

Nova Scotia Seniors Left in the Cold

by **MARNEY J. SIMMONS**

As climate change makes weather events more extreme, the importance of reducing fossil fuel usage to a minimum becomes ever more urgent. One way to reduce our emissions is to adopt sustainable energy systems at home.

In an attempt to encourage Nova Scotia homeowners to use alternative, energy efficient methods to fossil fuels, the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia are working together to help low and median-income Canadian households make the transition to electric cold-climate heat pumps.

Nationally, the Oil to Heat Pump Affordability (OHPA) program provides up to \$5,000 to help eligible homeowners and may be combined with funding from existing federal and provincial programs including the Canada Greener Homes Grant and programs offered by Efficiency Nova Scotia. In addition to the rebates for leaving behind oil, homeowners can receive support to upgrade their existing electrical panels.

The OHPA Grant includes electrical and mechanical upgrades required for the new heat pump, safe removal and/or decommissioning of the oil tank, installation of a back-up electric heating system (as required) and switching away from oil-using household systems, such as hot water heaters.

Although the programs are generous, there is a number of prerequisites for participation. Homeowners may be eligible for the OHPA Grant if their home is oil-heated as of January 2023 (this must be demonstrated with copies of oil fuel bills 12 months preceding application), they are the primary residents and owners of a single/ semi-detached home located in Nova Scotia and can provide proof of ownership, and their total household income is at or below the maximum annual household income after-tax, as determined by Statistics Canada (\$32,400 for one person).



Houses in Shelburne, N.S.
PHOTO: Simon Ryder-Burbidge

A worker doing cleaning work on a heat pump. PHOTO: Aleksej Sarifulin/iStock



TAKE ACTION

Write letters and emails to your councillors, MLAs and MPs to ask for a more equitable distribution of green energy incentives, grants and rebates.

While the rebates are enticing, qualification for them is highly specific, leaving them untenable for many. Specifically, low-income seniors who are renting their dwellings are put at a disadvantage by these government regulations. Many seniors are living in cold environments and sacrificing food and medicine just to be marginally warm.

Efficiency Nova Scotia recently launched an initiative to provide grants and rebates to senior apartment renters. However, the program applies only to multi-unit dwellings.

These federal and provincial government rebates for energy-saving measures are thus exclusionary. If seniors can afford their place of residence, qualifying for measures that contribute to climate change mitigation should be as convenient for them as it is for homeowners.

No one should have to suffer in the cold in Canada, and that includes low-income seniors who are already dealing with other housing and financial difficulties. Governments need to level the playing field by making energy savings available to everyone in Canada – not just those that can afford to be homeowners.

Marney (she/her) enjoys rural life on the North Shore gardening, sewing colourful and useful things for the home, visiting farmers' markets and walking the red sand beaches. Currently, she and a colleague are setting up a Rural Carpool transportation service on the North Shore in order to decrease fuel emissions and increase community connectedness.