

LIHEAP PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

OCS Presentation to Congressional Staffs, Unveiling the Performance Management Data Warehouse

By Max Larsen

Jeannie Chaffin, Director of the Office of Community Service, expressed a sense of tremendous pride when on December 9, she and Lauren Christopher, Director of the Division of Energy Assistance, demonstrated for some members of Congress and Congressional staffers the capabilities of the LIHEAP Performance Management Website that was released and made accessible to the public on January 12, 2017. The website will house data from LIHEAP Reports to Congress through 2014. The data warehouse tool, developed by our contractor APPRISE, Inc., will make it possible for Congressional staffers, State LIHEAP Offices, grantees, and the public to produce reports based on these data to show how well LIHEAP programs are serving the needs of low-income households

Important dates and events associated with this development include:

- Launch of the Publicly-Accessible Website **Thursday, January 12.**
- OCS is preparing a one-page Fact Sheet about the Data Warehouse that can be circulated with communication materials.
- OCS will provide a webinar for grantees, stakeholders from the utility industries, and anyone interested on **Wednesday, January 18, at 1 PM EST.**

- OCS sent a Dear Colleague Letter:
 - ♦ Discussing the Congressional Demo,
 - ♦ Announcing the January 12, launch; and
 - ♦ Inviting all grantees and their utility partners to view the webinar.

Jeannie and Lauren commented that they recognize that OCS's decision to implement performance management activities, data collection, and reporting have meant additional work for you, your sub-grantees, and your energy vendors. All of us at OCS appreciate your efforts to fulfill your obligations and support our efforts to move to data-driven management of LIHEAP. They reported that as a total organization progress is occurring. As of October 2016, 73% of all state grantees verified that they would be able to report most or all performance indicators. Thank you for your part in this achievement. We will soon be in full compliance with our goals.

The purpose of collecting data is to have the means to manage our program effectively and efficiently and be sure that we are achieving all we can for our ultimate clients. You have been instrumental in being certain that we have the data we need. The LIHEAP Performance Management Website that was just demonstrated provides all of you with the tool to turn data into information that you can use to understand how well you are doing. The focus of LIHEAP's training and technical assistance in the future will be

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to enhance the use of data to improve management of LIHEAP at every level.

Each of you has access to the LIHEAP Performance Management Website now. We urge you to increase your familiarity with it and begin your own investigation of how you can use your data to enhance your program.



“Reports to Congress” Tab on Performance Management Website

By Max Larsen

The Performance Management Website now has a tab “Reports to Congress” which includes LIHEAP Reports to Congress through 2014. (The 2011 – 2014 Reports to Congress have been cleared recently and posted for public access.) Anyone using the Performance Management Data Warehouse can produce reports based on Report to Congress data from 2001 to 2014. The 2015 LIHEAP Report to Congress and 2015 Home Energy Notebook have been completed and submitted for review. We anticipate approval and posting of the 2015 data on the Data Warehouse in January 2017. Data Warehouse users will then have access to the most up-to-date information about LIHEAP.

Because of the accessibility of data through the Data Warehouse, the format of the 2015 LIHEAP Report to Congress has been simplified making it more efficient for users. The hardcopy published 2015 LIHEAP Report to Congress will be reduced in size, focusing on the national view of LIHEAP funding and uses of funds. It will be printed and distributed to Congressional offices and stakeholders as in the past. The hard copy version will also be available on the Data Warehouse. Both versions will contain links to the more detailed tables in the Data Warehouse. The 2015 Home Energy Notebook is entirely on the Data Warehouse presented as three self-contained sections:

1) Home Energy Data, 2) Home Energy Trends, 3) Performance Measures. The Data Warehouse can be searched for specific results which can be printed as pdfs. OCS invites your comments and suggestions about the change in format of the reorganized 2015 LIHEAP Report to Congress and the 2015 Home Energy Notebook.

The Report to Congress tab in the LIHEAP Performance Management Website also includes FY 2014 **Grantee Profiles**, a one-page display of important data about the state or territory’s LIHEAP. In past years, a grantee that wanted to show current data about the grantee’s LIHEAP program had to consult several different tables in the LIHEAP Report to Congress. Now the information is available through the one-page ready-to-use Grantee Profile. Each Grantee Profile shows total funding, total households served, income eligibility requirements for a four-person household, percent of income-eligible population served and total income-eligible population. Graphs show the uses of LIHEAP funds and the grantee’s service of vulnerable recipient households. Some information is provided about the type of assistance provided by the grantee. Grantee Profiles can be downloaded and printed from the

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LIHEAP Performance Management Website (liheappm.ncat.org) under the Reports to Congress Tab. Grantee Profiles provide an easy-to-use tool for communicating key aspects of your LIHEAP details for Public Hearings, Legislative Briefings or other public information efforts.

Grantee Data Needs Beyond the Data Warehouse

By Debra Brown and Chuck Anderson

Since LIHEAP is a Block Grant program, grantees have substantial flexibility in program design to meet local conditions within certain federal guidelines and requirements. Compiling and reporting national data as mandated by legislation on a program with this much flexibility requires finding common data elements such as those used in the annual LIHEAP Reports to Congress and Home Energy Notebooks. Since these are the sources of data for the Performance Management Data Warehouse, some grantees may find that the reports from the Data Warehouse do not tell the complete story for their LIHEAP program.

The amount of information contained within the Data Warehouse is impressive. The site is also user-friendly, making it very easy to identify trends in any given state that would be useful for planning purposes. However, most information is mined from federally mandated reports, so the information available for display can be limited by the scope of the required reports.

For instance, when accessing the Data Warehouse to run a report regarding California's cooling program, it appears that California does not assist households with cooling services. California operates a year round program that includes cooling, heating, weatherization and emergency assistance. However, when reporting California's cooling information via the LIHEAP State Plan, we must identify the cooling information in the notes field. The information

contained within the notes field does not get pulled into the reports; therefore, it doesn't accurately reflect California's cooling information within the report.

California operates a 15 month program, October 1 to December 31. The intent of operating a fifteen month program is to ensure that local service providers have the funds necessary to provide continuous services to clients while waiting for the annual disbursement of funds from the Health and Human Services (HHS) Agency. When reporting California's program in the LIHEAP State Plan, it is required that California only report a 12 month program since the federal period has always been 12 months. The direction that California has been given from HHS representatives is that the contract period has nothing to do with the operations of the program and the obligation timeframe of the funds. Therefore, California is required to report a 12 month program in the body of the report and add another note explaining the actual program term of 15 months.

Connecticut, and it is assumed many other states, tracks some LIHEAP information independently that as a result is not currently available in the Data Warehouse. Two examples are included here. First, each year we track in aggregate the primary heating source of eligible households by community action agency service area, vulnerability and income level. Documenting each year how many households use electricity, natural gas, or the variety of deliverable fuels allows for comparisons over time that illustrates trends, which is vital information for planning purposes. Second, we have formed an Assurance 16 workgroup which over the past year has been working to update Connecticut's Assurance 16 reporting format, strengthen definitions of what should be counted as an Assurance 16 activity, and has identified instances of data duplication in order to eliminate them from future reports. We anticipate that a federal report focused on Assurance 16 will be developed in the near future, and when it is we are certain that the Data Warehouse will display each state's information accordingly.

Questions and Some Answers about Public Access to Data

- 1. I just learned that the LIHEAP Data Warehouse is going to be made accessible to the public. Why is that happening?**
 - a. Since LIHEAP depends on public funding, it is important that there be transparency about how the funds provided by Congress are distributed and how they are used. Making the data from LIHEAP Reports to Congress easily accessible to the public will increase transparency.

- 2. Does this mean that the public will have access to confidential information about our clients and their energy expenditures?**
 - a. No. The only data accessible through the LIHEAP Data Warehouse are those available through LIHEAP Reports to Congress or Home Energy Notebooks, none of which include any personal data about families or individuals. All information in the LIHEAP Data Warehouse are available publicly elsewhere.

- 3. Why do we need the LIHEAP Data Warehouse if the data are already available in Reports to Congress?**
 - a. Anyone wanting to compile information about LIHEAP for a state, territory or tribe across several years would need to consult several tables in as many Reports to Congress as years covered. So, while the data have been available, they were not easily accessible and usable. The LIHEAP Data Warehouse increases the accessibility of the data by providing effective search tools and retrieval programs.

- 4. How should the data be used in Public Hearings and development of Model Plans?**
 - a. You can use reports and graphs from the LIHEAP Data Warehouse to help state policymakers, utilities and the public understand your program and to illustrate the impact of various policy alternatives.
 - b. Demonstrating the usefulness of the LIHEAP Data Warehouse will encourage your stakeholders to become stronger partners in serving your clients.

- 5. Will my utilities be able to access data about my program without my knowledge?**
 - a. Yes, the data and the tools in the Data Warehouse are available to everyone. You might want to initiate discussions with your stakeholders about the data and if there are anomalies about your program not explained completely by the nationally-formatted data, provide an explanation to them.

- 6. What efforts will OCS make to inform local data users such as state legislative aides, utility companies and other state agencies about the Data Warehouse?**
 - a. Nothing is planned beyond the Press Release that accompanied the Launch of the Website on January 12 and the webinar on January 18. National energy organizations are very interested in this development and may have communicated to their membership.
 - b. There have been presentations and discussions at NEADA and NEUAC meetings and we anticipate that those will continue, especially as the user community finds powerful ways to make use of the data and the tool.
 - c. The PowerPoint slides used by OCS for their announcement are available to you. We recommend that you consider inviting your energy partners and stakeholders to a presentation and engage in discussions of how the data can be used to mutual benefit.