FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As winter bears down on the country, imagine heating your home using only a kitchen stove, completing your homework by candlelight, or contemplating arrearages of $2,000 or more.

Now imagine that same bill when your household income is less than $20,000. Summers are no better in many parts of the country. Surviving a southern heat wave as a homebound person with no air conditioning can be life-threatening.

Choices between critical needs are an everyday occurrence for those at the lowest levels of income. It is common for these families and individuals to make choices between food and heat, or medicine and electricity.

To document the intricacies of poverty and energy needs, the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC) and the National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association (NEADA) have released the National Energy Assistance survey (NEA). This survey, funded by NEUAC, documents changes in the affordability of energy bills, the need for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and the choices that low-income households are forced to make when faced with a disproportionate energy burden.

LIHEAP is a federal block grant distributed to states and managed by nonprofit agencies. LIHEAP assists eligible low-income households with heating and cooling energy costs, bill payment assistance, energy crisis assistance, weatherization, and energy-related home repairs such as HVAC system repair or replacement.

In order to obtain a comprehensive demographic picture of LIHEAP recipients and their characteristics, the Applied Public Policy Research Institute for Study and Evaluation (APPRISE) conducted a survey of more than 600 households in seven states that received LIHEAP benefits:

- California
- Connecticut
- Georgia
- Iowa
- Indiana
- Louisiana
- Pennsylvania

Stratified samples of fiscal year 2018 LIHEAP recipients were chosen from each of the above state LIHEAP databases. The survey results present the findings from the 2018 NEA survey and provide comparisons to the previous NEA surveys conducted in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2009, and 2011.

The 2018 survey’s results confirmed that LIHEAP recipients are susceptible to the consequences of temperature extremes, with 92% overall reporting a vulnerable person in the home, defined as an adult
age 60 or older, a child younger than 18, or a household member with a disability, with a further 28 percent reporting use of medical equipment that requires electricity.

Nearly 40 percent reported that their utility bills exceeded $2,000 at some point during the year, and yet 82 percent said their annual income was less than $20,000. Faced with an overwhelming energy burden, the LIHEAP population reported making difficult choices. More than 1 out of 3 reported closing off part of their homes during the year to conserve heat or cooling, 1 out of 4 kept their homes at an unsafe or unhealthy temperature, and nearly 1 out of 3 households reported using the kitchen stove to heat their home.

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Medical and health challenges related to energy burden also were documented in the survey. For example:

- 36 percent of respondents reported that they went without food for at least one day during the past year,
- 41 percent reported they went without medical or dental care, and
- 31 percent said they did not fill a prescription or took less than the full dose of a prescribed medication in the past five years.

The survey documented the impact of federal LIHEAP funds on these exceptionally vulnerable households, with more than half stating that if not for LIHEAP, they would have been forced to maintain an unhealthy or unsafe temperature in their homes. Additionally, nearly 60 percent said their utilities would have been disconnected or discontinued without the assistance provided by LIHEAP.

“This survey documents what many in the field are acutely aware of – the special circumstances of those at the lowest levels of poverty in regards to energy burden,” Katrina Metzler, Executive Director for NEUAC, said. “LIHEAP provides a measure of stability for families during the most dangerous temperatures across the country. This is not a matter of comfort, it is a matter of health and safety. Energy is a life-critical resource, not a luxury for these vulnerable families.”

Dan Alderson, Manager of Customer Advocacy for Atmos Energy, said, “The National Energy Survey will help Atmos Energy and other energy providers, stakeholders across our nation better understand the energy struggles of vulnerable households. This survey is not only timely, we will use this information to revise and/or develop new innovated policies/programs to reduce overall energy burdens, making a difference for American seniors, disabled, veterans and families.”

For more information on energy assistance, contact your local LIHEAP provider or go to https://neuac.org and click on Find Help to locate information on LIHEAP in your state.

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The National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition is a leader in the fields of public policy, advocacy, energy, and poverty issues. Members of the organization include utilities, non-profit organizations, energy assistance programs, trade associations and tribal organizations. NEUAC currently serves more than 160 individuals and member organizations that span the nation. NEAUC provides its members with the tools to advocate for LIHEAP and other funding to support low-income families, as well as knowledge of government policies and initiatives and other resources to solve low income issues. NEUAC
bridges the gap between states, social service organizations and government to empower them to work together and learn from each other in times of energy and poverty crisis.

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