

Communications Snapshot – Regulation for Ontario Electricity Support Program

Communications Objectives

- Demonstrate the government's commitment to providing electricity rate relief to low-income households in Ontario through the introduction of regulation that, if passed, would expand the Ontario Electricity Support program.

Context

- Launched in January 2016 the OESP is administered through the Ontario Energy Board (OEB).
- The OESP is an income-tested, application based program that lowers electricity costs for the most vulnerable consumers, providing a rebate directly on bills. There are two scales: one with basic credits, and an enhanced credit for Indigenous people or those who use electric heat or certain electrically intensive medical devices.
- At the time of the January 2016 launch, qualified individuals could be eligible for a \$30 to \$50 monthly credit based on the size of the household and income. For example, a family of four with an annual income of less than \$28,000, would be eligible for a \$38 monthly credit -- a total of about \$455 per year.
- On March 2, 2017 Premier Wynne announced Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan to lower electricity rates for households and small businesses by an average of 25 per cent and also increase support for Ontarians eligible for OESP.
- The ministry is proposing to bring in additional savings to Ontario consumers through new initiatives to help the most vulnerable by creating and enhancing electricity support programs and shifting cost onto the tax base.
- The government intends to introduce legislative and regulatory changes that would, if passed, enable the following:
 - Increase the OESP by 50 per cent, meaning that single, low-income consumers who receive the lowest credit amount would get an increase from \$30 to \$45 per month (\$540 per year, an increase of \$180), and single consumers receiving the lowest credit on the enhanced scale would increase from \$45 to \$68 (\$816 per year, an increase of \$276).
 - Exploring automatic qualification for customers who are enrolled in other provincial low-income social programs.
 - Move forward in having the OESP funded by provincial revenues, reducing regulatory charges for all Ontario ratepayers.
- Changes that reflected in this OESP regulatory amendment include an increase of all OESP credits by 50%, and an increase in the number of OESP-eligible classes of customers. These are to be implemented May 1.
- Also on May 1, in accordance with the OEB's recent OESP Order, the OESP regulatory charge collected from consumers is reduced to zero (it is currently \$0.0011 kWh), and the program will be funded by the OESP variance account (the difference between the amount collected and the amount paid, which is currently \$107M). This will result in all customers in Ontario paying less for electricity, and those eligible for the OESP receiving more on-bill support.

Target Audience

- All low-income electricity consumers in Ontario.

Key Messages

- Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan would, if approved, lower electricity rates for households and small businesses by an average of 25 per cent.
- The proposed changes to the Ontario Electricity Support Program would, if approved, provide more assistance to those who need it most, helping to ensure that all Ontarians have continued access to clean and reliable electricity.
- We understand the rising costs are a concern, which is why we are bringing in savings now through new initiatives that are anticipated to cut costs directly on your energy bill.
- The government is working hard to keep electricity affordable for Ontarians. This program would help ensure that electricity costs are more affordable for the most vulnerable.

Strategic Approach

- Reactive materials will include Q&As and key messages will be prepared.
- Strategic communications, particularly timing, is dependent on the passing of relevant regulation.
- A comprehensive communications strategy will be submitted prior to the passing of the regulation

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 Ontario Electricity Support Program and other initiatives which are targeted at the most vulnerable consumers.	The Ontario Electricity Support Program provides targeted relief to low income consumers. In addition, special programs are available to assist low income consumers with energy conservation and in meeting unpaid bills. As well, the government has put in place the Ontario Trillium Benefit to assist families with low to moderate incomes.

Tactics & Rollout

Launch Event	
Proposed Date and Time	Location
n/a	n/a
Description <i>(What is the event, who is leading it? If it's a third party event, how does it connect to the announcement?)</i>	
n/a	
Visual/Photo-op <i>(Describe the backdrop (e.g., protected greenbelt forest) and describe any planned photo ops (e.g., boarding a new TTC streetcar).</i>	
n/a	
Speakers & Attendees	
n/a	

	Pre-Launch	Launch	Post-Launch
Regional Rollout Examples: - MPP Template - Speeches - Media event - Op-ed, media pitch - Editorial board meeting	N/A	N/A	N/A
Earned Examples: - News release, etc. - Remarks - Event - Calls/emails to targeted audiences - Multilingual media - Fact sheets - House Statement	N/A	N/A	N/A
Digital / Social Examples: - Web content - Twitter/Facebook - Keyword / interactive web - Blogger outreach - Videos	N/A	N/A	N/A
Paid <i>(must include budget)</i> Examples: - TV/radio/newspaper - Online banners/ads - Advertorial - Householder/direct mail	N/A	N/A	N/A

Evaluation

- A comprehensive evaluation will be provided closer to the passing of the relevant regulation.