



# CHANGES Program

Consumer Help and Awareness  
of Natural Gas and Electricity Services

**QUARTERLY REPORT**  
**Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025**

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## INTRODUCTION

CHANGES (Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electricity Services) was established by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to address the needs of Limited English Proficient (LEP) consumers. The program provides outreach, education, and case resolution services to consumers in the language of their choice through a statewide coalition of **24** Community Based Organizations (CBOs). The Coalition has the capacity to provide services in **78** languages. The program is administered by International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA) with operational guidance from Milestone Consulting LLC.

This report provides an overview of services provided through the CHANGES Program in the second quarter of the program year, October 1 – December 31, 2025.

## ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

The following services were completed during this reporting period:

### **Outreach**

*Due to budget constraints, Outreach activities were curtailed after the first quarter of the program year.*

- **0** Community Events
- **0** Media Placements
- **0** Social Media Posts

### **Consumer Education**

*Due to budget constraints, Consumer Education was curtailed after the first month of this quarter.*

- **1,538** Consumer Education units were delivered
- Education was delivered in **11** languages

### **Case Assistance**

- **174** Dispute Cases
- **807** Needs Assistance

# OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

CHANGES CBOs conduct a variety of outreach activities to inform limited English proficient communities about available CHANGES services and how to access them. Outreach strategies include placing articles and interviews with in-language media, posting announcements on a variety of social media platforms, attendance at community resource events such as health fairs and ethnic community celebrations, and other activities designed to reach various ethnic communities served by the CBOs.

## Community Events

CBOs attend local community events to distribute outreach materials and inform their communities about available services. CBOs must reach a minimum of **500** event attendees to meet requirements for compensation. CHANGES CBOs conducted outreach at the following events during this reporting period.

Community Event Outreach Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025				
Event	City	IOU	Language	Attendees
<i>Due to budget constraints, Outreach activities were curtailed after the first quarter of the program year. No Community Events were conducted this quarter.</i>				

## Community Presentations

CHANGES CBOs make presentations about program available services to other organizations in their communities at Task Force, Coalition, Event Planning, and other meetings. Meeting attendees are advised of ways to refer clients to the CHANGES CBO for assistance. Presentations must be made to a minimum of five different organizations in attendance.

Community Presentations Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025
<i>Due to budget constraints, Outreach activities were curtailed after the first quarter of the program year. No Community Presentations were completed this quarter</i>

## Media Outreach

Media outreach consists of disseminating program information through in-language television and radio broadcast media and print outlets. The following media outreach was conducted during this reporting period.

Media Outreach Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025				
Date	Publication/Station/Program	Type	Language	Potential Reach
<i>Due to budget constraints, Outreach activities were curtailed after the first quarter of the program year. No Media Placements were completed this quarter.</i>				

Y-T-D Media Outreach	
Language	Potential Reach
<b>Korean</b>	30,000
<b>Vietnamese</b>	137,950
<b>Armenian</b>	11,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178,950</b>

**Social Media Outreach**

Social media outreach consists of in-language posts by CHANGES CBOs on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others typically used by LEP and immigrant communities.

Social Media Outreach Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025		
Platform	Total Posts This Quarter	Total Posts Y-T-D
<i>Due to budget constraints, Outreach activities were curtailed after the first quarter of the program year. No Social Media posts were completed this quarter.</i>		
<b>Facebook</b>	0	4
<b>Instagram</b>	0	4
<b>We Chat</b>	0	0
<b>X</b>	0	3
<b>Other</b>	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

# CONSUMER EDUCATION

Consumer Education is provided in both group settings and in one-to-one conversations. Sessions include content delivery and discussions about pre-determined telecom topics. Sessions are at least 45 minutes in length, including time spent on administrative and documentation tasks. Educational materials consist of CHANGES handouts specific to each topic.

Consumer Education by Language Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025			
Language	This Quarter*	Previous Quarters	Y-T-D**
Arabic	14	116	130
Armenian	65	238	303
Cambodian	0	486	486
Cantonese	138	481	619
Dari	116	585	701
English	160	232	392
English – Native American	311	347	658
Haitian Creole	0	8	8
Hmong	0	112	112
Japanese	0	26	26
Korean	83	405	488
Mandarin	0	235	235
Mein	0	122	122
Pashto	9	34	43
Portuguese	76	159	235
Spanish	313	1,376	1,689
Swahili	0	2	2
Tagalog	0	20	20
Ukrainian	0	16	16
Vietnamese	253	1,292	1,545
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,538</b>	<b>6,292</b>	<b>7,830</b>

Consumer Education by Topic Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025			
Topic	This Quarter	Previous Quarters	Y-T-D
Avoiding Disconnection	116	639	755
CARE and Other Assistance Programs	605	1,705	2,310
Choosing Your Electricity Rate Plan	60	355	415
Energy Conservation	75	659	734
Gas Aggregation	190	591	781
High Energy Use Audit for CARE Participants	11	352	363
Level Pay Plan	44	206	250
Natural Gas and Electricity Safety	279	365	644
Understanding Your Bill	196	1,748	1,944
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,576</b>	<b>6,620</b>	<b>8,196</b>

Note: The total number of consumer education units delivered will be fewer, exceeding the number of educations by language because more than one topic may be presented in some educational workshops.

# CASE ASSISTANCE

Case assistance in CHANGES is provided to consumers to address the challenges and barriers LEP consumers face with understanding and navigating often complex utility and energy assistance processes. In the second quarter (October 1 – December 31, 2025), CHANGES CBOs resolved **1,007** cases.

## Dispute Resolution

Dispute resolution is provided to consumers who feel there are incorrect charges on their utility bills, who did not receive discounts for which they are eligible or have issues with the services they received.

Dispute Resolution - Language Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025										
Language	PG&E	PG&E Y-T-D	SCE	SCE Y-T-D	SCG	SCG Y-T-D	SD&GE	SDG&E Y-T-D	TOTAL	TOTAL Y-T-D
Arabic	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cambodian	35	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	55
Cantonese	14	43	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	43
Dari	3	6	0	0	0	0	2	4	5	10
English	10	25	24	51	14	32	0	1	48	109
Farsi	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Hmong	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Japanese	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Korean	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Laotian	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mein	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mandarin	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pashto	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	4
Portuguese	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Russian	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Spanish	45	82	4	18	5	11	3	7	57	118
Tagalog	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Vietnamese	10	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>374</b>

The following issues were addressed in Dispute cases during the first quarter:

Dispute Resolution – Issues Addressed Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025										
Issue	PG&E	PG&E Y-T-D	SCE	SCE Y-T-D	SCG	SCG Y-T-D	SDG&E Y-T-D	SDG&E Y-T-D	TOTAL	TOTAL Y-T-D
AMP Problem	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	3	4
AMP Follow-Up	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AMP Enrollment	1	2	4	5	0	1	2	2	7	10
Assisted with Making Payment	1	2	3	4	2	3	0	1	6	10
Bill Adjustment	1	4	0	2	0	1	0	1	1	8

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<b>CARE Customer High Energy Use Documentation</b>	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	2
<b>CARE/FERA</b>	8	18	7	17	4	7	0	0	19	42
<b>Changed Bill Language</b>	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5
<b>Changed Consumer information on Account</b>	8	25	4	8	2	7	0	1	14	41
<b>Closed Account</b>	0	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	2	7
<b>Collections</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Demand Response Program</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Electricity Aggregation</b>	48	85	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	85
<b>Energy Assistance Fund</b>	0	0	4	15	0	0	0	0	4	15
<b>Energy Savings Assistance Program (ESA)</b>	0	0	1	4	0	1	0	0	1	5
<b>Gas Aggregation</b>	57	116	0	0	0	0	0	0	57	116
<b>Gas Assistance Fund</b>	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
<b>LIHEAP</b>	22	47	5	19	5	13	0	4	32	83
<b>Medical Baseline</b>	3	3	3	9	3	8	0	0	9	20
<b>Meter Service/Testing</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
<b>Neighbor to Neighbor</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	5	4	5
<b>Other Payment Assistance</b>	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
<b>Payment Extension</b>	0	0	3	7	3	3	1	2	7	12
<b>Payment Plan</b>	1	2	7	12	7	10	0	0	15	24
<b>PIPP</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Rate Plan Selection Assistance</b>	0	0	4	12	0	0	0	0	4	12
<b>REACH</b>	9	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	16
<b>Remove/Add Automatic Payment</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Remove/Add Paperless Billing</b>	1	1	2	3	0	1	0	0	3	5
<b>Reported Scam</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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<b>Scheduled Service Visit</b>	1	1	0	0	2	2	1	1	4	4
<b>Set Up New Account</b>	0	1	2	3	3	5	0	0	5	9
<b>Set Up Online Account Access</b>	1	2	4	6	2	6	0	0	7	14
<b>Solar</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Third Party Notification</b>	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
<b>Utility Company Refused to Speak with CBO***</b>	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>572</b>

Note: The total number of issues addressed will exceed the total number of cases because some cases include multiple issues.

### Needs Assistance

Needs assistance cases may include helping clients with their services or bills, or assisting with payment arrangements, enrollment into consumer assistance programs, or referrals to financial assistance agencies. Needs Assistance is provided to consumers who request help with utility services or bills, but do not feel that their bill is incorrect or that the IOU has acted wrongly.

Needs Assistance - Language Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025										
Language	PG&E	PG&E Y-T-D	SCE	SCE Y-T-D	SCG	SCG Y-T-D	SDG&E	SDG&E Y-T-D	TOTAL	TOTAL Y-T-D
Amharic	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
Arabic	1	3	1	1	0	1	2	6	4	11
Armenian	0	0	1	1	48	123	0	0	49	124
Brazilian Portuguese	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cambodian	30	58	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	58
Cantonese	65	156	3	18	2	21	0	0	70	195
Dari	23	57	0	0	0	0	21	58	44	115
English	37	92	94	220	28	111	2	4	161	427
English – Native Amer.	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Eritrean	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Farsi	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	2	2	5
Hmong	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

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<b>Japanese</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Karen</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Korean</b>	14	50	19	36	2	10	0	0	35	96
<b>Laotian</b>	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Mandarin</b>	1	3	2	8	0	2	0	0	3	13
<b>Mein</b>	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
<b>Pashto</b>	1	7	0	0	0	0	12	25	13	32
<b>Persian</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Portuguese</b>	4	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	7
<b>Russian</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Samoan</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Somali</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
<b>Spanish</b>	213	457	78	194	35	156	12	31	338	838
<b>Swahili</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	3
<b>Tagalog</b>	2	32	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	33
<b>Ukrainian</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Vietnamese</b>	20	115	46	108	1	2	0	0	67	225
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>1,049</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>830</b>	<b>2,202</b>

The following services were provided in Needs Assistance cases in the first quarter of the program year:

<b>Needs Assistance – Services Provided</b>										
<b>Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025</b>										
<b>Issue</b>	<b>PG&amp;E</b>	<b>PG&amp;E Y-T-D</b>	<b>SCE</b>	<b>SCE</b>	<b>SCG</b>	<b>SCG Y-T-D</b>	<b>SDG&amp;E</b>	<b>SDG&amp;E Y-T-D</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL Y-T-D</b>
<b>AMP Problem</b>	4	5	1	3	0	1	0	0	5	9
<b>AMP Follow-Up</b>	0	1	5	11	20	68	0	2	25	82
<b>AMP Enrollment</b>	19	46	38	71	8	29	9	28	74	174
<b>Assisted with Making Payment</b>	2	7	7	11	0	3	0	0	9	21
<b>Bill Adjustment</b>	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	4
<b>CARE Customer High Energy Use Documentation</b>	2	3	2	2	0	1	0	0	4	6
<b>CARE/FERA</b>	115	232	39	90	27	64	21	43	202	429
<b>Changed Bill Language</b>	30	42	0	2	0	0	0	0	30	44

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<b>Changed Consumer information on Account</b>	10	24	4	9	2	9	0	2	16	44
<b>Closed Account</b>	3	5	0	1	0	2	0	0	3	8
<b>Collections</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Consumer Education Only</b>	6	6	0	2	0	0	0	0	6	8
<b>Electricity Aggregation</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Energy Assistance Fund</b>	0	0	45	130	0	0	0	0	45	130
<b>Energy Audit</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Energy Efficiency Tool</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>ESA Program</b>	33	57	13	22	3	7	0	0	49	86
<b>Gas Aggregation</b>	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
<b>Gas Assistance Fund</b>	0	0	0	0	1	120	0	0	1	120
<b>Level Pay Plan</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>LIHEAP</b>	163	521	72	203	13	27	0	10	248	761
<b>Medical Baseline</b>	41	94	5	19	8	13	1	2	55	128
<b>Meter Service/Testing</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Neighbor to Neighbor</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	5	4	5
<b>Other Payment Assistance</b>	17	24	5	7	3	16	0	0	25	47
<b>Payment Extension</b>	4	5	45	98	28	86	4	18	81	207
<b>Payment Plan</b>	30	72	11	24	5	11	2	2	48	109
<b>PIPP</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Rate Plan Selection Assistance</b>	22	47	5	20	0	0	0	0	27	67
<b>REACH</b>	59	139	0	0	0	0	0	0	59	139
<b>Reconnect Service</b>	4	7	4	8	3	4	0	1	11	20

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<b>Remove/Add Automatic Payment</b>	1	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	3	7
<b>Remove/Add Paperless Billing</b>	2	3	2	3	2	5	2	2	8	13
<b>Reported Safety Problem</b>	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	3
<b>Reported Scam</b>	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Scheduled Customer Service Visit</b>	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	1	4
<b>Set Up Energy Alerts</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Set Up New Account</b>	8	27	2	2	1	1	11	21	22	51
<b>Set Up Online Account Access</b>	3	9	6	7	4	6	2	2	15	24
<b>Solar</b>	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
<b>Third Party Notification</b>	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
<b>Wildfire Related Assistance</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>1,391</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>755</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>1,086</b>	<b>2,764</b>

*NOTE: The number of services provided will exceed the number of cases because many cases require more than one service.*

# TRENDS ANALYSIS

Decision 15-12-047 establishing the CHANGES program as a permanent program called for a more formalized reporting of trends observed through the data collected by CHANGES CBOs when they assist limited-English proficient consumers with issues related to their utility services.

## Summary of Main Findings

Data collected for this reporting period, comparisons to previous reporting periods, and information provided by CHANGES CBOs lead to the following conclusions:

- Issues addressed this quarter remain consistent with previous reporting periods, with gas and electricity aggregation companies (CTAs and CCAs) as the top dispute case issues, and enrollment in payment assistance programs as the consistently most sought access type of needs assistance services.
- All Outreach activities were curtailed at the beginning of this second quarter because of budget shortfalls. Outreach funds were diverted to cover case assistance services. In November, Consumer Education activities were also stopped to shift funds to case assistance.
- Needs Assistance services provided during this quarter, as with all previous reporting periods, continue to reflect the need for bill reduction and emergency payment assistance programs.
- Payment assistance and bill reduction programs continue to be the predominant service provided in Needs Assistance cases. This does not reflect a trend. Low-income consumers have always and will continue to face challenges with the high costs of utility services in every region of the state.
- These difficult circumstances are magnified as funding for assistance programs is stretched even more thinly, and program eligibility requirements have become more difficult to meet.
- Numerous rate increases have pushed consumers to their financial limits as bills are beyond the resources of most low-income people.
- Dispute cases continue to reflect the difficulties faced by consumers from the increasingly high costs of utility services. Resolving Dispute issues requires seeking assistance to reduce balances prior to beginning to negotiate payment plans with utility companies.

### Trends Overview

The most prevalent Dispute issues addressed this quarter include assisting LEP consumers with ongoing issues related to gas and electricity aggregation and bill payment assistance.

**Needs Assistance** cases reflect a prevalence of seeking and securing payment assistance and bill reduction programs.

Most Prevalent Issues Addressed Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025		
<b>Dispute Cases</b>		
Issue/Service	Number of Cases	% of Total Cases this Quarter
Gas Aggregation	57	21%
Electricity Aggregation	48	18%
LiHEAP	32	12%
<b>Needs Assistance Cases</b>		
LiHEAP	248	23%
CARE/FERA	202	19%
Payment Extension	81	7%

## Trends Analysis

### Payment Assistance Programs

Payment assistance and bill reduction resources continue to be the most prevalent services provided and are anticipated to be requested more than any other service in the future. This is not a trend. Utility costs will continue to be beyond the means of most LEP, and all low-income consumers.

Bill Reduction and Payment Assistance Programs Q2 October 1 – December 31, 2025			
Assistance Program	Number of Cases*	Percentage of Assistance Program Cases*	Percentage of Total Case Services*
Arrearage Management Program (AMP) Enrollment	79	9%	6%
CARE/FERA	221	26%	16%
Energy Assistance Fund	49	6%	4%
Energy Savings Assistance Program (ESA)	50	6%	4%
Gas Assistance Fund	1	<1%	<1%
LIHEAP	280	33%	20%
Medical Baseline	64	8%	5%
Neighbor to Neighbor	8	<1%	<1%
Other Payment Assistance	26	3%	2%
REACH	68	8%	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>846</b>		

\*Dispute and Needs Assistance cases combined

The consistent approval of rate increases, now numbering several per year for most consumers, make assistance programs less effective, as their benefits do not expand at pace with rate hikes. And heavily relied upon programs such as LIHEAP are now more difficult to access as demand rises.

### LIHEAP

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The current annual budget is approximately **\$4.5** million nationally. Funding for California in 2025 was nearly **\$216** million, down **10%** from the 2024 allocation.

LIHEAP assistance is overwhelmingly the most effective and relied upon resource CHANGES CBOs access when assisting consumers in both emergency situations and managing ongoing bills. However, the program has become increasingly difficult to access, apply for, and achieve successful approval.

In 2024, LIHEAP processing agencies in California reached budget thresholds that required them to implement a prioritization process to determine eligibility. The eligibility approval process now includes a points system applied to applications. This system was implemented in 2024 when rate increases sent requests for emergency assistance soaring. This prioritization system has led to many households that are eligible for LIHEAP not being approved to receive assistance because they are no longer considered a priority. Many CHANGES consumers, especially those with no minor children in the home, often do not meet the required points threshold and are denied assistance.

Processing and approval times have increased dramatically. In some counties, CBOs continue to experience approval delays of four months or more. In some counties, the wait time is long enough to make submitted applications and documentation invalid, and CBOs must begin again and resubmit documentation to replace submitted information that has expired. During this period, consumers waiting months for approval continue to watch their balances increase and often face disconnection.

### **Arrearage Management Plan (AMP)**

The AMP program has been beneficial to consumers who have been able to maintain monthly AMP payments in addition to all new charges on their bill each month. While CHANGES CBOs continue to enroll consumers into the Arrearage Management Plan (AMP), this program can be extremely difficult for most CHANGES consumers to achieve the bill forgiveness they seek. Many CHANGES consumers expressed feelings of being misled by promises of debt forgiveness which did not occur because current high bills combined with required repayment of outstanding balances were impossible to maintain.

CBOs have found that enrollment into the AMP program became more challenging after new enrollment guidelines require that applicants must have had a zero balance at some time during the past 24 months preceding application.

### **IOU Operated Assistance Programs**

Payment assistance programs operated and offered directly by IOUs are also being depleted or are more difficult to access. This is especially true this quarter, as funds in those programs have been exhausted. For the calendar year

SDG&E's Neighbor to Neighbor program has tightened eligibility requirements and has led to a significant reduction in bill assistance in the SD&G territory. Once the primary form of CHANGES assistance after LIHEAP in the SDG&E territory, CHANGES cases related to Neighbor-to-Neighbor applications were only 8 cases this quarter.

Requests for PG&E's REACH program have increased.

COVID emergency utility assistance programs are no longer available.

Households that are concurrently enrolled in CARE and Medical Baseline and receive LIHEAP and IOU payment assistance and can access ESA services still have bill balances

that are higher than they can afford. The high cost of energy services far exceeds the ability of low-income immigrant households to maintain safe, healthy environments. They are often forced to choose between having utilities in their homes and paying rent, or purchasing food and medicine, even after availing themselves of all available resources.

When traditional resources are limited or inadequate, CHANGES CBOs often seek additional payment assistance from local churches and community organizations. However, these resources are very limited and have sporadic availability. Typically, after applying all available resources to a consumer's balance, CHANGES CBOs must still negotiate a payment plan for the consumer. And because payment plans require a monthly payment in addition to any new charges for the month, even those become unaffordable, eventually pushing the household to disconnection.

### **Gas and Electricity Aggregation**

The largest number of dispute cases during this reporting period addressed issues related to gas and electricity aggregation, comprising 38% of all services provided in Dispute cases during this reporting period.

Consumers often do not realize that their accounts have been transferred to Core Transport Agents (CTAs) or Community Choice Aggregators (CCAs) until it has been pointed out to them by CHANGES CBOs. Many are uncomfortable with being enrolled with a company they did not request.

- Most consumers do not recall being contacted by a CTA prior to being enrolled with them.
- Others remember speaking with a CTA or its contracted marketing associate but told the company they did not want to change companies and were switched anyway.
- Still others switched willingly because they were assured that their bills would be lower but received higher bills.
- It is unclear how rate increases and/or energy usage impacted bill amounts from CTAs as compared to IOUs. However, many consumers who are receiving higher bills are choosing to transfer back to IOUs.

### **Conclusion**

Energy costs are unaffordable regardless of the payment of assistance and bill reduction resources any consumer can access. Continuous rate increases will impact Californians' ability to maintain safe and healthy living situations and lead to more limited financial resources for food, housing, medical care and transportation.

Gas and Electricity Aggregation cases continue to be a significant issue among consumers in the PG&E territory, as aggressive practices of 3<sup>rd</sup> party marketing companies result in confusion and dissatisfaction among consumers that is still being felt today.

The CHANGES Program budget has not been increased since the inception of the program a decade ago and is insufficient to maintain a consistent level of services in all program components.

CHANGES CBOs and the consumers they serve continue to encounter increasing difficulties with accessing emergency payment assistance and bill reduction programs. Assistance program budgets do not keep pace with raising rates, and program administrators are faced with both reducing assistance payment amounts and applying more stringent eligibility requirements.