

CHANGES Program

Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electricity Service

ANNUAL REPORT

Program Year: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Submitted by
International Institute of Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) launched the Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electricity Services (CHANGES) program to help limited English proficient (LEP) clients manage their natural gas and electricity services. Initially introduced as a statewide pilot in 2011, the CHANGES program was made an ongoing statewide program effective January 1, 2016, under Decision 15-12-047. The CARE proceeding (A.19-11-003) extended CHANGES in decision D.21-06-015, with a "program at a total of $10,515,012 for program years 2021-2026," which includes two program evaluations.

This report summarizes the services provided and related insights for the most recent program year (PY), July 2025-June 2026.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY

Program activities this reporting period were impacted by shortfalls in the program budget and rising energy rates. Resources for payment assistance and bill-reduction programs became scarcer as need outpaced available funds in most assistance programs, such as LIHEAP and the Arrearage Management Plan (AMP) programs, and eligibility requirements for some programs were also made more rigorous.

Case Assistance services were provided to **5,624** consumers, a **23%** increase in the total number of cases over the previous program year. The increase in the number of cases compared with the last program year can be attributed to the redirection of program funds away from consumer education and outreach services early in the program year. CBOs stopped providing outreach and education in the 3rd month of the program year. This reallocation of an extremely limited budget enabled the provision of case assistance services for most of the program year, avoiding a several-month period in which no services were provided at all.

Consumer Education activities were curtailed for most of the year so that allocated education budgets could be redirected to cover needed case resolution assistance. Without budget available for education services, the number of consumers educated this PY dropped **59%** from the last PY because funds budgeted for Consumer Education were reallocated to cover additional case resolution assistance.

Outreach activities were discontinued early in the PY, allowing the remaining funds to be used for case assistance.

OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

Program delivery is contracted to the International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA), a nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles, with operational oversight by Milestone Consulting LLC. As the lead contractor, IILA manages a statewide network of 24 multilingual community-based organizations (CBOs).

CHANGES CBOs are trained to advocate for LEP communities through the program's three service components: individual case assistance, education, and outreach. Most case assistance requests stem from clients' disputes or needs related to utility services, such as help applying for payment assistance or bill-reduction programs, or managing their accounts. Consumer Education classes are offered in group settings or one-on-one with consumers. Outreach is primarily conducted through promotions at community events or via media outlets.

ABOUT CHANGES CBOS

CHANGES CBOs work as a single collaborative to provide program assistance throughout California, particularly in geographic areas with high rates of LEP residents. Most CBOs have been providing CHANGES services for well over a decade, and even those most recently added have assigned staff who worked in the program at other organizations. The CBOs' extensive experience and knowledge in program delivery and energy issues have solidified a committed and knowledgeable team of consumer advocates able to navigate the often complicated and constantly changing landscape of electricity and natural gas services.



CBOs receive ongoing training and support through an annual 4-day training and meeting where they can interact, share new techniques and insights, learn new delivery methods, and renew goals, commitments, and knowledge. Regular remote training and meeting sessions are held to provide updates and discuss emerging issues. CBOs also receive individual training and monitoring visits at least twice each program year, and all newly hired CBO staff receive in-person program training before beginning to provide services.

All CBOs are linguistically capable and culturally competent, and they are selected because their organizations focus their activities on immigrant communities. Collectively, CBOs can provide CHANGES services in 78 languages.

Throughout the year, CBOs discussed overall program operations, issues impacting service delivery, and how changes in assistance programs have affected their ability to assist clients. **CBOs overwhelmingly felt that restrictions on the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) were the most significant factor limiting the assistance provided to consumers.** Approval and processing delays of up to 6 months in some counties left few options for reducing balances to a point where a utility company would enter a payment plan. Since LIHEAP providers began using a points system to prioritize applicant eligibility, CBOs have found that many of the neediest consumers no longer qualify for enrollment because they lose points for not having children in the home, even when their income is much lower than that of households with more resources.

SUMMARY OF SERVICES PROVIDED

CASE RESOLUTION

CBOs offer case assistance services to clients who need help with payment difficulties, lowering monthly utility bills, disputing charges, and managing their accounts, among other services. Regardless of a client's initial concern, CBOs assess the client's full range of needs and address them. Clients may submit disputes if they believe a utility has acted in error regarding their account or service. For example, consumers may submit disputes if they believe a utility has acted in error regarding their account or service. The overall range of provisions is illustrated in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Case Assistance Services Provided in PY 2025-2026
July 1, 2025– June 30, 2026
(Dispute and Needs Assistance cases combined)

Main Category	Subcategory	Service Type	# Services Provided	% of Total (7/25-6/26)
PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES	HEAP/LIHEAP	HEAP Application Assistance	2,097	29%
		Subtotal	**2,097**	**29%**
	Arrearage Management Plans (AMP)	AMP Enrollment	317	4%
		AMP Follow-Up	144	2%
		AMP Billing or Enrollment Problem	38	<1%
		Subtotal	**499**	7%
	Emergency Financial Assistance Programs	Enrolled in SCG Gas Assistance Fund	336	5%
		Enrolled in PG&E REACH Program	332	5%
		Other Sources of One-Time Payment	174	2%
		Enrolled in SDG&E Neighbor-to-Neighbor Program	20	<1%
		Enrolled in SCE Energy Assistance Fund	242	3%
		Subtotal	**1,104**	15%
	Support with Payment Plans/ Extensions	Set Up Payment Plan	278	4%
		Set Up Payment Extension	351	5%
		Subtotal	**629**	**9%**
	Other	Assisted with Reconnection	27	<1%
		Subtotal	**27**	**<1%**
TOTAL – PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES			**4,356**	**61%**
MONTHLY BILL REDUCTION	Support with CARE Program	CARE/Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA)	982	14%
		Assisted High Energy User	17	<1%
		High Energy User Dispute	0	0

		Subtotal	**999**	**14%**
	Medical Baseline	Medical Baseline	308	4%
	Energy Savings Assistance (ESA) Program	Applied For/Support with ESA	132	2%
	Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) Program	Applied For/Support with PIPP	1	<1%
	Support with Lowering Energy Use/Managing Bills	Energy Efficiency Tool	0	0
		Added/Removed Level Pay Plan	1	<1%
		Scheduled Energy Audit	1	<1%
		Demand Response Programs	1	<1%
		Subtotal	**444**	6%
TOTALS – MONTHLY BILL REDUCTION			**1,443**	**20%**
BILLING DISPUTES	-	Bill Adjustment	24	<1%
		Requested Meter Service or Testing	5	<1%
		Collections	5	<1%
TOTALS – BILLING DISPUTES			**34**	**<1%**
COMMUNITY CHOICE AGGREGATORS (CCAs)	-	CCAs	**202**	**3%**
GAS AGGREGATION/ CORE TRANSPORT AGENTS (CTAs)	-	Gas Aggregation	**206**	**3%**
SOLAR ISSUES	-	Solar Issues	**5**	**<1%**
ACCOUNT ADMINISTRATION & SERVICING	-	Set Up New Account	86	1%
		Changed Billing Language		
		Changed Consumer Information on Account		
		Assisted with Making a Payment		
		Set Up Online Account Access	67	<1%
		Set Up 3rd Party Notification	16	<1%
		Added/Removed Paperless Billing	41	<1%
		Closed Account	32	<1%
		Added/Removed Automatic Payment	18	<1%
		Set Up Energy Alerts	1	<1%
TOTALS – MANAGING/SETTING UP/CHANGES TO ACCOUNT			**673**	**9%**

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OTHER ITEMS	-	Time of Use/Rate Plan Selection	170	2%
		Utility Company Would Not Speak with CHANGES CBO	3	<1%
		Reported Scam	4	<1%
		Identity Theft	1	<1%
		Reported Safety Problem	5	<1%
		Wildfire Related Assistance	0	<1%
		Scheduled Service Visit	15	<1%
		Consumer Education Only	12	<1%
TOTALS – OTHER ITEMS			**210**	**3%**
OVERALL NUMBER OF CASE ASSISTANCE SERVICES PROVIDED			**7,129**	**100%**

Clients are offered multiple services to address their concerns. In the past PY, a total of **7,128** case support services were provided to **5,624** clients, averaging **1.3** services per client. Of these clients, **755** (**13%**) received dispute resolution, while **4,869** (**87%**) received need assistance.

Consistent with prior PYs, financial challenges remained a primary concern. **61%** of services addressed payment difficulties, and **20%** focused on reducing monthly bills. This trend highlights the ongoing impact of rising energy charges on LEP communities, many of which are low-income.

Similar to the previous PY, support with HEAP/LIHEAP applications is the most common individual service type. For the 2025-26 PY, CBOs assisted with **2,097** HEAP/LIHEAP applications. HEAP/LIHEAP enrollment accounted for **29%** of all services.

In addition to LIHEAP support, CBOs processed **1,421** applications for non-LIHEAP emergency bill relief programs, including the Arrearage Management Plan (AMP) and IOU assistance programs, and aided with non-LIHEAP program applications.

COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS PY

Table 2 compares the main categories of case assistance services to the previous PY. Columns A and B present each case assistance category as a share of all services for the respective PY. Column C shows the YOY distributional change, and column D compares the proportional share of each category between two consecutive PYs.

Table 2: Comparison of Case Assistance for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 PYs

Main Category	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
	2024-25 PY (July '24-June '25)	**2025-2026 PY *(July '25-June '26)***	**YOY Change**	**Difference in Category Share (%)**
	Services Provided (% of All Services)	**Services Provided (% of All Services)**		

Payment Difficulties	3,395 (59%)	4,356 (61%)		
Monthly Bill Reduction	1,189 (21%)	1,443 (20%)		
Billing Disputes	26 (<1%)	34 (<1%)		
Community Choice Aggregators (CCAs)	139 (2%)	202 (3%)		
Gas Aggregation/Core Transport Agents (CTAs)	176 (3%)	206 (3%)		
Solar Issues	7 (<1%)	5 (<1%)	(2)	(29%)
Account Administration and Servicing	677 (12%)	672 (9%)	(5)	(7%)
Other Items	167 (3%)	211 (3%)		
OVERALL NUMBER OF CASE ASSISTANCE SERVICES PROVIDED	**5,776 (100%)**	**7,129 (100%)**		

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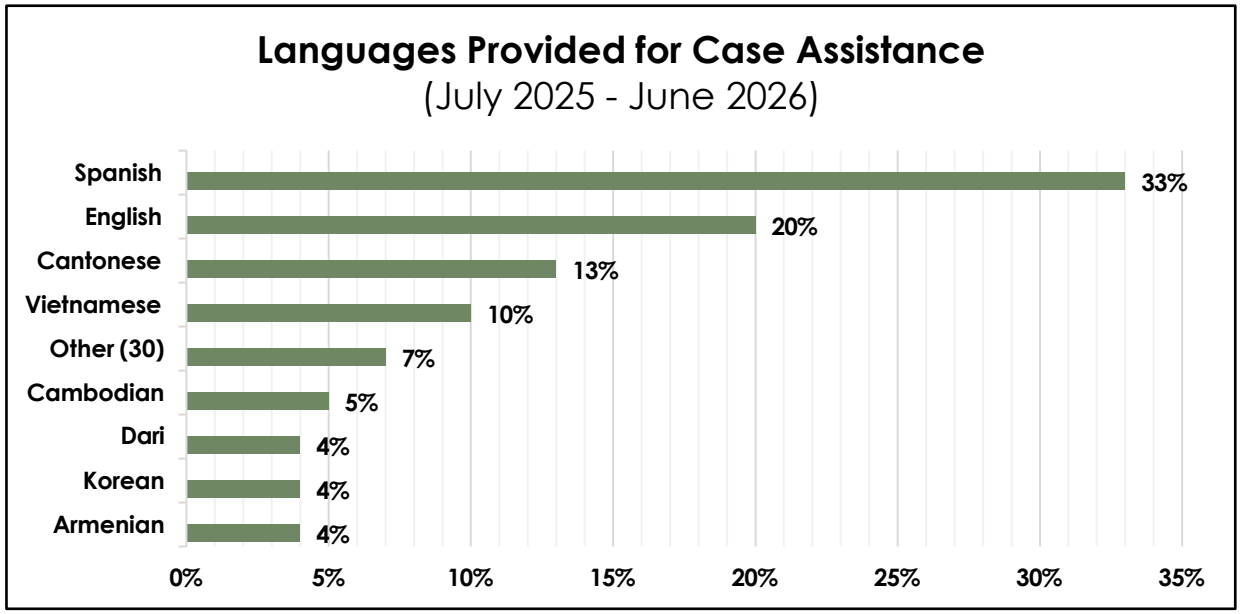
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Languages Provided for Case Assistance

The chart below outlines the most commonly spoken languages among case assistance clients. In total, clients spoke 38 different languages, reflecting the program's broad linguistic reach. Many of the clients were Spanish (**33%**) or English (**20%**) speakers. These were follo (**13%**), Vietnamese (**10%**), and Cambodian (**5%**), with Dari, Korean, and Arr of the cases were conducted in 30 other languages. This linguistic diversity u importance of culturally and linguistically responsive services in addressing t California's LEP communities and the CHANGES program.

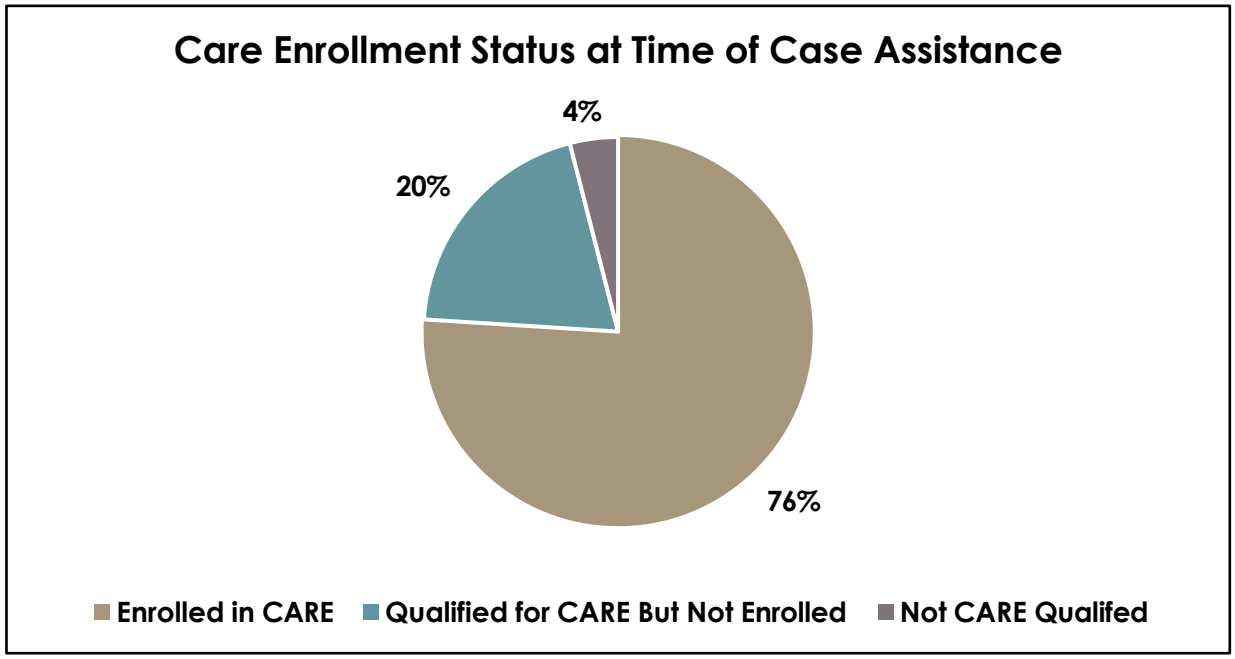
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CARE Eligibility

The CHANGES program's eligibility for the CARE program is used to survey not only CARE status but also the income distribution of CHANGES clients. Of all recipients, **96%** of case assistance recipients were from low-income households. At the time of seeking assistance, **76%** were enrolled in CARE, **20%** were qualified but not enrolled, and **4%** did not qualify. The total enrolled/qualified and not qualified statistics exactly mirror those of the previous year.



Assistance Program Service Detail

Services related to financial assistance programs were predominantly focused on enrollment, with recertification and problem resolution comprising a smaller share. As shown in **Table 3**, **81%** of CARE/FERA services were for enrollment, followed by **18%** for recertification, and **less than 1%** were for enrollment or billing problems. Similarly, ESA program services were entirely enrollment-based (**100%**), except for 1 case, and **99%** of Medical Baseline program services were for enrollment. This distribution highlights the ongoing demand for assistance with utility discount programs and the continued need for support with application processes.

TABLE 3: ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SERVICES DETAIL										
Assistance Program	**Enrollment Assistance**		**Recertification Assistance**		**Enrollment Problem**		**Billing Problem**		**Total**	
CARE/FERA	791	81%	180	18%	9	<1%	2	<1%	**982**	**100%**
ESA	131	99%	0	0	1	<1%	0	0	**132**	**100%**
Level Pay Plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	**1**	**100%**
Medical Baseline	305	99%	1	<1%	2	<1%	0	0	**308**	**100%**
Demand Response Program	1	100%	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**	**100%**

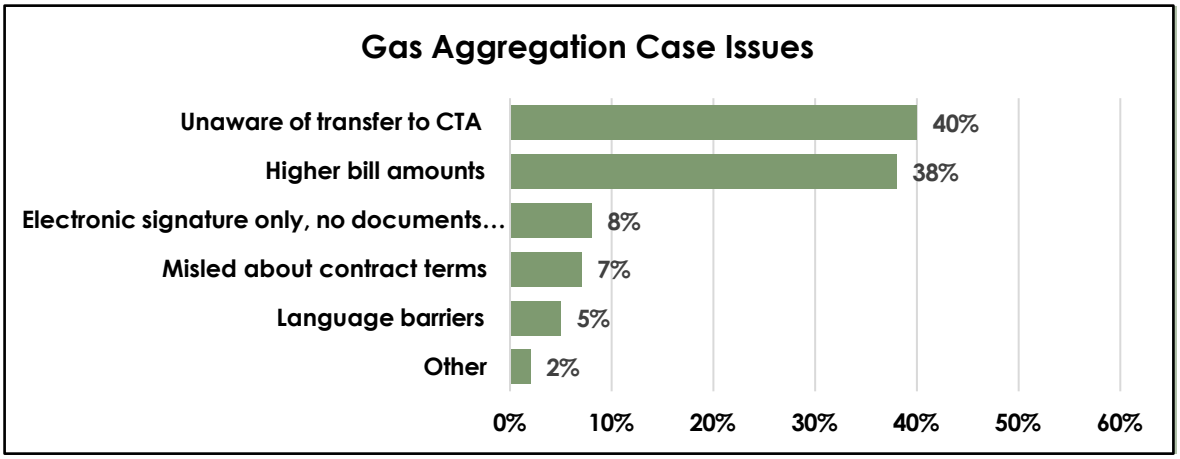
DISCONNECTIONS

As illustrated in **Table 4, 2%** of all clients were experiencing service disconnections at the time of seeking CHANGES services. Additionally, **1,105** (**20%**) of all clients faced scheduled disconnections. CBOs successfully suspended pending disconnections for **91%** of affected clients. These figures highlight the growing financial vulnerability of CHANGES clients and the critical role CBOs played in providing timely support to prevent the loss of essential services.

TABLE 4: DISCONNECTION DETAIL						
Account Status (Questions Asked to Clients)	**Yes**		**No**		**Total**	
Were services disconnected at the time of case assistance?	107	2%	5,528	98%	5,635	100%
If YES, were services reconnected through case assistance?	57	64%	32	36%	89	100%
Was disconnection pending at the time of case assistance?	1,105	20%	4,530	80%	5,635	100%
If YES, was the pending disconnection cancelled through case assistance?	769	91%	79	9%	848	100%

GAS AGGREGATION

All **206** gas aggregation cases were from PG&E territory. The chart below provides a visual breakdown of the issues in these cases. **40%** of client concerns stemmed from unawareness of CTA transfers, and **38%** from higher gas bills. However, concerns about higher bills do not account for the numerous rate increases over the past PY. Some consumers may notice the CTA on their bills for the first time and incorrectly believe it is the new company with higher rates.



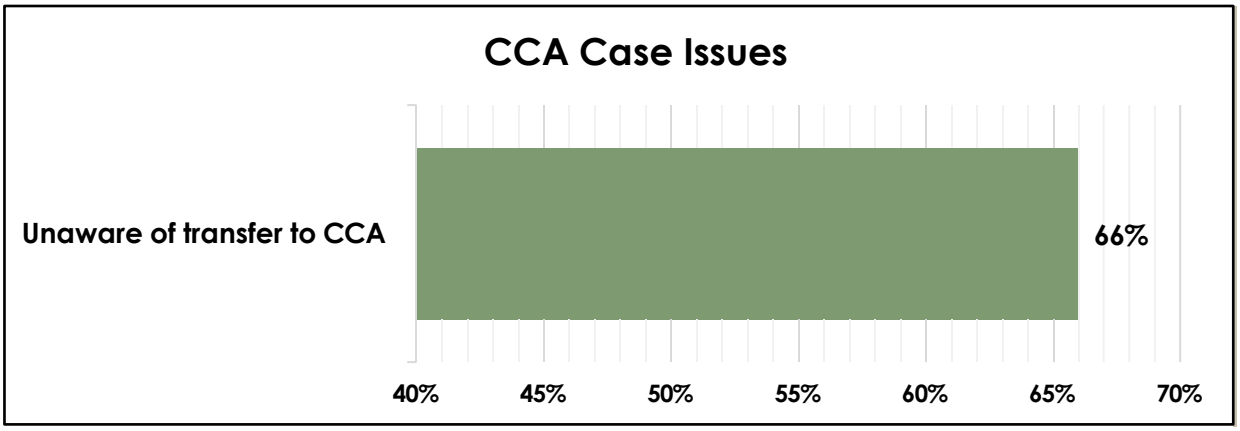
While it is unclear whether the switch to third-party gas suppliers led to higher bills than with IOU providers, nearly all clients ultimately requested a service transfer back to an IOU.

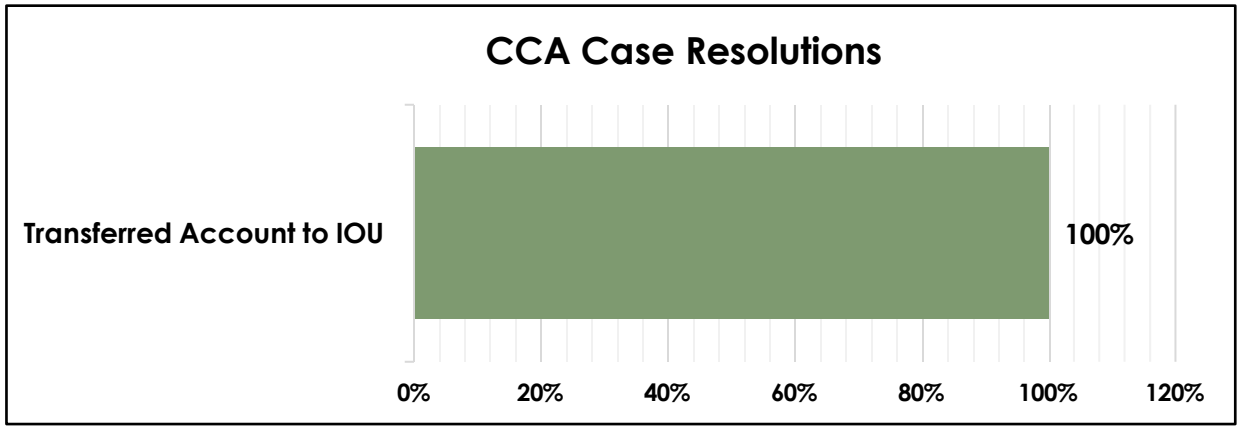
Addressing cases involving CTAs can be time-consuming and difficult for CHANGES CBOs because it typically requires multiple calls to the CTA and IOU to resolve the issue. Unlike IOUs, CTAs do not have established relationships with the CHANGES program, and many are unaware of its existence. As a result, CTAs are often less responsive and more difficult for CBOs to engage when working to resolve clients' issues.

Community Choice Aggregators (CCAs)

A total of **202** Community Choice Aggregators (CCAs) cases were reported. In these cases, CBOs collaborated with various CCAs to address issues, mainly related to high bills and clients' confusion about CCA transfers.

As shown in the chart below, **66%** of surveyed clients reported being unaware that a CCA was supplying their electricity. Unlike gas aggregation cases, clients did not report misleading or deceptive sales tactics. This suggests that clients may have been automatically opted into CCA programs without fully understanding the change.





Arrearage Management Program (AMP)

For the 2025-2026 PY, CBOs enrolled **317** clients in an Arrearage Management Plan (AMP).

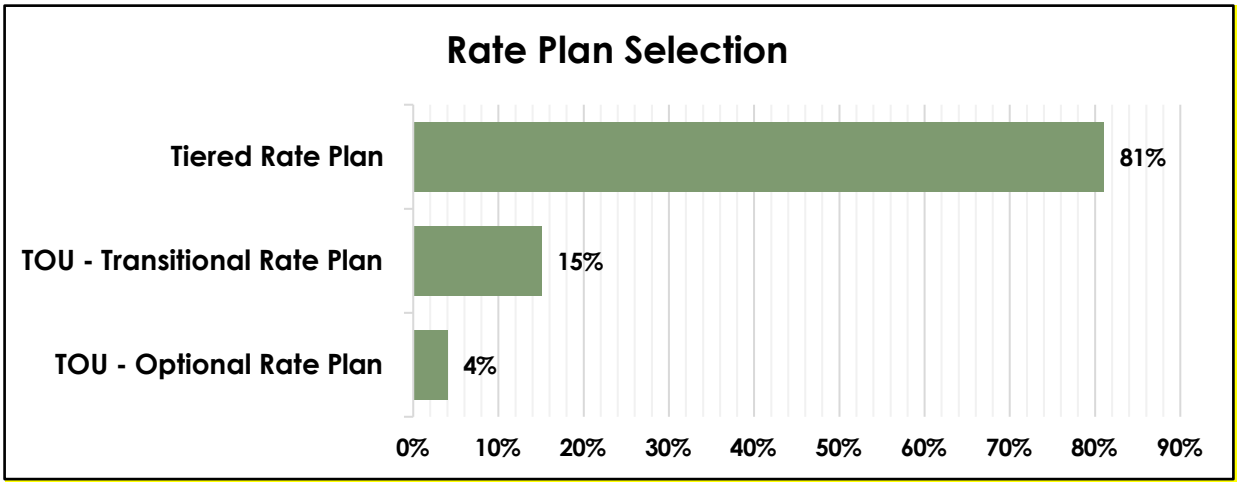
Although AMP eligibility requirements remained unchanged throughout the program year, CBOs reported receiving inconsistent information about eligibility from utility call center representatives. To support consistent program administration and ensure CHANGES CBOs receive accurate information, the Contractor will promptly report discrepancies and work with CPUC staff and the IOUs to improve the accuracy and consistency of information provided to consumers.

Due to AMP's structured, long-term design for complete debt forgiveness, CBOs check in with their clients at various intervals to determine whether they have successfully removed their utility balance. There are three types of AMP follow-ups: three months, six months, and twelve months post-enrollment. Clients who have not been able to maintain the required monthly payments in AMP are provided with additional services to help reduce payments or balances.

For the 2025-2026 PY, **145** AMP follow-up assessments were conducted. Follow-up contact with AMP enrollees indicated that **64%** of those contacted maintained an active AMP account, while **36%** missed at least one payment.

Time of Use

CBOs also supported **170** households in evaluating and selecting a suitable rate plan. As illustrated below, clients overwhelmingly (**81%**) preferred the tiered rate plan, indicating a continued preference among CHANGES clients for a simpler, more predictable billing format over time-of-use (TOU) alternatives.

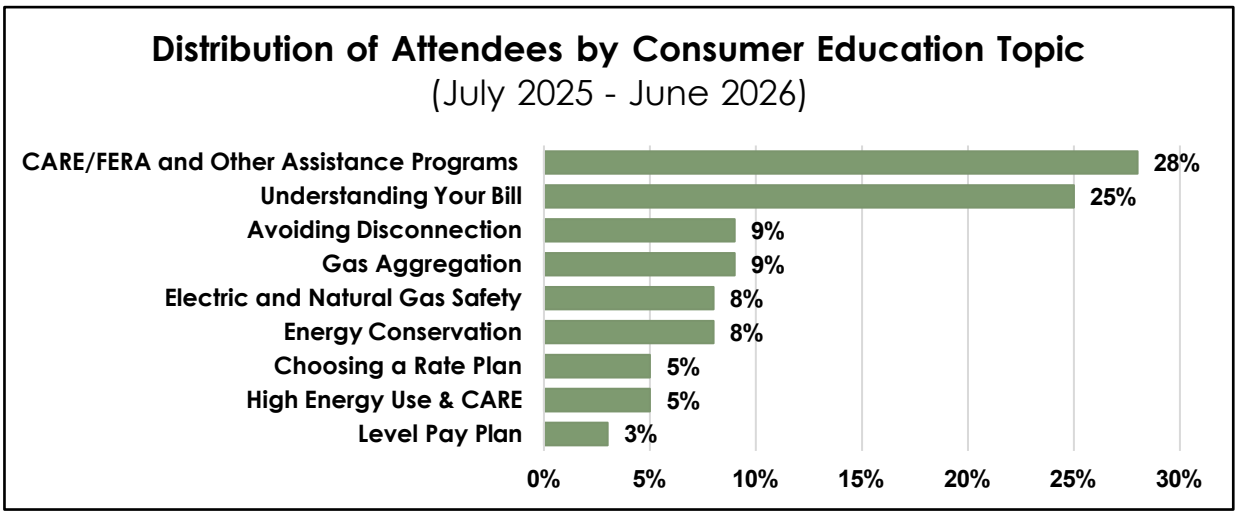


CONSUMER EDUCATION

EDUCATION WORKSHOP TOPICS

CBOs provide consumer education on nine topics through workshops that typically last between 45 and 60 minutes. They select topics based on their assessment of the needs and interests of their respective communities.

During the 2025-2026 PY, a total of **9,436** clients participated in CHANGES education workshops. As shown below, more than half of attendees engaged in the CARE/FERA and Other Assistance Programs (**28%**) and Understanding Your Bill (**25%**) workshops. The figures indicate a strong emphasis on helping clients understand utility bills, apply for and maintain bill-reduction discounts, and pursue emergency financial assistance. The remaining topics—Avoiding Disconnection, Electric and Natural Gas Safety, Energy Conservation, Gas Aggregation, Level Pay Plan, and High Energy Use & CARE—were offered to clients in smaller numbers. Choosing a rate plan is a new topic introduced this program year.



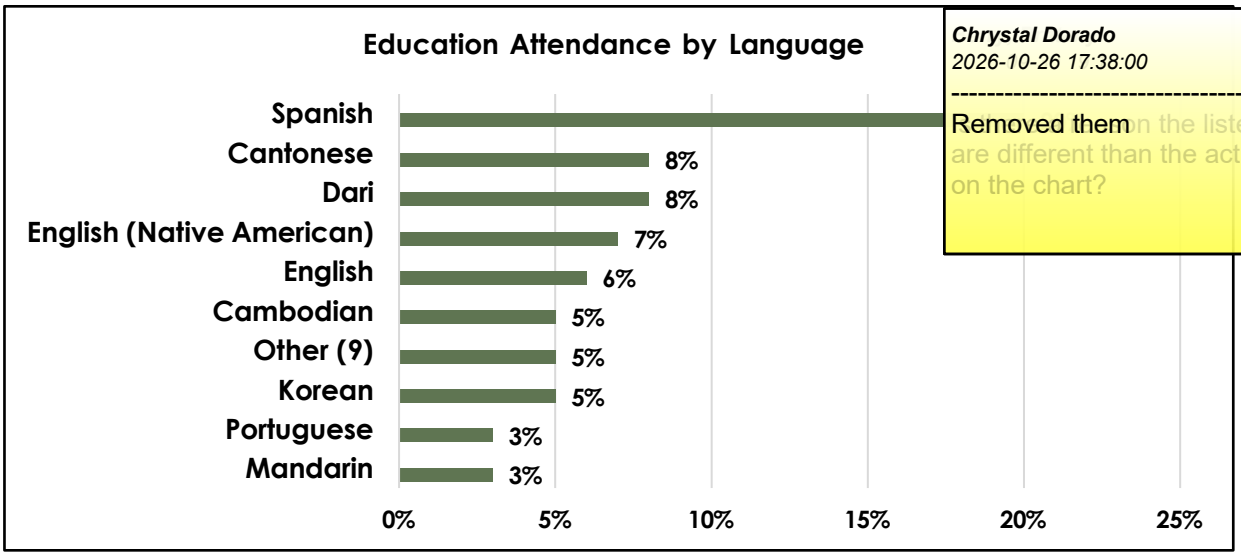
As shown in Table 5, total workshop attendance decreased by **59%** compared with the previous year. This decline can be attributed to the need to reallocate funds budgeted for consumer education to case assistance services.

Table 5: Comparison of Education Attendees for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 PYs

Topic	2024–25 PY (% of Attendees)	2025–26 PY (% of Attendees)	YOY Change	YOY % Change
CARE/FERA and Other Assistance Programs	6,509 (28%)	2,639 (28%)	(3,420)	(53%)
Understanding Your Bill	6,491(28%)	2,313 (25%)	(4,178)	(64%)
Avoiding Disconnection	2,040 (8%)	816 (2%)	((1,244)	(61%)
Energy Conservation	1,952 (8%)	751 (8%)	(1,201)	(62%)
Choosing a Rate Plan	62 (<1%)	505 (5%)	443	714%
Electric and Natural Gas Safety	1,651 (7%)	765 (8%)	(886)	(54%)
High Energy Use and CARE	1,831 (8%)	468 (5%)	(1,363)	(74%)
Level Pay Plan	1,280 (6%)	323 (3%)	(957)	(75%)
Gas Aggregation	1,407 (7%)	856 (9%)	(551)	(39)%
TOTAL	**23,223**	**9,436**	**(13,787)**	**(59%)**

LANGUAGES PROVIDED FOR EDUCATION

Overall, CBOS provided energy information sessions in 18 languages. The chart below shows the ten most common languages spoken by consumer education participants. Spanish (**20%**) speakers comprised the largest shares, a trend consistent with the previous PYs.



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PROGRAM OUTREACH

SOURCES OF CLIENT REFERRALS

Table 6 summarizes the range of referral sources CHANGES clients used during the 2025-2026 PY. Referrals from friends or family accounted for **25%** of case referrals, highlighting the importance of trusted personal networks within LEP communities over traditional media sources or other types of mainstream outreach, such as broadcast media and/or print advertisements.

Participation in CBOs' other programs (**13%**), CHANGES education workshops (**28%**), and community events (**14%**) were also common referral sources.

Table 6: Referral Sources

Referral Source	% of Clients
Attended CHANGES Education Workshop	28%
Friend or Family	25%
Community Event	14%
Participated in Another Program at the CBO	13%
Special Outreach Project	8%
Referred by Another CBO	7%
Media Placement (Print, Radio, or Television)	5%
Received TEAM Services	<1%

CBOs use five methods for promotion: community events, traditional media placements, social media postings, community presentations, and special outreach projects. **Table 7** outlines the 2025-2026 PY's outreach efforts and compares them to the previous PY. Compared with the previous PY, community events reached **49%** fewer individuals. CBOs scaled back media placements by **47%** and social media postings by **100%.** The reduction in outreach activities reflects the stoppage of all outreach a few months into the PY, due to budget constraints.

Table 7: Comparison of Outreach Activities for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 PYs

Outreach Component	2024–25 Program Year	2025-26 Program Year	YOY Change	YOY % Change
Community Events*	112,600	57,247	(55,353)	(49%)
Media Placements*	373,421	198,950	(174,471)	(47%)
Social Media (Postings)	120	0	(120)	(100%)
Community Presentations	5	0	(5)	(100%)

CONCLUSION

During the 2025-26 PY, services declined in comparison to the previous PY, mainly as a result of funding shortages.

Outreach and Consumer Education activities were halted in August 2025 to make funds available for much needed case assistance. The reduction in services provided should not be misconstrued as a reduction in need. Higher utility rates and recent difficulties with traditional assistance programs made the need more prevalent, as CBO found it increasingly challenging to find adequate assistance to meet their clients' needs.