

Low Income Utility Assistance Workgroup Meeting Minutes

September 8, 2022

10am- 11:30am

Google Meet joining info

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/pez-rgax-tnx>

Or dial: (US) +1 443-408-8589 PIN: 437 392 503#

More phone numbers: <https://tel.meet/pez-rgax-tnx?pin=8222720919817>

Attendees:

Katherine Natafgi
Anthony Cramer
Bob Smith
Brandi Nieland
Cindy Carter
Jennifer Walczyk
Laura Steepleton
Lauren Graziano
Lauren Molineaux

Lisa Smith
Delegate Lorig Charkoudian
Senator Malcolm Augustine
Nicola Tran
Paula Tolson
Robert Durocher
Ronni McTier
Samuel Quist
Shanise Smith

Notes:

- I. Introductions
 - A. LIHEAP plan is available for public comment
 - B. Application recommendations are currently in sign off.
- II. Approval of the minutes
 - A. Minutes from previous meeting approved with no edits from work group
 - B. Update date of “next” meeting to today (9/8)
- III. OHEP Updates
 - A. VPW Waiver
 1. Adjusted VPW waiver from \$800 to \$2000

2. Retroactively extends to 7/1
3. No questions from workgroup

B. EUSP bill in applicants name/budget billing

1. Working internally to ensure we have systems in place to track the impact of these changes in the OHEP system.
2. Outreach or announcement for new EUSP changes. Will do an outreach campaign to promote both changes to the EUSP when we do the budget billing change too. Will cover both applicant name and budget billing requirement
 - a) WG members are encouraged to reach out to LM to provide feedback.
 - b) Delegate Charkoudian would like to see separate messages for the change in name on the bill or budget billing since they are different audiences.

IV. EUSP Social Security number policy discussion update

A. Currently under review with DHS AG.

B. Members asked what is the legal question being analyzed by DHS AG?

1. The issue has to do with federal law 8USC621. Which prohibits undocumented aliens from receiving state and federal funds. Only through the enactment of a state law that provides for eligibility specifically in state law. Could be done through regulation, but it is unclear if the issue's enactment requires a state law or if it could be handled by regulations (PU sec. 7-512.1).
 - a) Federal definition of state or local public benefit unclear if it would apply to EUSP since it is ratepayer funds.
 - b) Will need affirmative language to the effect of “the program may be extended to an unlawful alien”.

V. Online myDHR application statistics

A. MDTHINK provided data requested in the May meeting. Monthly averages November- august

1. Total percentage of OHEP apps submitted online: 55%
2. Purged apps due to in application progress: 39%
3. Deleted by customer: 10%

B. Discrepancies between customers who apply online and those who apply in person. This discrepancy will always exist, but it can be reduced.

1. Deeper dive into denial reasons for online and in person apps.

a) Purged and deleted application numbers are for all programs, not just OHEP. 2791 at least had OHEP on the application, but also had other programs,

C. Want to improve not only the applications but also the processes of submitting.

1. Want to bump up getting the application fixed in MDTHINK queue

2. More investigation into these numbers. Want stats about if customers are applying elsewhere/ duplicate applications.

3. Users who already have experience with the system are having issues with MDTHINK.

a) Customer support for MDTHINK is lacking. Difficult to get someone on the phone. WG attendee was only able to do an application with assistance from the local OHEP office.

D. Don't want to assume the issue is a lack of understanding about technology but also for the processes for what people are being asked to do.

1. Telephone support is lacking

E. If not applying for other programs, customers are not being asked to provide a PIN. No PIN needed to access OHEP only info.

1. WG members were encouraged to send DHS info on applications where pins were an issue.

F. Denial rates by channel from OHEP. Different sites and methods of intake.

1. If being mailed in, taken in person, or over the phone all will show up as a paper application.

VI. Outreach and Marketing workgroup recruitment

A. Need to schedule a meeting. Only 2-3 people expressed interest. Invite WG members to refer colleagues for a smaller work group.

VII. Closing and next meeting

A. Future topics:

1. EUSP funding levels and RGGI

a) Asking WG members to help present RGGI info to the work group. Possibly PSC or another agency? Lisa Smith to reach out.

- b) Are we going to increase all to 200% FPL? This would be important for us to know so
- 2. Weatherization and coordination of benefits
- 3. Interim measures until the online application.
 - a) Call center wait times are increasing. Longer waits than normal.
 - b) Make part of the outreach workgroup?
- 4. OPC was asked to provide numbers about state-wide energy burden numbers last meeting. Should have data by the next meeting. Want to share a new Apprise report with the group.
 - a) Numbers for 200% fpl
- 5. Data on budget and positions and history of DHS call center?
- 6. Overview of upcoming DHCD programs and budgeting
 - a) Connection between OHEP and DHCD?
 - (1) Availability and limitations on funding for DHCD.
 - b) Data about the flow of apps from OHEP and weatherization
- 7. Missing document process? In-person customer service in general
- 8. Zero income process– forms?
- 9. Energy burden study from IEER. for the state of MD. currently happening. December could have a presentation from EA.
 - a) Study will be published in January
 - b) What is “best in class” energy burden? What is the national average or best practice?