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# The Progress-Index

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026 | [PROGRESS-INDEX.COM](http://PROGRESS-INDEX.COM)

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



## RISING COSTS

In 2020, 20.1% of households earning between \$60,000 and \$100,000 reported experiencing problems affording their energy. In 2024, 32.1% of those households did – a 12 percentage point increase. GETTY IMAGES

### Data: 1 in 3 households struggles to pay energy bills

**Diana Hernández**  
Columbia University  
THE CONVERSATION

Americans' concerns about being able to afford electricity and home heating fuel have been elevated since the beginning of the Iran war. But recently released nationwide data shows that even before the war began, these concerns were widespread, long-standing and getting worse faster than the data can reflect.

The information is from preliminary reports based on the Residential Energy Consumption Survey, a representative survey of U.S. households conducted every four to five years by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. These early results show that energy insecurity, a hidden hardship defined as the inability to adequately meet household energy needs, affects millions of American households and is worsening quickly.

As a scholar who has spent years sitting in hundreds of homes around the country, hearing firsthand accounts about energy insecurity, I turn to this survey data to quantify the suffering I have witnessed up close.

The latest tranche of data was collected in 2024 and released in March 2026, but full results won't be available for some time. The preceding survey was taken in 2020, but results weren't finalized until August 2025.

Though that data is incomplete and slow to emerge, the picture is unambiguous: Even households once confident they could afford energy costs are at risk of falling behind on bills, making hard trade-offs to keep the lights on and living in homes they can't afford to properly heat and cool.

#### A pandemic success story

The survey asks respondents wheth-



**Seniors have historically been among the most protected from high energy bills, partly by programs to assist with energy costs and partly because wealth usually peaks in later life. Even so, the share of older Americans experiencing energy insecurity climbed to 1 in 4 in 2024 from roughly 1 in 5 in 2020.** GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

**A closer look at the data over time reveals that more Americans live with energy insecurity now than in years past. In 2024, 43.6 million American households – 32.9% of all homes – reported experiencing some form of energy insecurity. In 2015, that figure was 31.3%, and in 2020 it was 27.2%.**

er, in the prior 12 months, they received a disconnection notice threatening to terminate their home's electricity, gas or other fuel service because they hadn't paid the bills. It also asks whether any of those services were in fact disconnected; whether they bought less food or skipped taking medication to be able to afford their energy bills; or whether they

left their home at an unhealthy temperature because running or repairing the heating or cooling equipment would be too expensive.

The result is a portrait of a significant swath of the population that has a hard time affording housing

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## Plenty of America 250 events coming up

Some in nation's capital, others across country

**Nicole Fallert**  
USA TODAY

The nation is gearing up to celebrate America's 250th anniversary.

Events across the country are scheduled to observe America's legacy in the coming weeks.

Some celebrations are already in full swing, such as the "American Presidents" exhibition at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery and The Great American Road Trip initiative led by the Department of Transportation.

But the major festivities are set to occur around July 4, which marks the 250th anniversary of America's adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

In addition to national events led by President Donald Trump's Task Force 250, states have their own individual events to celebrate local history, culture and achievements.

USA TODAY rounded up a selection of America250 events on the books in

See **250 EVENTS**, Page 2A

## WHO says nicotine pouches' marketing targets youth

**Emma Rumney**  
REUTERS

LONDON – The World Health Organization on May 15 urged governments to do more to control the sale of nicotine pouches, warning that the highly addictive products were being "aggressively marketed" in ways that particularly appealed to younger people.

Pouches, which users insert under their lip to get a nicotine buzz, have rapidly become one of the most important products for big tobacco companies looking to offset the decline in smoking. But campaigners and researchers have criticized their marketing tactics.

The WHO said that governments needed to introduce more safeguards to protect people, especially youth, from addiction.

Some products have high concentrations of highly addictive nicotine and technology to increase the speed and intensity of the drug's delivery or target young people via flavors and packaging, it added.

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Volume 160 | No. 150  
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\$1.25 8 02722 98165 6