

# Region 5 Focus Group 2025

**Ishkoday | First Nation Energy Sustainability  
Association**

January 26, 2025



[ishkoday.ca](http://ishkoday.ca)

## Introduction

A fundamental part of the human experience is our relationship to energy. Our relationship to energy has changed everything about how humans live. All cultures around the world have a unique and foundational connection to fire and how they came to understand and use it. Fire has changed the way we live, it has changed the way we eat, it has changed the way we interact with the rest of the natural world. Fire and energy are fundamental to human existence.

Ishkoday wants to give agency back to people and assist in a movement towards energy efficiency for all. It is important as an Indigenous grassroots organization to know where to focus our efforts, by working with First Nations social services employees, Ishkoday can gain insight into the lives of some of the most vulnerable populations in Ontario.

## Acknowledgements

Miigwech (thank you – *anishnaabemowin*) to our tireless leader – Jessica Nadjiwon, without her guidance none of this is possible.

Miigwech to Kelsey Leblanc and Staci Williams for hosting ONWAA regional sessions and assisting in logistics to make the focus groups a reality. Their hard work, knowledge and facilitation skills are unmatched.

Miigwech to Nick Puran and Sheldon Adams for their assistance and willingness to assist whenever needed.

Chi-miigwech (great thanks – *anishnaabemowin*) to our ONWAA/Ishkoday members, their experience, observations, contributions and connection to their clients; the work would not be possible without them.

## Summary

Ishkoday's Focus Groups are annual data collection and educational exercises to determine the needs and gaps in support for First Nations Ontario Works Administrators and case workers.

Data is collected to reveal the conditions and burdens of energy poverty on low- and fixed-income as well as the Ontario Works and Social Service Departments throughout First Nation communities in Ontario.

This report contains comparisons from the previous 2024 Ishkoday focus group, a first step in measuring trends and changes to the state of energy poverty in First Nations in Ontario.

## About Ishkoday

Ishkoday | First Nation Energy Sustainability Association (Ishkoday) is a sister organization to Ontario Native Welfare Administrators' Association (ONWAA). Ishkoday was formed in 2023 by the board of directors of ONWAA with the mandate to:

- Deliver energy efficiency training that benefit First Nations peoples residing on reserves who are of fixed income or in need.
- Provide insight to First Nations Leadership that assist them in bettering their energy resources and communities in the future.
- Promoting uniform, culturally appropriate training and delivery of cultural competency, energy programs, policy, and practices.
- Assisting in providing the basic necessities, tools, and resources of climate control which promotes safe and comfortable living conditions for First Nations peoples living on reserve who are of fixed income or in need.

Ishkoday is the Oji-cree word meaning: “flame” or “fire”. Fire is energy; Indigenous people have always understood the power and respect that fire commands. Throughout Canada's history; Indigenous people have unequally experienced the benefits and the dangers of energy generation, transmission and use.



## About the Authors

Adam McLaren (*he/him*) is Marten and McLaren Clan from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation in Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory. Adam has been with ONWAA/Ishkoday since August 2023. He has a community-based approach to his work professionally and in his personal life. Adam loves to go hiking, facilitate educational and cultural exercises, land-based learning and volunteering for his community.

Chelsea Brunelle (*she/her*) of the Bear Clan is Ojibwe from Batchewana First Nation. Chelsea is the policy specialist with ONWAA and has been with the organization for almost four years.

Nicholas Puran (*he/him*) is a Data Manager at Ishkoday and has been with the organization since October 2024. Nicholas has a background in environmental biology and years of experience working for First Nation communities.

## Region 5 Focus Group Details

Date: May 27, 2025

Location: Delta Toronto Airport – 655 Dixon Road, Mississauga

Facilitator: Adam McLaren – Ishkoday

Host: Jessica Nadjiwon – ONWAA

### All communities in ONWAA's Region 5:

- Aamjiwnaang First Nation (Chippewas of Sarnia)
- Aamjwanang First Nation
- Alderville First Nation
- Beausoleil First Nation
- Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation
- Chippewas of Nawash First Nation
- Chippewas of Rama First Nation
- Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation
- Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
- Curve Lake First Nation
- Hiawatha First Nation
- Kettle & Stony Point First Nation
- Mississauga of Scugog Island First Nation
- Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation
- Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
- Mohawks of Bay of Quinte



- Moose Deer Point First Nation
- Moravian of the Thames First Nation
- Munsee-Delaware Nation
- Oneida Nation of the Thames
- Six Nations of the Grand River
- Wahta Mohawks
- Walpole Island First Nation

## Region 5 Communities represented Focus Group: (6/23)

- Saugeen First Nation
- Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
- Hiawatha First Nation
- Curve Lake First Nation
- Chippewas of Rama First Nation
- Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation
- Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
- Chippewas of Nawash First Nation
- Beausoleil First Nation
- Alderville First Nation
- Six Nations of the Grand River

## Position held by participants in Focus Group:

(5) Eligibility Review Officer

(1) Chief District of Kawehno:ke

(4) Ontario Works Administrator / Social Service Administrator

(3) Program Supervisor/ Program Manager

(1) ODSP Caseworker

## Purpose

Ishkoday's purpose for this study is as follows:

- 1) Gather a base data set to inform Ishkoday in its organizational research and direction to achieve its mandate.



- 2) Provide aggregate data on the state of Energy Poverty in First Nations and the impact to low- and fixed-income people and their social services departments to aide First Nations in advocacy and policy.

## Methodology

Gathering people together for a common purpose across a landmass as great as Ontario's is no easy feat. The 2025 focus group was designed to be facilitated in-person through ONWAA's annual regional spring/summer gatherings.

Mentimeter.com was chosen to present and gather data during these facilitated focus groups. It is an interactive and intuitive online software that utilizes live responses input by the participant with their personal device.

Each focus group session was designed for 1.5 hours to ensure that discussion of various subjects and allow participants to share stories and experiences. Our 14 participants consisted of (5) Eligibility Review Officer, (1) Chief District of Kawehno:ke, (4) Ontario Works Administrator / Social Service Administrator, (3) Program Supervisor/ Program Manager, (1) ODSP Caseworker

Participants were notified early about the session and given a couple of preview questions that may take some prior preparation, specifically in questions 7, 8 and 9 about the costs of "bill relief" to their program.

Many of the questions in this focus group were the same as the 2024 Ishkoday Focus Groups with some minor changes and a few additions. The questions that were asked to the focus group participants utilized and built upon and content of the 2024 Ishkoday Focus Group Project.

## Considerations for Analysis

A main consideration for analysis and comparisons between the previous 2024 Region 5 Focus Group and current 2025 Region 5 Focus Group is that there is minimal overlap between participants. Only (1) participant from the 2024 Region 5 Focus Group attended the 2025 Region 5 Focus Group. Although the comparison between the current data and the previous year's data will be minimal, the data is still valuable to document

the impacts of Energy Poverty within Region 5 and for Ishkoday in knowing where to offer Energy Efficiency Training and what new supports can be developed.



As in 2024, the sessions began with (2) questions to gauge the participants’ current knowledge on the concepts of Energy Efficiency and Energy Poverty; their responses are measured by response types submitted as well as the terminology chosen to use.

## Question 1

What does **Energy Efficiency** mean? What comes to mind?



Figure 1: 2025 Focus Group - Region 5 | Question 1 Responses – May 27, 2025



Figure 2: 2024 Focus Group – Region 5 | Question 1 Responses– June 26, 2024

Among the most frequent response category were that of financial costs and savings. The next highest response category was that of conservation and energy usage and sustainability, followed, by environmental health and home comfort.

## **Question 1 – Analysis and Year to Year Comparison**

The response from the 2025 focus group indicates that the participants were very familiar with energy efficiency. Financially focused responses were among the most frequently submitted category but there is a diversity of responses. Responses related to accessibility, reliability and conservation plenty. The group had even connected health and wellbeing to energy efficiency. Which is an excellent indication that benefits of energy efficiency are understood. “Energy poverty is an overlooked determinant of health in Canada.” Riva et al. (2023, pg.429).

In 2024 responses directly relating energy efficiency to health and wellbeing benefits are overlooked, but the responses that connect energy efficiency to environmental benefits can be understood as a health benefit as well. Indigenous people’s core values and beliefs that humans are “one” with the environment and ecosystems makes direct connection to the wellbeing of the environment to the inhabitants of the land as well.

In both focus group years, the responses were insightful and diverse and indicated a good grasp on the concepts of energy efficiency.

## Question 2

What does **Energy Poverty** mean to you? What comes to mind?



Figure 3: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | Question 2 Responses - May 27, 2025



Figure 4: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | Question 2 Response- June 26, 2024

In question 2, participants were asked “what does energy poverty mean to you”. The goal is to discover the level of understanding of energy poverty as a concept as well as indicate areas of reaserch and opportunities for training where needed.

## Question 2 – Analysis and Year to Year Comparison

The 2024 and 2025 Region 5 Focus Group show that participants are very familiar with energy poverty. Some of the major indicators of energy poverty, un-affordability and unreliability were referenced throughout their responses. In 2025 responses indicating inaccessibility are present but not in 2024, this could be an indication that Region 5 is becoming more familiar with the concept of energy poverty. Connections to health and wellbeing are found in responses of both as well as connecting energy poverty with the struggles of an Indigenous housing crisis within Canada. CMHC (2025) states that as of 2021 “nearly half of on-reserve households are living in a dwelling below a housing standard” (p. 11)

### Question 3

How does Energy Poverty show up in the communities you serve?

Anger	Health issues	Wasted resources	Violence
Mould illness	Isolation	arrears and shut off	Lack of Housing supports
Stress	insufficient waste management	Food security	Low priority
Lack of access to capital	Aging homes Aging furnaces Aging infrastructure: hydro, transportation ex: ferry system	Trickles into other issues in the home and personally	Quality of work, service maintenance

Figure 5: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

Cost of energy keeps going up impacting our most vulnerable.	Disconnected hydro .. Mold ... bad windows	Costs of fuel to heat and use for cooking and other household purposes. Electricity bill costs are high making it difficult to afford. We have very cold long winters so it does take a lot to heat home	Disconnected from service
Disconnection Notices	Disconnections	Increased health problem (respiratory) increase in instance of asthma in children	Stress
	Bad credit	Clients asking for hydro bill assistance	Homes not being built properly

Figure 6: 2024 Region 5 Focus Group | June 26, 2024

The purpose for proposing this question is to document and learn about the real-life struggles that are taking place within their communities. These are firsthand accounts of the people working with some of the most vulnerable populations in Ontario.

## **Analysis and Year to Year Comparison**

Region 5 responses from both 2024 and 2025 show the impacts of energy poverty that they have witnessed in their communities. In 2025, various health and wellbeing impacts such as “mould illness”, “stress” and “anger” conveyed in our participants responses. Connections to “food security” are made through unreliable connections and unaffordable services. “Wasted resources”, “quality of work, service maintenance” and “ageing homes, aging furnaces...” are references to inefficient homes that are leading to costly energy bills. “Lack of access to capital” and “lack of access to housing supports” are references to the lack of federal support from the government of Canada. This lack of support speaks to the underfunding in First Nations in Region 5 and the continuation of systemic racism.

In 2024, the response that “...increase in instance of asthma in children.”, also makes the connection of energy poverty and respiratory health conditions, which is a connection that has carried over to 2025. Another response references the First Nations housing crisis while the others reference the unaffordability of energy services and the vulnerable’s reliance on the Ontario Works system.

## Question 4

“Where are we at right now?”

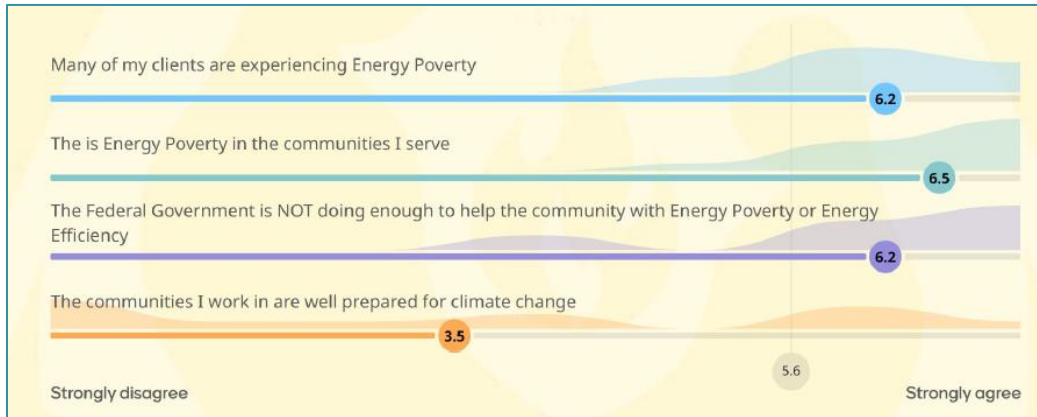


Figure 7: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

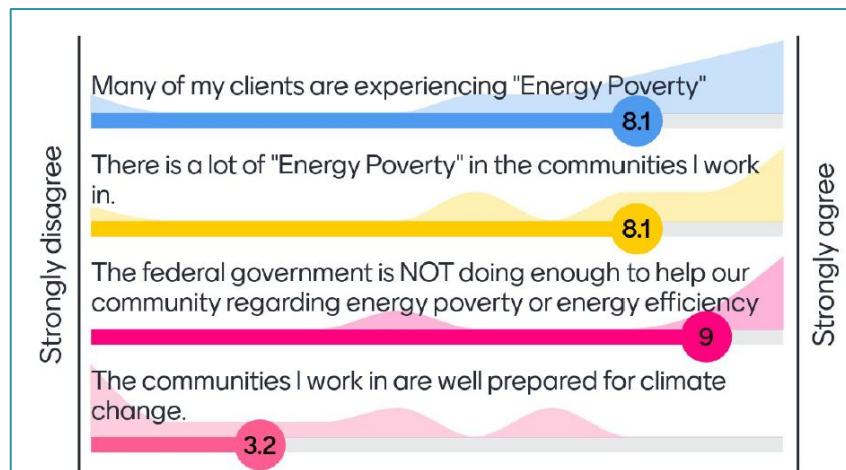


Figure 8: 2024 Region 5 Focus Group | June 26, 2024

In the 2024 and 2025 focus groups, participants were asked to agree or disagree with a statement to gauge the state of energy poverty in their communities. The lowest value indicates a strong disagreement with the statement and the high value indicates a strong agreement with the statement.

In 2025, the value from a scale of 1-10 was adjusted to a scale of 1-7 to simplify our question and have a dedicated value for a “neutral” position.

## Analysis and Year to Year Comparison

**Statement 1:** “Many of my clients are experiencing ‘Energy Poverty’”.

This statement was used to broadly indicate how many participants' clients were experiencing energy poverty. In 2024 and 2025 there is agreement that “many of my clients are experiencing energy poverty” in region 5. In 2024, the statement was more strongly agreed with than in 2025. It will be interesting to see what the future comparisons will be from year to year especially since Ishkoday is actively working with OW offices and clients in region 5.

**Statement 2:** *“There is a lot of energy poverty in the communities I work in → There is energy poverty in the communities I work in.”*

This statement has gone through a small but significant change since last year, the change in the wording could lead to a more skewed understanding of what we had expected for participants, along with the change in how we valued the scale. Describing “A lot of energy poverty” as opposed to indicating that “there is energy poverty.” In both statements participants did indicate that energy poverty exists in the communities they serve. In both 2024 and 2025 the participants strongly agreed that Energy Poverty is present in the communities they work in.

**Statement 3:** *“The Federal Government is NOT doing enough to help the community with Energy Poverty or Energy Efficiency.”*

It is important to document the participants general sentiment regarding support from the Federal Government. In Region 5, the Federal Government is not doing enough to support communities with energy poverty and energy efficiency. The ongoing housing crisis in First Nations is likely a large part of the sentiment, as well as the history and legacy of colonization that is ongoing to this day.

“...nearly half of on-reserve households are living in a dwelling below a housing standard” CMHC (2025, p.11).

“For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as “cultural genocide” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.10).

**Statement 4:** *“The communities I work in are well prepared for climate change”*

Canada’s movement and shift to a carbon neutral society is politically challenging and climate change is the major threat that is driving this shift. While communities all across Canada already face increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, First Nations are still behind in basic needs such as adequate housing.

We wanted to see what our participants thought about their communities’ plans for climate change.

In both 2024 and 2025, most participants did not agree with the statement that their communities are well prepared for climate change.

## Question 5

“What are the most common ways your clients are heating their homes?”

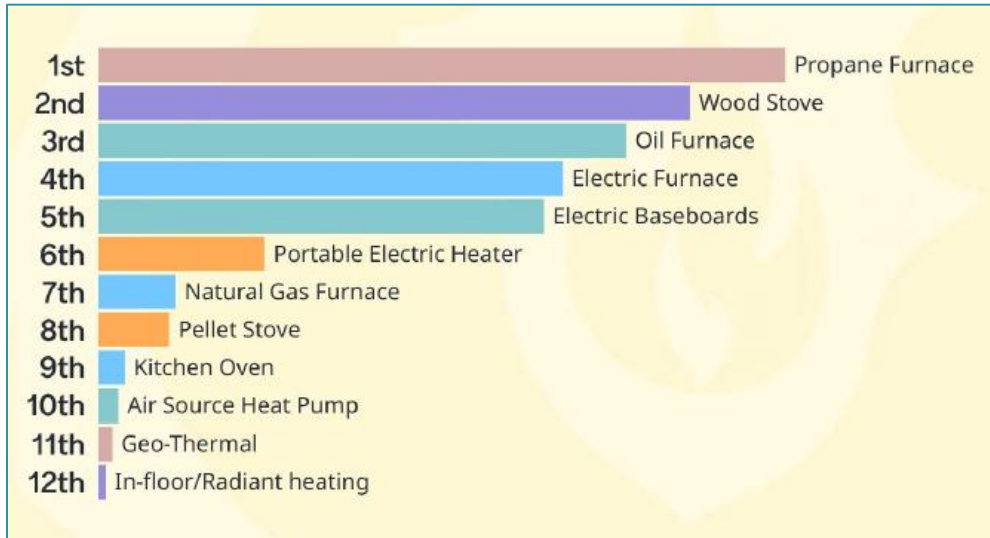


Figure 9: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

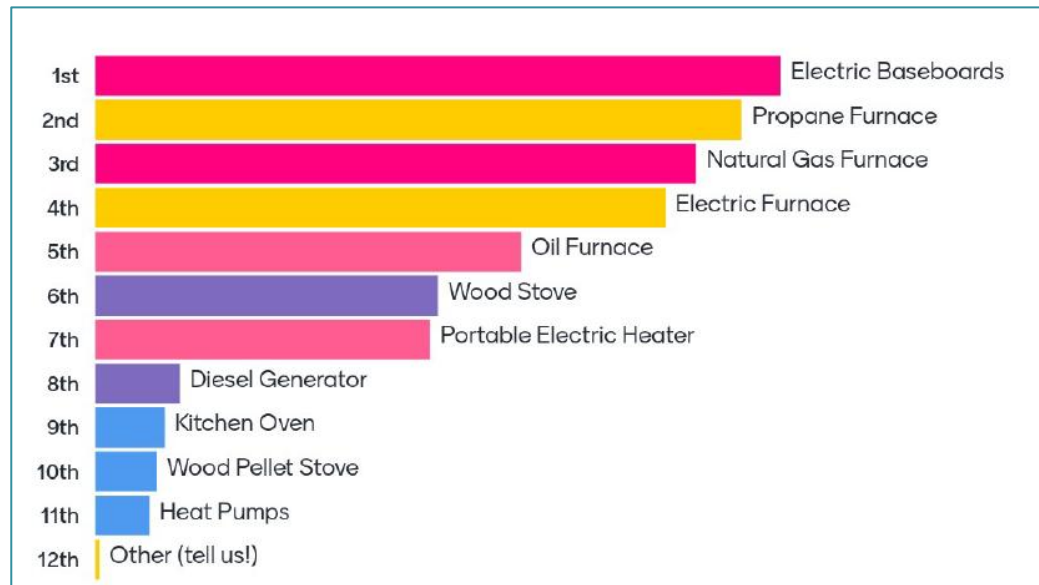


Figure 10: 2024 Region 5 Focus Group | June 26, 2024

In 2024 and 2025 participants were asked to rank which heating options on a provided list were most used by their clients. There are slight differences in the list of heating options between 2024 and 2025. In 2025, heat pumps and diesel generators were

removed from the list of heating options because in 2024 geo-thermal and radiant heating options were indicated as a “other” option.

## **Analysis and Year to Year Comparison**

The results from 2024 and 2025 vary. Region 5 represents First Nations in the more southern parts of Ontario. Compared to more Northern Ontario, First Nations located in southern Ontario increases accessibility for a diversity of technologies, fuel types, and services. The top 7 most common ways clients are heating their homes are the same as last year’s results although they are differently ranked. In both 2024 and 2025, kitchen ovens were still recognized as a heating source that clients use. This is a direct indication that energy poverty is present in Region 5 and that clients are resorting to using an appliance that isn’t designed to heat a room. The newest most efficient technologies ranked low in both years.

## Question 6

“Is the amount spent on energy bills higher or lower than the previous year?”

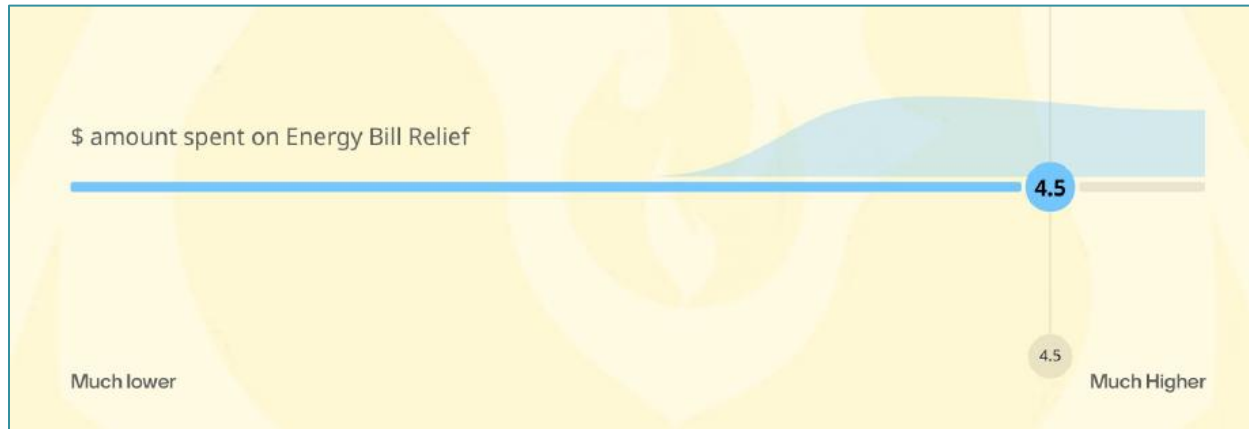


Figure 11: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

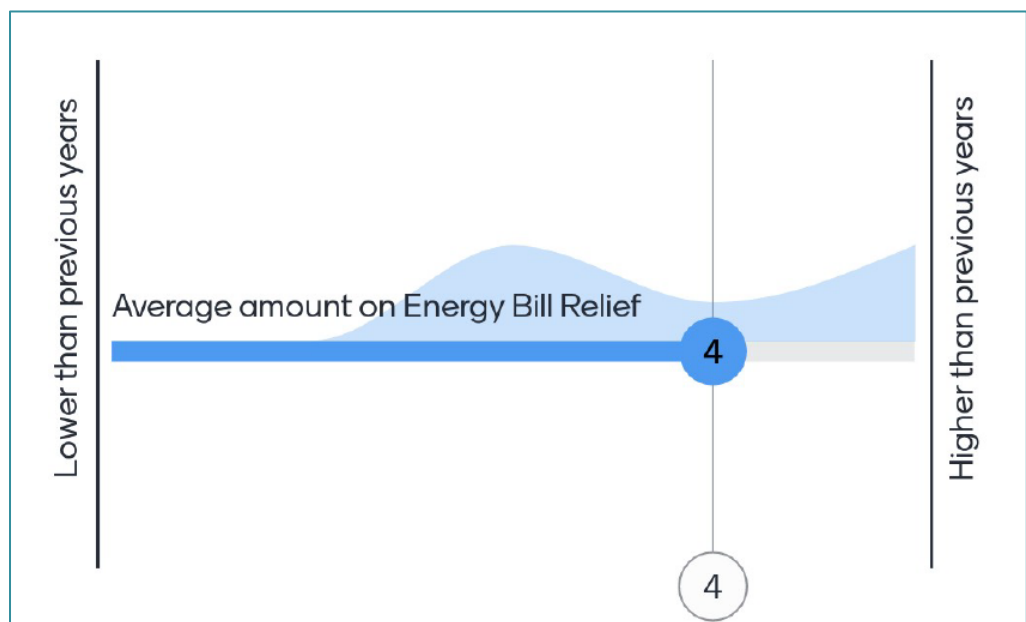


Figure 12: 2024 Region 5 Focus Group | June 27, 2024

## Analysis and Year to Year Comparison

In region 5 there is a greater diversity in energy technologies, fuel types and services available. In both 2024 and 2025, participants indicated that the amount of money spent on energy bill relief was higher than previous years.

Comparison of the results from year to year should be minimal for the reason stated in the above section – in *Considerations for Analysis* (pg.6).

## Question 7

“If you could invest all the money you have spent on energy bill relief, what would you do with it?”

Wages	Capital for Housing	An internet tower	Own source energy initiatives
address homelessness issues	Elder supports	Office renovations	Mental health supports
Food security programs	Food sustainability	Home improvement programs	Housing
mental health and addiction supports and programs	Give to community members	Wages	Addiction and mental health supports
Assist with youth programs			

Figure 13: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

Energy efficiency	Housing	Recreation	Upgrade homes.
Provide food cards	Put things in place to assist clients in keeping bills lower than usual.	Use to purchase other energy efficient appliances	Home upgrades
Renovation, energy audits,	Get upgrades	Keep it for emergency relief in case clients go into arrears.	Upgrade client's homes
Renovations for all homes with efficiency issues. High heating costs, investigate and needed new roof with insulation			

Figure 14: 2024 Region 5 Focus Group | June 26, 2024

Above you will see examples of what would be prioritized by First Nations Ontario Works if the burden of energy bill relief did not exist.

Energy is a fundamental aspect of our lives, it is required for cooking, heating, access to fresh water, technology etc. Access to energy is a priority for human existence, the cost of energy poverty cascades into many different areas of life. The financial burden alone limits what is achievable for individuals and communities.

## Analysis and Year to Year Comparison

The responses from both 2024 and 2025 showed a variety of initiatives that participants would want to fund with money that would regularly go to clients' energy bill relief. Responses that focus on housing and home repair initiatives are found in both years. Food security initiatives are found in both years as well as addictions and mental health supports. Youth support programs and elder support programs were included in 2025

and not 2024. The response “internet tower” indicates a need for some vital communication infrastructure as well as “own source energy initiatives” indicates a desire for energy sovereignty initiatives. These are examples of non-energy benefits that would undoubtedly be initiatives if we lived in a society that prioritized efficiency for all.

## Question 8 & 9

What percentage of your workload each month is spent assisting clients with energy related matters? (2024 year). The weather averages for the year in Region 4 were included for analysis purposes.

		Average Temperature	Region 4	% of Workload dedicated to energy
2024	January	Lowest Avg.	-23	38.6%
		Mean Temp.	-6.4	
		Highest Avg.	3.4	
	February	Lowest Avg.	-20	26.8%
		Mean Temp.	-4.02	
		Highest Avg.	10.9	
	March	Lowest Avg.	-15.9	25.2%
		Mean Temp.	-0.3	
		Highest Avg.	14.3	
	April	Lowest Avg.	-7.2	8.6%
		Mean Temp.	5.8	
		Highest Avg.	21.4	
May	Lowest Avg.	2.7	8.6%	
	Mean Temp.	14		
	Highest Avg.	27.3		
June	Lowest Avg.	4.6	8.2%	
	Mean Temp.	17.4		
	Highest Avg.	32.4		
July	Lowest Avg.	8.4	22.8%	
	Mean Temp.	20.3		
	Highest Avg.	30.2		
August	Lowest Avg.	8	7%	
	Mean Temp.	19.2		
	Highest Avg.	31.6		
September	Lowest Avg.	4.2	7%	
	Mean Temp.	16.7		
	Highest Avg.	27.3		
October	Lowest Avg.	2.3	14.2%	
	Mean Temp.	9.4		
	Highest Avg.	23		
November	Lowest Avg.	-5.7	18%	
	Mean Temp.	3.4		
	Highest Avg.	16.9		
December	Lowest Avg.	-21.1	25.4%	
	Mean Temp.	-4.3		
	Highest Avg.	7.3		

Figure 15: 2025 Focus Group | May 27, 2025 – Region 5 Responses Compared to 2024 Ontario Temperature Data (Government of Canada, 2024) Weather data added to our chart show median, highest, and lowest average temperatures taken from climate stations near the First Nations represented in this focus group.

“What aspects of that workload takes up the most time?”

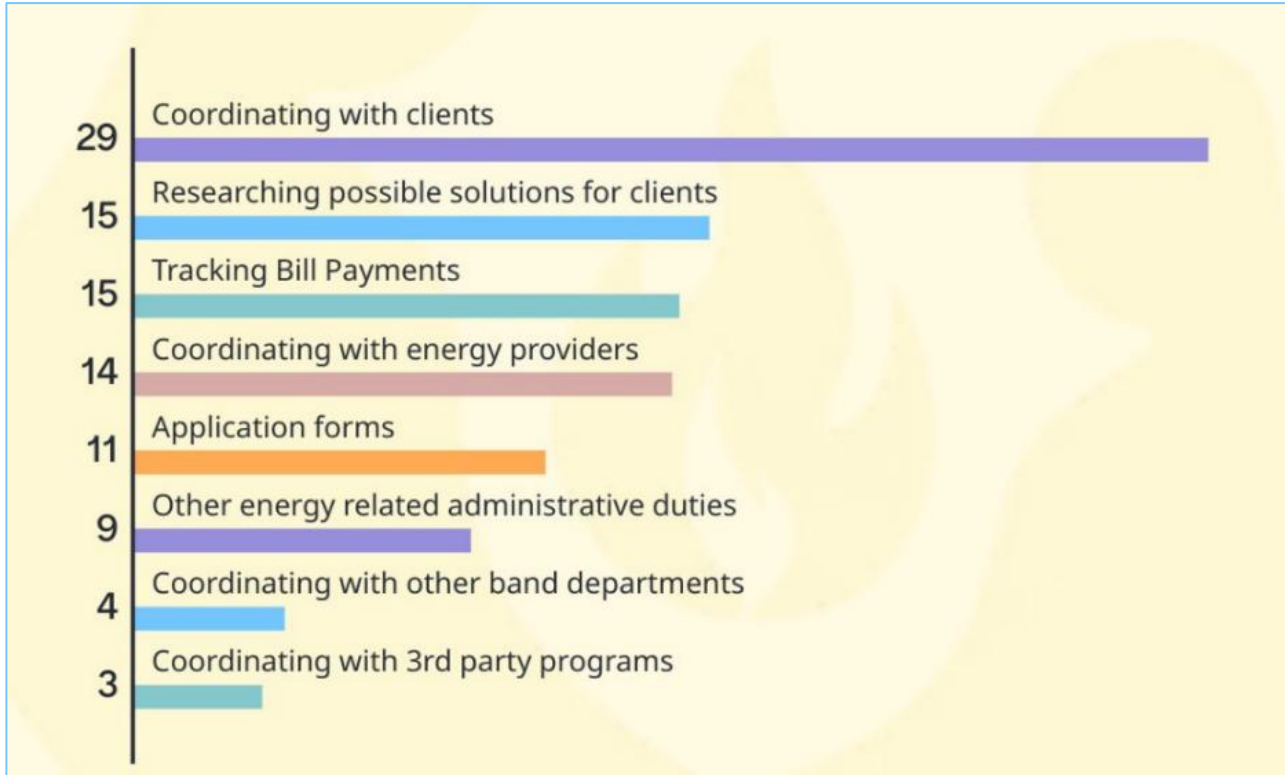


Figure 16: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

Weather data added to our chart show median, highest, and lowest average temperatures taken from climate stations near the First Nations represented in this focus group.

## Analysis

In Region 5, energy related work load increases during the colder months beginning in October reaching highs in January and continuing until March. There is a spike in July, the warmest month of the year. Temperature data from weather monitoring stations near the participating communities in the 2025 focus group have been included to show a correlation between temperature trends with the energy related workload of our participants. Temperature data from region 5 mirror that of the busy workload periods seen throughout the year. Substantial hot and cold temperatures meant a greater workload for workers as more time was spent with clients assisting them with necessary energy related matters.

The most time consuming energy-based activity of our participants work goes towards coordinating with clients, while the next most time consuming activity was researching possible solutions for clients, tracking bill payments, and coordinating with energy providers.

Ishkoday had identified the need for a more streamlined research process and created the Boodawewin App, to help lighten the load of researching possible solutions for First Nations Ontario Works clients.

By understanding the different burdens of energy poverty on First Nations social service departments we can find direction as an organization for the creation of tools and resources to assist in these matters.

# Question 10

“Which of the following programs have you heard about before?”



Figure 17: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | May 27, 2025

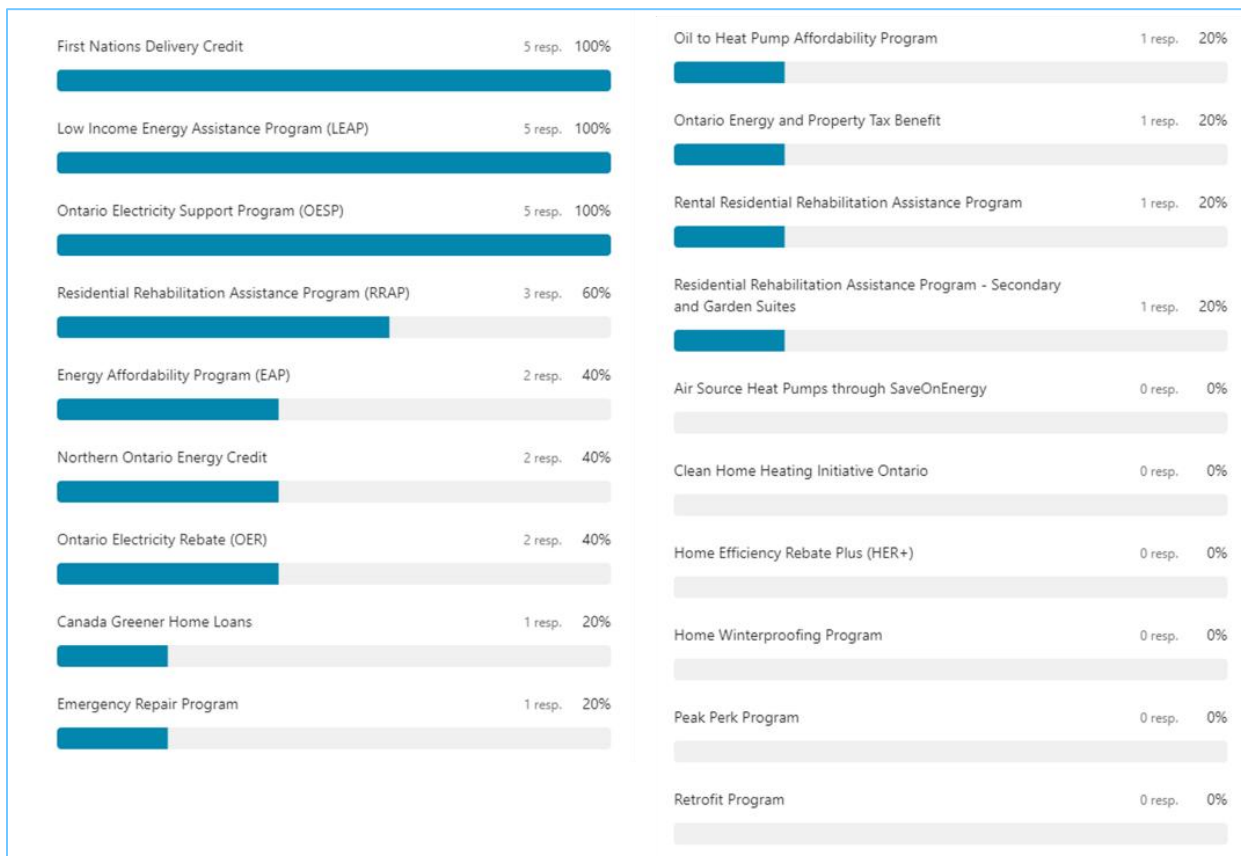


Figure 17: 2025 Region 5 Focus Group | June 26, 2024

## Analysis

Ishkoday works hard to ensure that First Nations OWAs know about the resources available for their clients. We have seen a measurable success; by promoting energy efficiency programs and their delivery agents we have seen an increase in recognition and engagement with these programs and the delivery agents managing them.

## Conclusion

Fire and energy are fundamental to human existence, Ishkoday finds it incredibly unjust and worrying that the experiences of unreliability, unaffordability and inaccessibility are still prevalent within this region.

In Region 5, our participants are indicating that energy poverty is increasing. While energy costs rose throughout most of the year in 2024 the First Nations housing crisis still remained. (Ontario Energy Board 2025)

The cost of energy poverty is more than just overdue bill payments; the cost, is often time and funds that could go towards investing food sustainability programming, investing in competing priorities like mental health and addictions programming, and energy sovereignty programming. The cost of energy poverty is the dignity of inhabitants of an inefficient home. The cost is living in precarious and sometime fatally dangerous conditions by using appliances that are not designed for heating living spaces.

Addressing energy poverty will undoubtedly raise the quality of life for many people as well as free up time and resources for First Nations leadership, Ontario Works and social services offices to focus in on other priorities.

## Solutions

Ishkoday offers Home Energy Efficiency Training for ONWAA members free of charge, this training is practical and designed specifically for First Nations people. It's an opportunity for First Nations Ontario Works clients to find supports, gain a comprehensive understanding of home energy systems and develop agency in their

relationship to energy. We recommend that Region 5 Ontario Works Administrators book a session with the Ishkoday team.

The conversations around energy needs to include the health benefits and the health risks of energy poverty in a more detailed way. The conversations around energy needs to include a right to have access to energy in its modern day form in order to live a life of dignity and opportunity. Canada is often described as one of the most energy stable countries in the world. The country is known as an “energy super power” but that is not the experience for First Nations across Ontario.

Ishkoday wants to reinforce Truth and reconciliation call to action 92:

“We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.
2. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.
3. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015, call to action #92). The corporate energy sector needs to continue to understand the histories and relationship that First Nations have had with Canadian Governments and their predecessors of the energy sector. Successfully understanding this relationship could create more culturally relevant

supports, sow good relations and collaborate efforts with First Nations people and their leadership.

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