

## **Low Income Utility Assistance Workgroup Meeting Notes**

June 7, 2023

9am- 10:30am

**Present:** Brandi Nieland, Brian Crosby, Cindy Carter, Katherine Natafagi, LaSherra Ayala, Laurel Peltier, Lisa Smith, Lorig Charkoudian, Malcolm Augustine, Rachel Sledge, Ronni McTier, Samuel Quist, Wanda Levenson

### **OHEP Customer Communications Sub-Workgroup Updates**

Meetings began in December 2022 and continued a bi-weekly than monthly basis.

This group was tasked to improve OHEP communications.

The Sub-Work group also performed a thorough review of all OHEP forms and notices and provided feedback.

Many changes have been implemented while others are in development.

### **DHS Call Center Scripts and Script Changes for OHEP**

DHS Call Center Script: Revised Script has been implemented to ask customers if they want to apply for Energy assistance. Agent provides customers with a brief overview of the program and access on how to apply. OHEP will be working with the call center to work on the Script and have it further in the call centers priority list.

Workgroup asked: What is the timeline for call center updates? Answered: Ongoing process with no specific timeline at this point.

**Action Item:** Delegate Lorig Charkoudian would like more specifics about timeline and changes. OHEP will provide an overview of the current process of OHEP selections in the call center and confirm that experience.

### **Updating Requirements for future RFP's for Outreach**

In process of drafting RFP's for Outreach associated with OHEP's programs. In this RFP OHEP will include specific language regarding expectations for proper triaging of off-service and other crisis applications.

### **Public Posting of OHEP performance data on DHS website**

The following information is in process with the formal go-ahead about data performance being publicly reported:

Total applications received by: Paper applications, MD Think Applications, Telephonic Applications, Home Visit Applications

Monthly redetermination participating and eligibility reporting: Total number of customers participating in redetermination, total notices issued by DHS, Total number of customers eligible for redetermination.

Monthly reporting for applications and denials (broken down by jurisdiction and intake Channel for each OHEP program): Total number of applications to date, total number of accepted applications to date, total benefits issued, average benefit amount, denial rate, denial rate by intake channel, monthly USPP enrollment reporting, DHCD application,

### **Document Verification Matrix for Local Administering Agencies**

Verification Matrix has been drafted and distributed to LAA's. The OHEP Operations Manual has been updated and will be released July 1, 2023.

### **DHS public website**

Requests for website improvements have been noted. Currently DHS website updates are in review.

### **Improved Customer Communications**

**Redetermination Eligibility Notices:** Streamlined application for 65+, disabled, or participating in the Critical Medical Needs Program (CMNP). No major changes to the living situation can have occurred in the last year for the customer to be eligible to use the form. The Form was updated to include a simplified questionnaire based on more active language, font and sentence structure making the form clearer. Fraud language has also been simplified.

Effective July 1, 2023, the redetermination notices will be automatically sent out.

**Revised Eligibility Determination Notices:** Automatically generated letters to customers after payment has been sent to the utility. Notice has been updated with more active language, formatting changes and font changes.

**Revised Landlord Agreement:** Landlord agreement form has been revised. Recent change to the EUSP program regarding applicants having to have their name on the Utility bill was updated on this form.

Form was revised for smaller landlords. Prior, the landlord agreement form did not meet smaller landlords needs. The form has incorporated an introductory letter. Other updates include formatting, text size and language.

Delegate Charkoudia would like to explore legislative action for requirements and processes of the landlord agreement.

Landlord Agreements will probably need more outreach.

## **Revised Request for Additional Information (RFAI)**

Form is used when customers applied for energy assistance and there is a deficiency in the application. Added information clarifying what documents or information are missing and why the documents or information are needed. The letter has been clarified.

## **Revised Application**

Field has been added requesting information about any disabilities. However, the customer does not have to name the disability. The disability is an Immediate flag to reach out to the customer to see if any reasonable accommodations are needed to complete the application.

Page 3 of the OHEP application is the biggest change for the application. Top of the third page, customers can check one box to be screened for all eligible grants.

Application also has lumped together EUSP and electric arrears grant. Also, MEAP and gas arrears were lumped together.

DHCD enrollment has moved up to the third page. We would like to get those numbers up so the workgroup decided to move it higher in the application.

LaSherra Ayala: *Action Plan*- Further discussion regarding crisis season for year round. Also, to magnify the crisis season in application and through communications. We need to find better ways to streamline the process.

## **Policy Changes for OHEP for FY24**

July 1, 2023 – Income eligibility limits raised to 200% for all OHEP programs.

New OHEP application

First full year without budget billing Requirement for EUSP.

First full year where the bill does not have to be in the customer's name for EUSP.

First full year with Uniform Redetermination Process.

Implementing Categorical Eligibility, January 1, 2024

July 2024 – Transitioning OHEP to local DSS offices.

Stakeholders will be a big part of the process of creating categorical eligibility processes. The process will mirror the law. OHEP will also be modifying general applications up front so customers will automatically be enrolled and not to complete more than one application.

## **Member Discussion**

The Joint EUSP committee does not have details about this group in Statue. This group may want to think about recommendations for what the joint committee should look like. Ongoing tasks? Absolve the group? We need a new vision for that group.

## **Next Meeting**

A Doodle poll will be sent out for July dates that work for most people.