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Subject: 39 hires in North Bay will ensure social assistance recipients across the province get credits on their electricity bills

<http://www.thesudburystar.com/2017/07/29/province-hiring-hydro-welfare-team-in-north-bay>

Province hiring hydro welfare team in North Bay

*By GORD YOUNG, The Nugget
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The province is establishing a team in North Bay that will be dedicated to enrolling social assistance recipients across Ontario in a program to help lower their electricity costs.

The local Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) office is looking to hire 39 people for up to 12 months or longer to help sign up ODSP and Ontario Works recipients in the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP).

"There are approximately 100,000 ODSP and Ontario Works recipients that pay hydro costs today. We want to ensure that individuals and families are accessing the supports available to them – that's why we're setting up the dedicated team," Kristen Tedesco, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Community and Social Services, said in an email. "The team will be responsible for conducting outreach to existing social assistance recipients across the province and completing OESP applications on their behalf. The team will also complete OESP applications for new grants upon referral."

According to the job listing, the positions pay between \$21.71 and \$25.10 an hour. They're looking for people who are skilled at customer service and communication, office administration, computers, planning and organizing. Some of the positions are bilingual.

Based on household income and size, the OESP provides a credit for low-income individuals and families on their monthly utility bill.

It was launched last year. But uptake has been slow.

An estimated 570,000 low-income customers are eligible for the energy assistance fund. But according to an Ontario Energy Board release issued in the spring outlining changes to the program, it has "provided monthly on-bill credits to more than 153,000 lower-income households" since Jan. 1, 2016.

As of May 1, OESP credit amounts have increased and rules have been changed so that social assistance recipients who have an electricity account in their name are automatically eligible for the OESP credit.

"The increased credit amounts and enhanced eligibility for social assistance recipients are part of the government's ongoing efforts to reduce electricity bills as outlined in the Fair Hydro Plan," said Tedesco.

The program could provide between \$180 and \$300 in savings annually for households in monthly, on-bill credits, depending on their size and annual income. For example:

- A single-person household earning \$28,000 or less could now receive \$45 per month.
- A four-person household earning less than \$48,000 (up from \$39,000) could now qualify for \$40 per month.
- Households with seven people earning a total of \$39,000 or less could receive \$75 per month.

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