



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kandi Young, Public Information Officer
kandi.young@puc.oregon.gov, (503) 551-5290 cell phone

Date: July 14, 2022

OREGON PUC APPROVES INCOME-QUALIFIED UTILITY DISCOUNT TO BENEFIT NW NATURAL CUSTOMERS

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) approved NW Natural’s program to offer income-qualifying residential customers an ongoing discount to their monthly bills. To qualify, customers must be at or below 60 percent of the state median income level.

House Bill 2475, passed during Oregon’s 2021 Legislative Session, gave the PUC authority to consider the financial burden of energy costs when making decisions about rates, bill credits, and program discounts for customers of investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities. This bill, known as the Energy Affordability Act, allows the PUC to consider equity in the ratemaking process to make energy more affordable for all Oregonians.

“Historically, income was not considered in energy rates,” said Megan Decker, PUC Chair. “This program will help provide relief to families who typically pay a higher percentage of their income to cover the cost of necessary utility services. We appreciate the collaboration among NW Natural, many organizations representing customers, and PUC Staff to deliver a strong program.”

The monthly bill discounts are calculated as a percentage of the bill and are offered at four levels based on total household income when compared to the state median income (SMI) level. NW Natural customers who have received energy assistance in the last two years will be auto-enrolled into Tier 3 and may contact NW Natural to determine whether or not they qualify for a higher discount. Individuals wishing to apply starting this fall may contact their local Community Action Agency or NW Natural at nwnatural.com/account/payment-assistance or call 800-422-4012 to enroll. At the time of enrollment, the customer will be asked to declare their household size and qualifying income in order to be placed in the appropriate discount tier. View the current [Oregon SMI energy assistance eligibility matrix](#).

Program Level	Total Household Income	Percentage of Bill Discount
Tier 0	At or below 15% of SMI	40% discount
Tier 1	16%-30% of SMI	25% discount
Tier 2	31%-45% of SMI	20% discount
Tier 3	46%-60% of SMI	15% discount

“A collaborative effort led to creation of an additional tier offering a 40 percent discount,” added Chair Decker. “This effort addresses the severity of energy burden facing the lowest income households.”

-more-

Docket No.: [ADV 1390](#)

The costs of providing this discount program are to be paid by NW Natural customers through a new charge on monthly bills across all customer types effective November 1, 2022. Residential customers using an average of 53 therms per month will see an additional charge of about 17 cents per bill, which is a 0.30 percent increase. This cost is based on anticipated enrollment in the discount program and will be adjusted annually based on actual program costs.

In addition to the income-qualified bill discount program, NW Natural customers behind in payments or struggling to pay monthly utility bills may qualify for other energy assistance or debt relief programs that provide short-term assistance to help get utility payments up to date and avoid disconnection. Customers are encouraged to contact NW Natural for additional information.

In April, the PUC approved Portland General Electric's income-qualified discount program. PacifiCorp, Avista and Cascade Natural's income-qualified discount programs have been filed and are currently under review by the PUC.

The PUC regulates customer rates and services of the state's investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities, including PGE, Idaho Power, Pacific Power, Avista, Cascade Natural, and NW Natural. The PUC also regulates landline telephone providers and select water companies. The PUC's mission is to ensure Oregon utility customers have access to safe, reliable, and high quality utility services at just and reasonable rates. For more information about the PUC, visit oregon.gov/puc.

###