JULY 2024 INTERNAL

Utility Discount Program

PROGRAM BUSINESS OBJECTIVE

Seattle City Light (SCL) is committed to ensuring all customers have access to clean, affordable electricity no matter their financial circumstances. The Utility Discount Program (UDP) strives to help income-eligible residential customers lower bills and reduce past due balances across City Light service areas that include Seattle, Burien, Tukwila, Renton, and Shoreline.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Utility Discount Program (UDP) provides bill assistance for income-eligible customers. Based household size, customers with household incomes at or below 70% of the state's median income are offered a discount of 60% on their SCL bills. All income-eligible customers who receive a Seattle Public Utilities' (SPU) bill will receive a 50% discount on their water, sewer, and solid waste services from Seattle Public Utilities. Tenants whose Seattle Public Utilities services are paid by a landlord or homeowner's association but have a City Light account may receive credits for water, sewer, and solid waste services Seattle Public Utilities on their residential City Light bill.

ELIGIBILITY

An applicant is eligible for UDP if the applicant is an adult household member (18 years or over), is the primary City Light electric service account holder and receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or the combined income of all adult household members does not exceed 70% of the Washington State Median Income (SMI) adjusted for the number of individuals in the household. UDP is open to all customers regardless of their citizenship status, race, gender, ethnicity or ability. City employees do not ask about citizenship status and serve all customers regardless of immigration status.

Seattle City Light (SCL) inter-departmentally contracts with the Human Services Department (HSD) to offer UDP to customers. HSD's team of Program Intake Representatives (PIR) are responsible for program intake which includes ensuring customers meet eligibility requirements for UDP, as well as recertification of customer program eligibility every two years or standard households, three years for

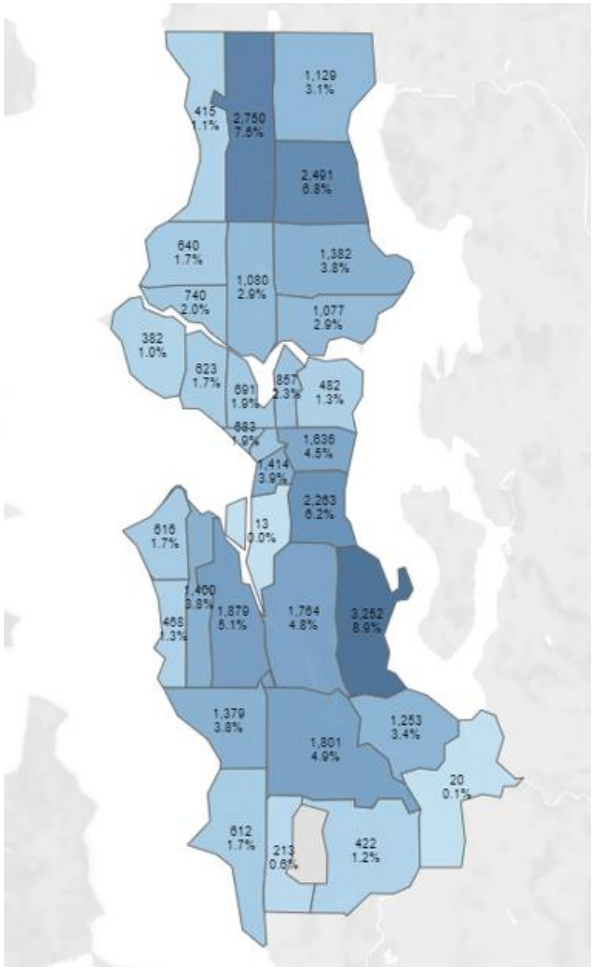
elder only (65+) households. As part of the MOA agreement, HSD also supports UDP outreach ad marketing efforts.

Income Eligibility:

(Maximum monthly/yearly household income before taxes and deductions)

People in household	Utility Discount Program (Monthly)	Utility Discount Program (Yearly)
1	$3,689	$44,268
2	$4,825	$57,900
3	$5,960	$71,520
4	$7,095	$85,140
5	$8,230	$98,760
6	$9,366	$112,392
Each Additional	+ $213	+ $2,556

Current UDP Enrollment by Zip Code/Council District:



PROGRAM KEY CONTACTS

- Program Manager: Thor Peterson
- Portfolio Manager: Melissa Bookwalter

GOVERNANCE

The Utility Discount Program is governed by SMC 21.49.040, DPP, City of Seattle Ordinance 125171, and Director's Rules. In addition, SCL and SPU has an MOA with HSD to operate a program to verify customer income eligibility for UDP. In addition, an IDT Utility Assistance Steering Committee comprised of SCL, SPU and HSD leadership and staff help to inform program and policy changes across departments. The Utility Assistance (UA) IDT Steering Committee Team Charter is located here.

FAST FACTS

Portfolio Segment	Financial Assistance
Enrollment Snapshot 2024 YTD:	**36,614** Customers, Residential
# Staff (SCL) **(HSD)** **(SPU)**	SA: 1.5 PIR: 17 SUP: 1 MGR: 0.5 SA: 1
Eligibility	70% SMI
Product/Offer	Discount on bi-monthly utilities
Application Process	Administered by HSD: Online, Phone, Email, In-Person, Mail https://seattle.gov/human-services/services-and-programs/utility-discount-program
Administration	Internal
Launch	1982

ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES

Seattle City Light, Seattle Public Utilities and the Human Services Department have worked to increase enrollment in the Utility Discount Program (UDP) from approximately 17,000 in 2014 to over 36,000 in 2024. New enrollments in the program are primarily the results of these efforts:

(1) Auto-enrollment - when a customer is automatically enrolled in UDP through their participation in another government program that verifies their income eligibility – no UDP application required.

- **Affordable Housing:** UDP has an ongoing partnership with the Washington State Housing Finance Commission (WSHFC) and the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) to share data that facilitates auto-enrollment of eligible residents. These partnerships cover virtually every publicly subsidized affordable housing unit in the SCL/SPU service territory, including those homes financed by Seattle's Office of Housing plus households that use SHA Housing Choice Vouchers in private-market housing.

(2) Streamlined enrollment – when eligibility or application to one program serves as eligibility or application to another – UDP application is required, but the process is streamlined as a customer's household income is only verified once.

- **SNAP:** UDP began a data sharing partnership with WA Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) that allows UDP staff to verify a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipient's eligibility in the DSHS database. As a result, SNAP recipients are not required to submit household income documentation.

- **Self-Attestation Pilot during COVID-19:** In response to the financial disruption caused by COVID-19 UDP temporarily relied on a household's self-attestation of income for eligibility rather than submission and program verification of documentation prior to receiving benefits. This resulted in over 20,000 unique applications to the program between March 2020 and January 2022. The current program evaluation described below identifies actions to continue to increase enrollment and remove income verification barriers which may have caused many customers to drop from UDP in addition toto their circumstances changing after COVID-19**.**

- **Utility Assistance Portal:** The new customer-facing Utility Assistance Portal (UAPA) launched in 2022 with the ability for customers to enroll in all three utility assistance programs (UDP, EBA and EAP) with one online application.

(3) Targeted outreach and cross-promotion - when a program targets enrollment outreach to a group of households identified as likely eligible through specific indicators like the household's participation in another low-income program.

- **Community Connectors at Foodbanks**: HSD contracts with 10 foodbanks and community-based organizations to help communities access programs such as UDP. The Community

Connectors promote the program to their clients, assist community members in filling out the UDP application and help submit income verifying documentation.

- **Ongoing communications** activities include in-person outreach at community events, most recently at Summer Food Service Programs (SFSP) Kick-off Event at Jefferson Park in Beacon Hill, Northgate Community Center 18th Anniversary, Impact Schools Family Carnival in Tukwila and Byrd Barr's Neighborhood Block Party in the Central District. Promotional materials continue to be available at over 60 public facilities throughout the city (Community Centers, Libraries, Customer Service Centers) and shared out through City Departments newsletters, outreach to Community Based Organizations and direct communications to customers in arrears.

EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Current projects and/or strategies that may help to increase UDP program participation:

(1) Utility Assistance Programs Evaluation: A recently completed program evaluation with over 70 recommendations to streamline operations and increase program participation is being incorporated into a workplan due by December 2024. One key recommendation is to raise income eligibility limits to 80% Area Median Income (AMI) from 70% State Median Income (SMI) to increase access and enrollment, helping to remove many barriers for customers. Program redesign work hopes to center customers with the highest energy burden furthest from environmental justice.

70% State's Median Income		80% Area Median Income	
Household Size	**Maximum Gross Yearly Income**	**Household Size**	**Maximum Gross Yearly Income**
1	$44,268	1	$70,650
2	$57,900	2	$80,750
3	$71,520	3	$90,850
4	$85,140	4	$100,900
5	$98,760	5	$109,000
6	$112,392	6	$117,050
7	$114,936	7	$125,150

(2) Washington State Department of Commerce Clean Energy Credits: As part of the Climate Commitment Act, WA State Department of Commerce is providing SCL $19,131,893.35 to distribute to 90,876 customers $200 in Clean Energy Credits per customer households at or below 80% Area Median Income. Funds must fully be distributed by 9/15/24. SCL plans to automatically apply this credit to approximately 40,000households of residential customers who currently or previously participated in any of the following on or after January 1, 2022: Participation in the Utility Discount Program; recipient of financial assistance from LIHEAP, Emergency Bill Assistance, or Project Share; Previous or current participant in an SCL payment arrangement or payment plan.

Promise is the agency that Department of Commerce is contracting with to maintain a portal page (wacleanenergycredits.com) for customer self-attestation for income eligibility for additional income

eligible customers to receive the credit. SCL Communications is working on a large-scale marketing campaign to notify customers of the credit in partnership with Department of Commerce and is also cross-promoting current assistance programs to all income eligible customers. Press releases and conferences start on July 29th with social media campaigns through September.

(3) Expanding Categorical Enrollment: We are looking at efforts to automatically categorically enroll and recertify customers depending on the specific customer situation. Current partnerships cover publicly funded housing in Seattle and the surrounding service territory plus SHA Housing Choice voucher holders. We are exploring the opportunity to expand these efforts to include King County Housing Authority (KCHA) voucher holders and income-eligible residents of the Office of Housing's Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) program, onsite Mandatory Housing Affordability units, and homeowner assistance programs. KCHA Housing Choice voucher holders who live in private market housing in the SCL and SPU service territories might be eligible.

(4) Affordable Seattle Executive Order 2023-05: The Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL), Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and additional city departments each operate programs that help low-income residents. Each program has different income eligibility criteria; however, all include income verification processes, and we are committed to finding options for cross-enrollment. The UDP team is an active participant in this work with these departments through the Affordable Seattle IDT to develop data-sharing consent language so that a resident's application to one program serves as an application to all other citywide programs.