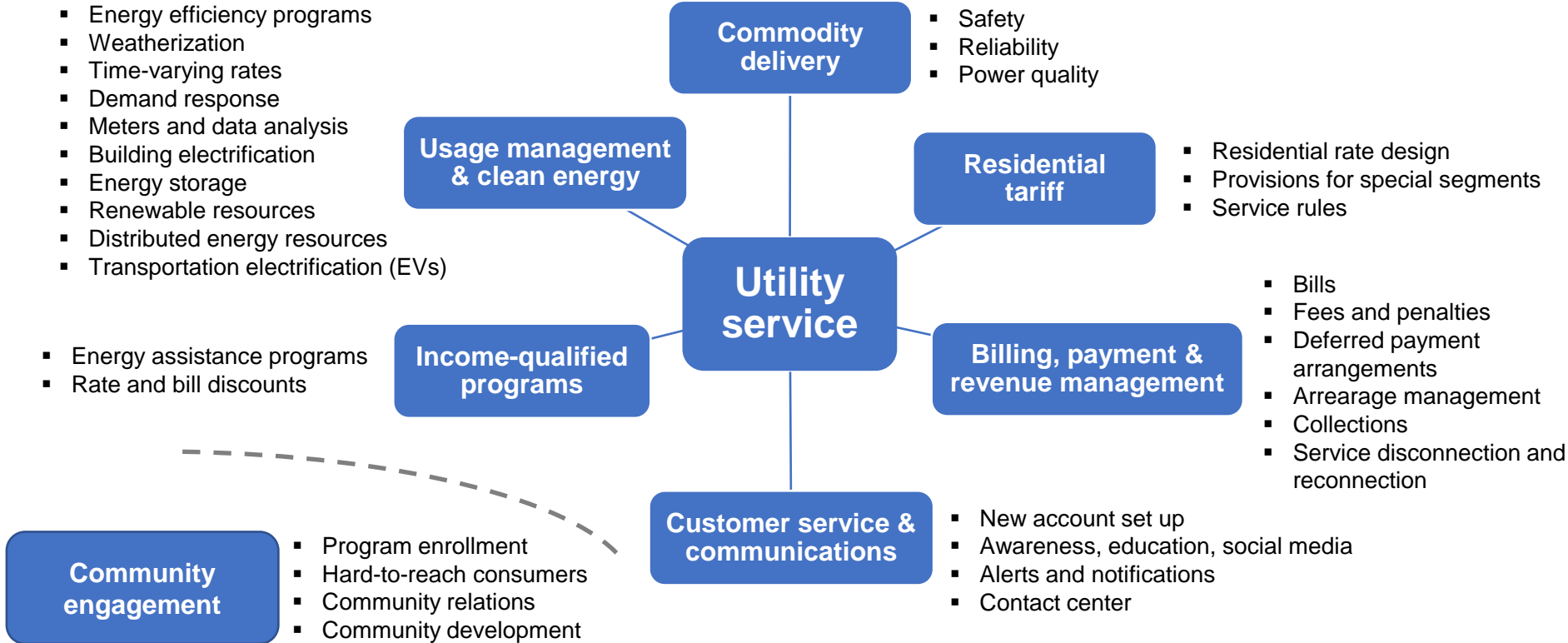
Let's explore:

- How these solution providers are partnering with utilities
- The ways they help drive success for programs designed for income-qualified customers
- How utilities can partner with them to better reach and serve LMI customers

LMI customer touchpoints
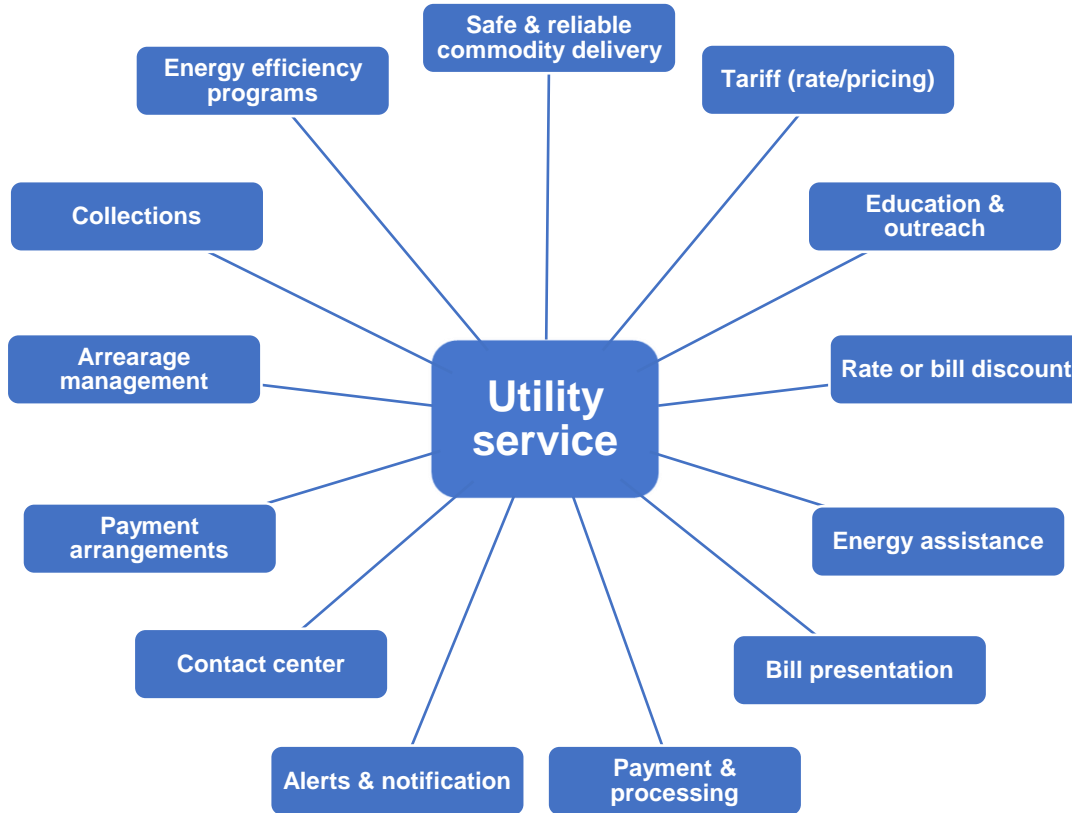
- Many utility departments and divisions serve low-income consumers

- There are a dozen relevant clusters of service

- Consumers experience only one service: **utility service**

- Integration of programs and services is challenging

- Many policies and practices affect many services

High-level affordability framework

Commodity delivery
- Safety
- Reliability
- Power quality

- Energy efficiency programs
- Weatherization
- Time-varying rates
- Demand response
- Meters and data analysis
- Building electrification
- Energy storage
- Renewable resources
- Distributed energy resources
- Transportation electrification (EVs)

Usage management & clean energy

Residential tariff
- Residential rate design
- Provisions for special segments
- Service rules

Utility service

- Energy assistance programs
- Rate and bill discounts

Income-qualified programs

Billing, payment & revenue management
- Bills
- Fees and penalties
- Deferred payment arrangements
- Arrearage management
- Collections
- Service disconnection and reconnection

Community engagement
- Program enrollment
- Hard-to-reach consumers
- Community relations
- Community development

Customer service & communications
- New account set up
- Awareness, education, social media
- Alerts and notifications
- Contact center

Utility affordability solution challenges

- Demand-side management (DSM) programs for LMI customers are reaching just a small fraction (5%) of households that need assistance.

—American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy
(A Review of Energy Efficiency Program Offerings for Low-Income Households)

- Millions of eligible households are not receiving any assistance and most states have less than 20% participation in LIHEAP.

—Rocky Mountain Institute (A Severe Winter Means High Energy Bills)

Experience with applying for assistance
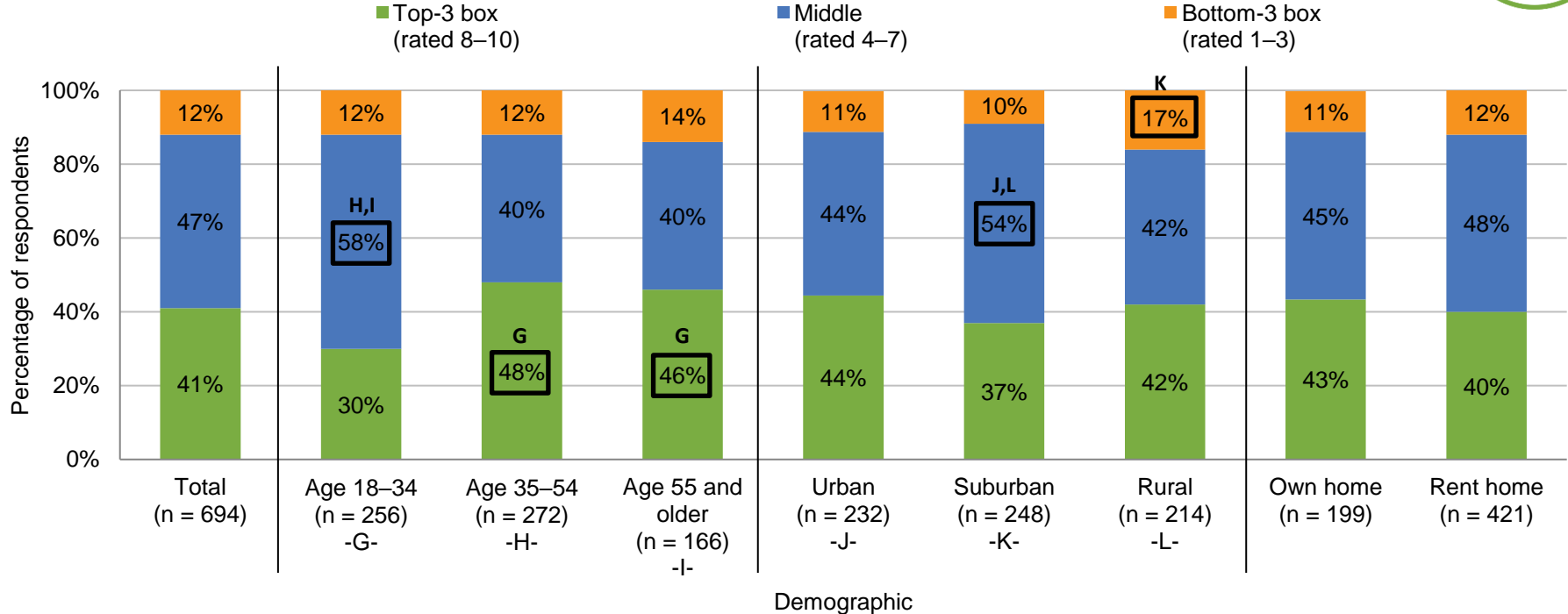
© E Source. **Base:** Total applied for/received utility bill assistance. **Question_H11:** If you've ever applied for or received utility bill assistance, how would you rate the experience of applying for or receiving utility bill assistance? **Note:** Ratings were on a 1–10 scale, where 1 was low and 10 was high.

Categories of practical solutions

- **Engage communities**—Community partnerships are essential to understand needs, address emerging issues, and reach challenging consumer segments.

- **Improve processes and policies**—There are many quick wins that will provide immediate progress and point the way toward future improvements.

- **Improve communications**—Better customer communications are necessary for all initiatives with retail customers and community partners.

- **Adjust the standard service model**—A hard look at the existing service model can reveal sources of the affordability and equity gap.

- **Expand offerings**—Service innovations are more than a slogan. Consumers want more convenience, control, and flexibility to manage their bills.

- **Invest in clean energy**—Utility resource planning examines investments in renewable resources and the equity and environmental justice impacts.

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What are we trying to achieve?

- **Greater engagement** of customers and communities

- **Greater program participation** to maximize energy assistance

- **Increased customer satisfaction** through convenient, flexible services that help people manage their utility bills

- **Increased operational efficiency and lower costs** through self-service options, improved awareness of programs, and reduced burdens on contact centers

- **Reduced customer debt and energy burden** through increased end-use energy efficiency and better arrearage management

- **Increased access to clean and efficient energy opportunities** for underserved and disadvantaged customers and communities

Today's webinar panelists

- [Patricia King](), Manager, Community Engagement, PECO

- [Ty Harnden](), Account Executive, [findhelp.org]()

  - [PECO's findhelp white label site]()

- [Daniel Mintz](), Head of Data & Operations, [PromisePay]()

- [Adrian Davis](), CEO, [GetRaindrop]()

Layered Solutions

❑ *Layered Solutions* are necessary for a comprehensive assistance program portfolio – solutions need to be both *connected and continuous*

❑ Layered Solutions include both utility assistance and *non-utility assistance* – customers who need utility assistance likely need assistance with other service as well – this helps address poverty in a more all-inclusive manner

❑ From a *utility perspective, a variety of solutions* need to be available including on-going assistance, usage reduction programs, emergent assistance and situational assistance

❑ From a non-utility perspective, we should also offer customers options and connections for other services (i.*e., rental assistance, food pantries, etc.*)
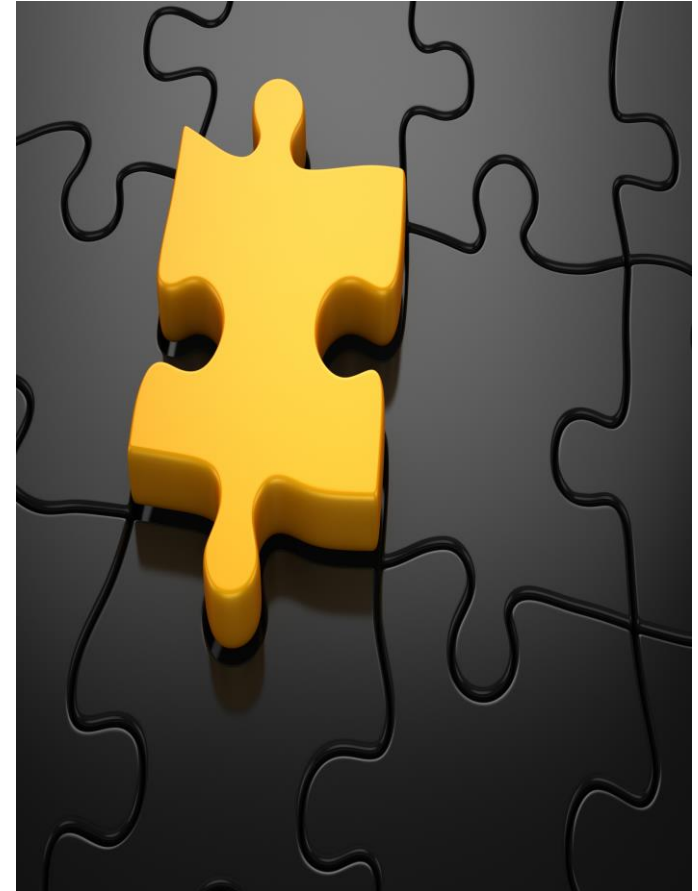
Layered Utility Assistance Support

➢ Every assistance program should provide connections to other programs via auto-solicitation, auto-enrollment or referrals

➢ PECO's Utility Assistance Programs "Layered Solutions" include:

  ✓ ***Ongoing Assistance*** – PECO's CAP program provides customers with a fixed monthly bill based on total household income (*6 – 10% of income*)

  ✓ ***Usage Reduction Programs*** – PECO has a variety of usage reduction programs that provide both remediation measures as well as education

  ✓ ***Emergent Assistance*** – PECO has a hardship program (*service is terminated or in threat of termination for non-payment*) for unexpected events

  ✓ ***Grant Programs*** – PECO works with government grant programs to maximize customer assistance

  ✓ ***Situational Assistance*** – Special needs or extenuating circumstances
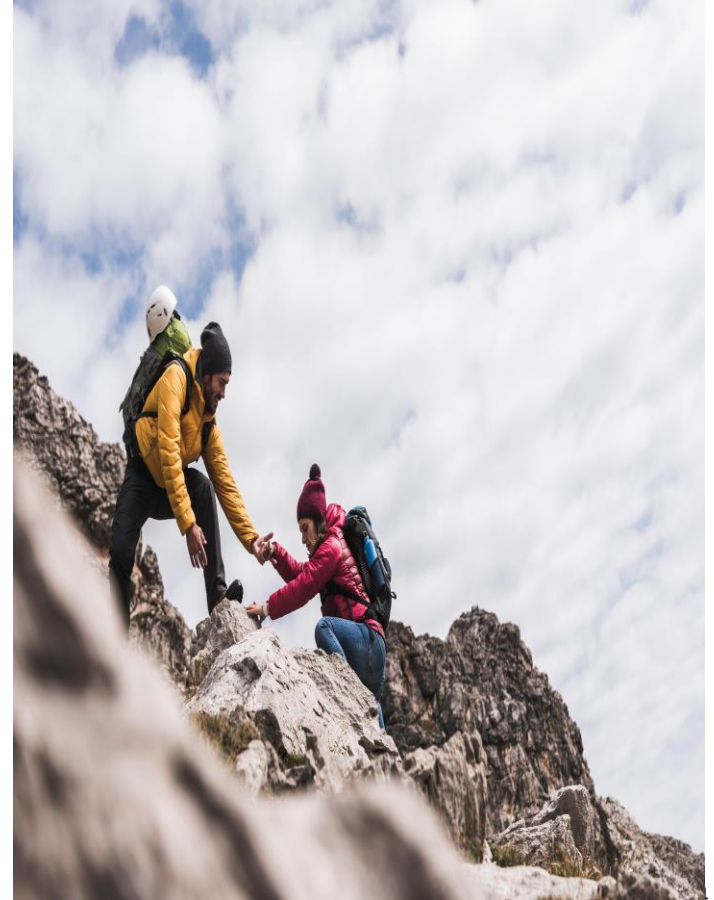
PECO Assistance Programs – Comprehensive and Complementary

Ongoing Assistance **Usage Reduction Programs** **Grant Programs** **Situational Assistance**

Customer Assistance Program (CAP)	Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP)	Health & Safety (H&S)	Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LEEP)	Matching Energy Assistance Fund (MEAF)	Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	Customer Assistance Referral and Evaluation Services (CARES)
Monthly credit based on the total household gross income and energy usage. NOTE: Arrearage Forgiveness for 1st time enrollment Forgiveness.	Usage reduction and conservation education program to help customers reduce energy	Remediates Health & Safety issues in LIURP eligible homes (i.e. roof leaks, poor ventilation, basement access, etc.)	Act 129's low-income component for weatherization and usage reduction programs	Hardship program for low-income customers whose service is terminated or in threat of termination	Federal grant program for low-income customers whose service is terminated or in threat of termination	Referral and information service for low-income customers with special needs or extenuating circum-stances
Affordable monthly bills	Lower future bills	Lower future bills	Lower future bills	Arrearage reduction	Arrearage reduction	Extended customer service

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Customer Segmentation – Vulnerable Populations

LMI customers are not monolithic; Specific segments have different needs; Below are some categories:

LEP	0-50% FPL	Hospital Systems / Disabilities / Elderly	Domestic Abuse / Veterans District Attorney's Office
Limited English Proficiency; Customer "expresses" or "demonstrates" a need for language assistance; Dominant languages – 5% +	• Poorest of the Poor • Deep Poverty	Social Determinants of Health	Populations that have extenuating circumstances and unique special needs
In PECO's service territory, the only language that rises to the level of "dominant" is Spanish (6%) followed by Simplified Chinese (3%)	This population has additional challenges given the deep poverty – Need additional "hand holding"	Hospital systems ask about energy security upon release from hospital	Domestic Abuse and Veterans' organizations assist their respective populations with psychological, financial, medical issues, etc.
Provide additional products and services; • Website translation • Application and brochure translation • Field Force LEP cards	• Engage 3rd parties, social service agencies, school officials, elected officials, etc. • Enhanced Outreach in identified zip codes	• Energy security necessary to continue the healing process • Partner with / educate hospital system social workers	• Partnerships with Veterans agencies • Partnerships with Domestic Abuse agencies • DA's Office of Victim Services

Access – Critical Piece of the "Layered" Puzzle

❑ Without proper access, solutions are useless; Access should be wide and varied; Cannot have a one-size fits all solution

❑ Different customers have ***different needs, tolerances and preferences***

❑ Although on-line is the most cost-effective option for utilities, we have to consider that many customers lack the tools or access to online options, and others simply just don't prefer electronic options (*i.e., elderly*)

❑ Access options should include electronic and manual alternatives; A comprehensive Access portfolio includes:
- ✓ ***Online***
- ✓ ***Email***
- ✓ ***U.S. Mail***
- ✓ ***Fax (yes, many people still fax ☺)***
- ✓ ***In-Person***
- ✓ Given COVID, new options have emerged, specifically Virtual – at PECO we offer **Virtual Assistance** weekly (*by appointment*)

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Non-Utility Assistance Connections – Holistic Approach

❑ **Community Partners:**
- ➤ ***CBO***'s – Community Based Organizations and ***NEC***'s – Neighborhood Energy Centers
- ➤ Known, trusted social service agencies in the community; Partnerships with these organizations cannot be understated

❑ **Other agencies:**
- ➤ ***BDT*** – *Benefits Data Trust* – National organization that provides government program enrollment (*i.e., SNAP*) for income eligible customers – Partnership with them includes outreach to CAP customers advising of these additional benefits
- ➤ ***Findhelp*** – Another national organization that provides assistance for a variety of programs (*utility and non-utility*); Findhelp.org starts with a zip code; Once a zip code is entered, all agencies in that zip code come up by category; PECO partners with Findhelp.org and has a link on our website to their website

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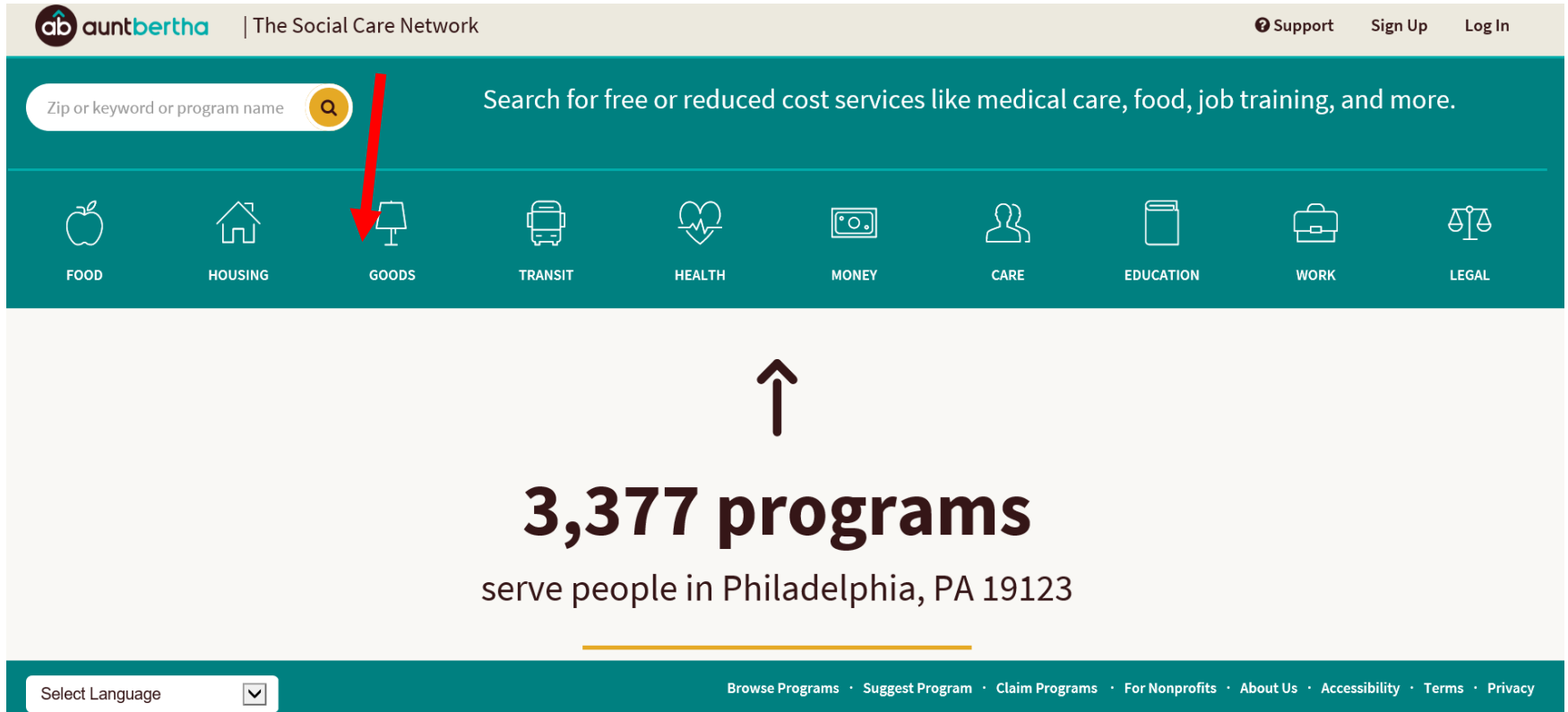
Findhelp.org – The Social Care Network

Landing Page -- Everything starts with a zip code – Customer enters zip code

Findhelp.org – The Social Care Network

System will display list of available services in your zip code. Utility programs are found by clicking on "Housing"

Appendix

What is Poverty – 2023 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Chart

2023 Program Eligibility
Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Monthly Income Limits

# of household members	25% FPL	50% FPL	75% FPL	100% FPL	125% FPL	CAP & LIHEAP 150% FPL (or less)	175% FPL	LIURP, MEAF & CARES 200% FPL (or less)	250% FPL	300% FPL
1	$304	$608	$911	$1,215	$1,519	$1,823	$2,126	$2,430	$3,038	$3,645
2	$411	$822	$1,233	$1,643	$2,054	$2,465	$2,876	$3,287	$4,108	$4,930
3	$518	$1,036	$1,554	$2,072	$2,590	$3,108	$3,625	$4,143	$5,179	$6,215
4	$625	$1,250	$1,875	$2,500	$3,125	$3,750	$4,375	$5,000	$6,250	$7,500
5	$732	$1,464	$2,196	$2,928	$3,660	$4,393	$5,125	$5,857	$7,321	$8,785
6	$839	$1,678	$2,518	$3,357	$4,196	$5,035	$5,874	$6,713	$8,392	$10,070
7	$946	$1,893	$2,839	$3,785	$4,731	$5,678	$6,624	$7,570	$9,463	$11,355
8	$1,053	$2,107	$3,160	$4,213	$5,267	$6,320	$7,373	$8,427	$10,533	$12,640
*For each additional person, add…	$107	$214	$321	$428	$535	$643	$750	$857	$1,071	$1,285

![peco — AN EXELON COMPANY]

Thank you!

LIEIF updates

New LIEIF members

- Ameren Illinois
- FortisBC
- Seattle City Light
- Tucson Electric Power
- Xcel Energy

Upcoming LIEIF webinars

- August: Findings and recommendations from LMI consumer survey

- September or October: Weatherization best practices

2023 LIEIF resources

- [Deploy layered solutions to help low- and moderate-income customers](#) (on-demand webinar)

- [Navigating the LIEIF Affordability Programs Database](#) (on-demand webinar)

- [Creative approaches to utility payment assistance programs](#) (on-demand webinar)

- [Strategies for income-qualified program enrollment and customer eligibility](#) (on-demand webinar)

- [Aligning the non-energy benefits of utility programs with health outcomes](#) (on-demand webinar)

- [Low Income Energy Issues Forum: Annual meeting](#) (slides)

- [Applying an Audience of One approach to better understand and serve LMI customers](#) (on-demand webinar)
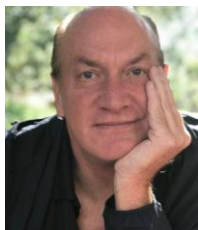
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