

The Pioneer Utility Grant Program (PUG) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The *Pioneer Utility Grant (PUG) Act* was passed in 1978 to help Yukon seniors with the cost of heating their homes in the winter. Since then, the seniors' population has grown substantially, pensions have increased and homes are better insulated.

In 2014, the *PUG Act* was amended and in 2015 regulations were created to address issues of fairness, flexibility and sustainability. Income testing was introduced; now seniors with lower incomes receive the full grant, but seniors who have more income may be required to pay some or all of the costs.

1. What are the major changes?

- moving up the application date to July 1 from October 1
- ensuring all new PUG applicants are 65 or older the year of the grant
- detailing what is required when applying for the grant
- establishing income testing to determine grant amounts
- establishing a rural rate

2. When can I apply for the grant?

We will accept PUG applications from July 1 to December 31. Only in exceptional medical circumstances will this date be extended to January 31.

3. What is required to apply?

You must submit:

- A PUG application form.
- If you are a **homeowner**, a **copy** of your 2017 Property Assessment Notice (either the **GREEN** Yukon government form or a property assessment statement stamped by Community Services) or a municipal water and sewer bill if it clearly identifies your street address. Your Atco electric bill cannot be submitted as it does not prove that you own the house.
- If you are renting or leasing you must submit a Certificate of Tenancy form prepared and signed by your landlord. Attach the signed Certificate of Tenancy to your application.
- Proof of annual income, which is based on your 2016 Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) NOTICE OF ASSESSMENT. We only need a photocopy of the pages that show your name and line 236. We would like you to black out your social insurance number (which is at the top of the notice) and all other lines, except for line 236.
- If you have a spouse, you will need to provide the Canada Revenue Agency NOTICE OF ASSESSMENT for **both** of you, even if your spouse is under age 65.

4. What is the new PUG rate and how is it determined?

In 2017, the maximum amount payable within Whitehorse is \$1059. In rural Yukon the maximum is \$1,143. A computer program calculates your rate (using marital status, income and physical address) and applies the formula set out in Section 10(1) of the Pioneer Utility Grant Regulations. **Because everyone's situation is unique, no two seniors will receive the same PUG rate.**

5. Why is there a different PUG rate for rural applicants and what is considered rural residency?

In general, Yukon rural and remote households experience higher fuel and delivery costs for heating. Any residence located outside Whitehorse city limits will receive the rural rate.

6. How long do I have to live in Yukon before I am eligible to apply?

If you are applying for the PUG for the first time, you must have lived in Yukon for a minimum of 12 months (1 year) before you can apply. If you have applied for and received the PUG previously, you must live in the Yukon a minimum of 183 days every year, and three months of the 183 days must be during the winter months (defined as January, February, March, October, November, December).

For example, if a senior moves to Yukon in May 2016, then they would be eligible to apply for the PUG in July of 2017 because they would have lived in Yukon for a year (initial requirement), at least three months of which were winter months.

Please note that if you leave Yukon on an extended vacation during the first six months of the year then you will have to delay submitting your application. For example, if you travel south on vacation for the entire month of February then you cannot apply until November first, as you would need January, March and October to count as your winter months.

7. When can I expect to receive the PUG payment?

If your application package is complete, you can expect your PUG within 30 working days.

Please note: By law, we must return incomplete applications to you. If they are mailed in and are incomplete, we will mail them back to you within 10 working days with a letter detailing what is missing.

8. Why do I need to provide my income information?

- We need this information to ensure you receive the correct PUG amount.
- Individual seniors with an income below \$40,000 and couples with a joint income below \$56,000 will receive the maximum PUG.
- Seniors in the middle income range will receive a partial PUG.
- Individual seniors with an income above \$117,000 and couples with incomes of more than \$165,000 will no longer be eligible for the PUG.

9. What are some of the reasons the PUG might not be paid?

- The applicant's income is very high.
- The applicant does not meet the residency requirements.
- The applicant has been in receipt of social assistance for the majority of the grant year.
- The applicant moved into a Yukon Housing Corporation unit prior to July 1, 2017.
- The applicant did not provide all the required information by December 31, 2017.

10. How will we protect your information?

All the information you provide is required under the *Pioneer Utility Grant Act* for the purpose of determining program eligibility. Your information is protected under the *Yukon Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Information is also collected, used and disclosed in accordance with *Yukon's Health Information Privacy and Management Act* and other applicable laws.

If you apply in person in Whitehorse, we will record line 236 on your NOTICE OF ASSESSMENT and then hand it back to you. Please provide **copies** of all original documentation; we will not mail documents back to you.

11. If I receive the PUG this year will I automatically qualify next year and receive the same amount?

No. You must apply every year. If your income increases or decreases your PUG will change. Some years the base PUG amount may increase slightly to respond to inflation rates.

12. I am a senior who is renting a room in a house with a roommate (not a spouse). Can I still apply for the PUG?

Yes—you will need to submit a Certificate of Tenancy, which your landlord will prepare for you, along with your application. Only those over age 65 can receive the grant and they may only receive a portion of the grant. For example:

Two roommates: One aged 49 and the other aged 68. While the 68-year-old can apply, he or she would still be income tested and only receive at most 50 per cent of the maximum PUG rate as the heating cost are being shared with a roommate.

Two roommates: Both are 65, so they would both be income tested and each would eligible to receive up to 50 per cent of the maximum PUG rate.

13. Why do couples receive a higher PUG than single applicants?

It's not possible to separate heating costs from total living expenses. Everyone's cost of living is different: generally, singles have lower overall living costs as compared to couples who usually incur higher expenses.

14. Who is considered a spouse?

Spouse means two people who are married to each other or who have lived together as a couple for at least 12 continuous months before applying for the PUG.

15. What is considered a principal residence?

The applicant declares the principal residence as the location in Yukon where they reside for at least 183 days of the year, with at least 90 of those (three months) days occurring in the winter months.

16. What are considered utilities under the *Pioneer Utility Grant Act*?

Utilities mean any source of heating (oil, electricity, wood, propane or wood pellets) used for heating the principal residence. We do not require you to submit any heating fuel receipts with your application.

17. Will I receive a T5007 slip to submit with next year's income tax return?

No. The PUG is tax exempt so you will not have to declare it.

18. Are there other jurisdictions that have a similar home heating grant for seniors?

The Northwest Territories and Nunavut are the only other Canadian jurisdictions with a heating grant program that is income-tested and based on every adult living in the house. NWT and Nunavut only pay home owners, not renters. Unlike Yukon, fuel receipts must be submitted, and applications must be made in person and notarized.

19. What are the new enforcement and compliance powers? Why do we need them?

The department needs to deliver the PUG program in a fair and transparent manner. To do that, we can request further information to confirm eligibility. If a PUG recipient was not eligible, we can recover this amount from the next year's PUG. If the department learns that a person knowingly provided false information, we could pursue court action and, if convicted, the person could be fined up to \$5,000.

20. Where can I obtain an application package and get further information?

Please call the PUG INFORMATION LINE at 456-5500 (toll free 1-800-661-0408 ext. 5500) if you wish to receive an application or require additional information about the PUG program. Note that the PUG line is only answered from July 1 through December 31. After that date, please call 667-5674

You can obtain application forms at the following locations:

Information Desk

*Government of Yukon Administration Building
2071 Second Ave. Whitehorse*

Income Support Unit

3168 – 3rd Ave. Whitehorse

Seniors Information Centre

4961B – 4th Ave. Whitehorse

In the communities, you can pick up a form at your Regional Health and Social Services or Territorial Agent office.

Previous years' PUG applicants will automatically be sent an application in the mail. To view the FAQ online please go to <http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pioneergrant.php>. There you will also find a link to the *Pioneer Utility Grant Act and Regulations*. In June we will update the site with the application form, Certificate of Tenancy and a PUG calculator that will help you estimate your grant amount.