



Executive Summary

2004 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

With Colorado's heating season nearly upon us, it's critical to have a clear picture of where our state stands on helping its most vulnerable residents afford home energy. This year, the 15th anniversary of Energy Outreach Colorado, we'd like to say the picture is brighter. Unfortunately, we can't.

As one of the 10 least affordable states in the nation, Colorado is expecting up to a 30 percent increase in natural gas commodity prices this winter – that's in addition to last year's dramatic price increase. Should we see colder temperatures than last winter, which was the warmest since 1999-2000 and the second mildest in the past nine years, the impact on bills will be even greater.

The need for bill payment assistance is unquestionable.

- Of the 1.7 million households in Colorado, an alarming 22 percent – or 366,886 – are considered to be low-income, earning a maximum of \$31,544 annually for a family of four.
- In Colorado, it is estimated that for each family receiving energy assistance this year, three more who are eligible won't receive the help they need and will be at risk of being shut off.
- Natural gas bills in Colorado have more than doubled in the past two years alone. Seniors, people with disabilities and the working poor generally can spend up to 40 percent of their income on home energy bills. The typical Colorado family spends just five percent.

Energy Poverty

The growing inability to afford home energy has created a new kind of poverty – energy poverty. Energy poverty is the struggle caused by an excessive energy cost that negatively impacts health and well-being.

Colorado families suffering with energy poverty often sacrifice their health and safety by skipping meals and forgoing needed medications, among other dangerous choices, in order to scrape together enough money to pay a growing energy bill.

This is a solvable problem.

Each of us can help fight energy poverty today through continued funding of energy bill payment assistance programs, weatherization initiatives and conservation education.

Energy Outreach Colorado will work to help eliminate energy poverty in the future by developing partnerships with energy companies and advocating on behalf of low-income energy consumers at the Colorado State Legislature and Colorado Public Utilities Commission.

Together, we generate the power to help.

The 2004 Report to the Community was developed to provide updated information about Colorado's low-income households, as well as demonstrate the need for a solution. It includes statistics on poverty and natural gas costs, facts about low-income energy assistance programs and funding in Colorado and recommendations for initiatives to combat energy poverty. The report is available in its entirety on the Energy Outreach Colorado website – www.EnergyOutreach.org.