

RCW 19.405.120 Energy assistance for low-income households. (1)

It is the intent of the legislature to demonstrate progress toward making energy assistance funds available to low-income households consistent with the policies identified in this section.

(2) An electric utility must make programs and funding available for energy assistance to low-income households by July 31, 2021. Each utility must demonstrate progress in providing energy assistance pursuant to the assessment and plans in subsection (4) of this section. To the extent practicable, priority must be given to low-income households with a higher energy burden.

(3) Beginning July 31, 2020, the department must collect and aggregate data estimating the energy burden and energy assistance need and reported energy assistance for each electric utility, in order to improve agency and utility efforts to serve low-income households with energy assistance. The department must update the aggregated data on a biennial basis, make it publicly accessible on its internet website and, to the extent practicable, include geographic attributes.

(a) The aggregated data published by the department must include, but is not limited to:

(i) The estimated number and demographic characteristics of households served by energy assistance for each utility and the dollar value of the assistance;

(ii) The estimated level of energy burden and energy assistance need among customers served, accounting for household income and other drivers of energy burden;

(iii) Housing characteristics including housing type, home vintage, and fuel types; and

(iv) Energy efficiency potential.

(b) Each utility must disclose information to the department for use under this subsection, including:

(i) The amount and type of energy assistance and the number and type of households, if applicable, served for programs administered by the utility;

(ii) The amount of money passed through to third parties that administer energy assistance programs; and

(iii) Subject to availability, any other information related to the utility's low-income assistance programs that is requested by the department.

(c) The information required by (b) of this subsection must be from the electric utility's most recent completed budget period and in a form, timeline, and manner as prescribed by the department.

(4) (a) In addition to the requirements under subsection (3) of this section, each electric utility must submit biennially to the department an assessment of:

(i) The programs and mechanisms used by the utility to reduce energy burden and the effectiveness of those programs and mechanisms in both short-term and sustained energy burden reductions;

(ii) The outreach strategies used to encourage participation of eligible households, including consultation with community-based organizations and Indian tribes as appropriate, and comprehensive enrollment campaigns that are linguistically and culturally appropriate to the customers they serve in vulnerable populations; and

(iii) A cumulative assessment of previous funding levels for energy assistance compared to the funding levels needed to meet: (A) Sixty percent of the current energy assistance need, or increasing energy assistance by fifteen percent over the amount provided in 2018,

whichever is greater, by 2030; and (B) ninety percent of the current energy assistance need by 2050.

(b) The assessment required in (a) of this subsection must include a plan to improve the effectiveness of the assessed mechanisms and strategies toward meeting the energy assistance need.

(5) A consumer-owned utility may enter into an agreement with a public university, community-based organization, or joint operating agency organized under chapter 43.52 RCW to aggregate the disclosures required in this section and submit the assessment required in subsections (3) and (4) of this section.

(6) (a) The department must submit a biennial report to the legislature that:

(i) Aggregates information into a statewide summary of energy assistance programs, energy burden, and energy assistance need;

(ii) Identifies and quantifies current expenditures on low-income energy assistance; and

(iii) Evaluates the effectiveness of additional optimal mechanisms for energy assistance including, but not limited to, customer rates, a low-income specific discount, system benefits charges, and public and private funds.

(b) The department must also assess mechanisms to prioritize energy assistance towards low-income households with a higher energy burden.

(7) Nothing in this section may be construed to restrict the rate-making authority of the commission or the governing body of a consumer-owned utility as otherwise provided by law. [2019 c 288 s 12.]