

Communications Snapshot – Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan Social Programs

Communications Objectives

- Demonstrate the government’s commitment to providing electricity rate relief to low-income households and those households in eligible rural and remote areas that are charged the highest distribution charges through legislative amendments that will enable the social programs proposed in Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan (OFHP).

Context

- The Fair Hydro Plan Act, 2017, which encapsulates the programs and initiatives of OFHP, passed legislation on May 31, 2017.
- OFHP will lower electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all residential consumers and as many as half a million small businesses and farms across the province.
- The 8 per cent rebate that came into effect in January 2017 is included in the 25 per cent savings proposed in the FHP.
- Additional savings for Ontario consumers will be available through new and enhanced social programs saving these households up to 40 to 50 per cent on their electricity bills.
- The Fair Hydro Act, 2017 will shift the costs of the Rural or Remote Rate Protection program (RRRP) from ratepayers to provincial revenues.
- The new and enhanced social programs are:
 - Broadening Distribution Rate Protection**
 - RRRP program provides a rate subsidy to rural and remote residential customers who face higher distribution costs, effective July 1.
 - About 800,000 customers will benefit from the new broadened distribution rate protection program. Customers of LDCs benefitting from this include: Hydro One low density (R2) and medium density (R1) customers, and residential customers of Northern Ontario Wires, Lakeland Power (Parry Sound), Chapleau Public Utilities Commission, Sioux Lookout Hydro, InnPower, Atikokan Hydro and Algoma Power.
 - Providing a First Nations On-Reserve Delivery Credit**
 - In 2016, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) engaged with First Nations, including remote communities, the distributors serving them, and consumer groups such as the Low Income Energy Network to develop and recommend options for a First Nations electricity rate.
 - As a result of recommendations from the OEB, the government plans to eliminate the delivery charge for all on-reserve First Nations residential customers and remove the monthly service charge for customers of licensed distributors which charge a bundled rate, starting July 1.
- The Fair Hydro Act, 2017 will enable the above initiatives.
- A package on the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) is tracking for LRC in Late June 2017.

Target Audiences

Broadening Distribution Rate Protection

Residential, small business, farm and greenhouse customers of the eight LDCs with the highest distribution charges	Town Councils Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance (TOGA) Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG)	MPPs	Relevant LDCs
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Providing a First Nations On-Reserve Delivery Credit

All Ontario on-reserve First Nations customers
Ontario Native Welfare Administrators' Association (ONWAA)

Chiefs of Ontario
Distributors serving reserves

Key Messages

Broadening Distribution Rate Protection

- Rate protection has been enhanced to provide distribution rate relief to customers served by the LDCs with the highest distribution rates.
- This measure is designed to bring down the delivery line cost across rural and remote parts of the province and ensure that there is less of an urban : rural split, when it comes to the distribution charge portion of electricity bills
- The broadened distribution rate protection will be available to about 800,000 customers, up from 350,000 customers.
- The cost for the broadened rate protection will be funded through provincial revenues.

Providing a First Nations On-Reserve Delivery Credit

- As part of the Fair Hydro Plan, 100 per cent of the electricity delivery charge for on-reserve First Nations residential customers would be paid for by the First Nations Delivery Credit.
- The First Nations Delivery Credit is an example of the Political Accord between Ontario and First Nations coming to life.
- This will save the average on-reserve First Nation customer \$85 a month and is a move that Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day has commended and acknowledged that it will “allow a path forward for greater quality of life for First Nations in Ontario”.
- This initiative will provide much needed relief to help address some of the unique challenges that on-reserve First Nations customers face, and to recognize First Nations’ contribution to the provincial electricity system.

Strategic Approach

Broadening Distribution Rate Protection

- Collaborate with LDCs and other relevant stakeholders to build awareness of the relief program among the customers of the expanded LDC network.

Providing a First Nations On-Reserve Delivery Credit

- Raise awareness among on-reserve First Nations Band members who are customers of a licensed electricity utility about the First Nations Delivery Credit.

Issues & Mitigation

Issue/Consideration	Mitigation Strategy	Key Message
The government is providing a little relief to all consumers, when they could instead have done more for those that needed it most.	Draw attention to social programs that target the most vulnerable consumers, including the expanded Ontario Electricity Support Program.	The province has launched new and enhanced social programs to help the most vulnerable consumers. This includes the expansion of the OESP, providing 50 per cent more support in the form of monthly credits for people with low incomes and increasing eligibility, effective May 1, 2017.

Non-status households on reserve will not receive the credit.	These residents will receive the 25 per cent on average reduction and could be eligible for other social programs including OESP and RRRP that could save them up to 40 to 50 per cent on their electricity bill.	This initiative provides much needed relief to help address some of the unique challenges that on-reserve First Nations customers face. And to recognize First Nations' contribution to the provincial electricity system.
Other communities in rural and remote areas do not receive similar credit for high distribution costs.	These customers will receive the 25 per cent on average reduction and could be eligible for other social programs including OESP and RRRP that could save them up to 40 to 50 per cent on their electricity bill.	This initiative provides much needed relief to help address some of the unique challenges that on-reserve First Nations customers face. And to recognize First Nations' contribution to the provincial electricity system.

Tactics & Rollout

	Broadening Distribution Rate Protection	Providing a First Nations On-Reserve Delivery Credit
Regional Rollout Examples: • MPP Template • Speeches • Media event • Op-ed, media pitch • Editorial board meeting	• OP-eds for newspapers in LDC districts • Matte articles • Letters to mayors and Town Councils in LDC districts • Speeches/bullets for northern MPPS • Letter to other relevant stakeholders (OFA, TOGA, etc) • Social media	• Speech bullets for MIRR • Letter to COO • Social media
Earned Examples: • News release, etc. • Remarks • Event • Calls/emails to targeted audiences • Multilingual media	• Northern and rural MPP news release	• E-mail to Chiefs

• Fact sheets • House Statement		
Digital / Social Examples: • Web content • Twitter/Facebook • Keyword / interactive web • Blogger outreach • Videos	• Web content for Northern ministry web pages • Geographically specific FB ads	• Web content • FB/online banners
Paid <i>(must include budget)</i> Examples: • TV/radio/newspaper • Online banners/ads • Advertorial • Householder/direct mail	• Tele Town Hall	• Postcard for on-reserve households and band offices • Tele Town Hall

Evaluation

- News media - Track the number news articles and editorials, recording their verified distribution reach, and applying a quantitative scale to denote their tone
- Social media - Record engagement, reach and tone of comments
- Correspondence - Track the number of letters and emails referring to the Fair Hydro Plan
- Provincial omnibus monthly survey – Track awareness of the FHP and gauge support or opposition of the programs