For Immediate Release
October 2, 2026

October 14 Energy Assistance Forum to Provide Critical Information on Fuel Assistance Amid Rising Winter Heating Costs for Northern and Downeast Maine

Avec Community Action, United Way of Aroostook and Heart of Maine United Way to Discuss HEAP Changes, Eligibility, Emergency Benefits and Community Resources

PRESQUE ISLE, ELLSWORTH & MACHIAS, Maine (October 2, 2026) – With winter approaching and many households already concerned about the impact of rising home heating costs, regional nonprofit organizations are coming together to help communities better understand the resources available to keep Maine families safe and warm throughout the coming heating season.

Avec Community Action, United Way of Aroostook and Heart of Maine United Way will host the 2026 Regional Home Energy Assistance Forum on Wednesday, October 14, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The virtual event will bring together representatives from the three organizations, along with 211 Maine, to provide the latest information on home energy assistance programs, emergency resources and community response efforts serving residents across Northern and Downeast Maine.

The forum comes at a particularly important time as families, older adults and individuals on fixed incomes throughout Aroostook, Washington, Hancock and neighboring counties prepare for another winter of significant heating expenses. Community leaders, municipal officials, faith organizations, social service providers, healthcare professionals and other stakeholders are encouraged to attend to learn about resources available to local residents and strategies for helping households access assistance before winter emergencies arise.

“Providing timely and accurate information is one of the most effective ways we can help families prepare for the heating season,” said Jason Parent, Chief Executive

Officer of Avec Community Action. “This forum brings together organizations working on the front lines of energy assistance to ensure communities understand what help is available, who qualifies, and how residents can access support before they face a crisis.”

Presenters will provide updates on the Federal Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and discuss anticipated changes and expectations for the 2026-2027 heating season, including income eligibility requirements, application procedures, anticipated supplemental and emergency benefit allocations, and how residents can connect with local providers to access available assistance. Participants will also learn about crisis heating assistance resources, the role of 211 Maine in helping connect households with support services, upcoming emergency fuel fundraising efforts, and collaborative strategies communities can use to ensure vulnerable residents receive assistance before cold weather conditions become critical.

To maximize accessibility across Northern and Downeast Maine, the forum will be offered virtually, allowing participants to join from their home or workplace. A recording of the presentation will also be made available following the event for individuals and organizations unable to attend the live session.

“Every winter, we see families forced to make difficult decisions between paying for heat and meeting other basic household needs,” said Sarah Duncan, Executive Director of United Way of Aroostook. “This forum is designed to ensure that community leaders and service organizations have accurate, up-to-date information about available resources so they can help connect residents with support before an emergency occurs. By working together, we can help ensure more of our neighbors stay safe and warm throughout the winter months.”

“When communities understand the resources available to them and collaborate around shared challenges, everyone is better positioned for success,” said Matt Donahue, President and Chief Executive Officer of Heart of Maine United Way. “The rising cost of home heating continues to create financial pressure for many households across Maine.

We are proud to partner in this forum to help expand awareness of available assistance programs and strengthen local networks of support ahead of the winter season."

The online forum is free to attend and is intended for municipalities, tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, churches, schools, healthcare providers, first responders, elected officials and community volunteers who work with households facing financial hardship and home energy challenges, however, all are welcome to join in.

Registration Information

Date: Wednesday, October 14, 2026

Time: 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Location: Virtual

Registration Link: https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/vuf7wbv

About Avec Community Action

Avec Community Action is a nonprofit serving families across Aroostook, Washington and Hancock counties in Maine. From heating assistance and early childhood education to housing supports, wellness education, health and jobs, we help people meet challenges and reach their goals. Our name means ***with*** *because we stand beside you, every step of the way.*

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About United Way of Aroostook

United Way of Aroostook mobilizes communities across Aroostook County to improve lives by bringing together partners, resources and volunteers to address local

challenges. Through investments in health, education and financial stability initiatives, the organization works to create lasting positive change throughout the region.

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About Heart of Maine United Way

Heart of Maine United Way serves communities throughout central and eastern Maine by convening partners, investing in community solutions and supporting programs that advance health, educational success and financial stability for individuals and families.

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