# Logo for Montana Department of Labor and Industry. The logo is several people hold hands around the center of a wheel.Division: Workforce Services Division

**Category: Programs**

**Effective Date: 10/1/2021**

**Last Revised: 10/1/2021**

**Policy No.: 04-16**

Health and Economic Livelihood Partnership (HELP) Link

Policy - Enrollment

Background

The 2015 Montana Legislature established the Health and Economic Livelihood Partnership (HELP) Act though a collaborative effort between Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MTDLI) in Senate Bill 405. The 2019 Montana Legislature extended the Medicaid expansion program in House Bill 658 and the 2021 Montana Legislature extended the Medicaid expansion program in House Bill 614, with some amendments to service delivery. HELP-Link is the MTDLI-implemented workforce development program created to identify workforce development opportunities focusing on specific labor force needs within the state of Montana; reduce the number of people depending on social programs, including the HELP Act; provide grants to employers who hire and train HELP-Link clients; and increase the earning capacity, economic stability, and self-sufficiency of clients so they are able to purchase their own health insurance coverage.

Scope

This policy applies to all MTDLI HELP-Link contractors and MTDLI Central Office staff. This policy is effective October 1, 2021.

# Policy

* Participation in HELP-Link is voluntary.
* Clients eligible for HELP-Link enrollment must, at a minimum:
  + Be willing and able to participate in mutually agreed upon workforce development activities;
  + Be employment eligible in Montana; and
  + Require HELP-Link assistance to engage in employment or training activities.
* Once an individual is determined eligible, appropriate, and enrolled in HELP-Link, the client will remain eligible to receive HELP-Link services for twelve (12) months (month of enrollment plus 11 months), regardless of medical coverage enrollment status.
* MTDLI will notify DPHHS when a client has exhausted all reasonably available services.
* HELP-Link funding can only be expended when:
  + There are no other available funding sources (including financial aid and the client’s own resources) and evidence of such finding is documented in the client’s file
  + Incurred during enrollment in HELP-Link
  + Based on the results of a financial assessment
  + Supported by the client’s employment and training plan
  + Approved prior to the client receiving or obtaining the goods or services (backdated requests for goods or services will not be approved)
  + Accompanied by source documentation maintained in the client’s file (accepting a client’s self-attestation of expenses as source documentation is not allowable)
* HELP-Link will only support employment and training opportunities for in-demand occupations. In-demand occupations are those:
  + Identified by legislature; OR
    - Current career paths supported by legislature are those in healthcare and cyber security
  + Identified by the HELP-Link contractor through a comprehensive business engagement process. The business engagement process must detail, at a minimum:
    - Name of the local business hiring
    - Title of vacant position(s)
    - Employment details such as wages, work schedule, and benefits
    - Skill sets needed for applicant qualification
    - Documentation supporting the occupation as in-demand, as evidenced by workforce shortages (number of open positions, scarcity of potential employees with needed skill sets, or industry growth)
* HELP-Link will only support employment and training opportunities for high wage occupations. High wage occupations must:
  + Provide an opportunity to enter a career pathway that offers advancement within the career cluster leading to self-sufficient wages after more education, training, and experience; or
  + Exceed 150% Federal Poverty Level for the client’s household size.
    - Household size is determined by the number of individuals financially supported by the client related by blood, marriage, or decree of court.

## Eligibility

* Medical coverage eligibility is determined by the Department of Public Health and Human Services.
* Only individuals currently receiving Medicaid Expansion medical coverage or qualifying Affordable Care Act (ACA) medical coverage may qualify for HELP-Link enrollment.
  + DPHHS documents approved HELP-Link enrollment categories as: ACA Adult, ACA Adult Medicaid, ACA Pregnant Woman, and ACA Parent/Specified Caretaker Relative.

Appropriateness Screening

* Appropriateness for HELP-Link is determined by the HELP-Link contractor.
* HELP-Link eligible individuals must participate in various screenings before being considered for enrollment. The following activities must occur to determine appropriateness for enrollment:
* Client intake process - gain a thorough understanding of the client’s situation, challenges to employment, and needs
* Employment/Career Assessments - identify client’s skills, strengths, and preferences
* Career Coaching – discuss employment opportunities available in the local area supported by HELP-Link; includes Labor Market Information and local industry needs
* Career Exploration – learning about various occupations and their “fit”; includes research and experiential learning
* Good fit career matching - match current, local employment opportunities to the client’s skills, strengths, and preferences
  + Skill gap screening - determine needed services and interventions to support the individual obtaining the skill sets needed to meet current, local business needs
* Only individuals in need of career coaching assistance and the full continuum of services to explore, plan, and begin steps to reach employment goals are appropriate for HELP-Link enrollment.

## Career Exploration Assistance

* Career exploration assistance may support career exploration activities intended to help determine appropriateness for HELP-Link enrollment and development of a suitable employment and training plan.
* Career exploration assistance is limited to $250 and must follow HELP-Link supportive service guidelines.

Employment and Training Plan

* HELP-Link requires development of a suitable employment and training plan. Suitable plans:
  + Require an employment goal targeted at in-demand and high wage career options available in the client’s community; and
  + Identify all necessary services and assistance needed to achieve the HELP-Link supported career path and employment goal.
    - Justification the client requires HELP-Link assistance must be kept in the client file (i.e. the client has not gained suitable employment or began education/training without placement assistance by a career coach).

## Financial Literacy Services

* All enrolled HELP-Link clients must be in compliance with financial literacy requirements to be eligible for HELP-Link funded services and supports. Clients receiving Diversion Assistance, Training Support Scholarships or Workforce Development Grant assistance are not required to comply with financial literacy requirements but may opt to participate.
* Compliance includes participation in:
  + Intake session and setting an action plan
  + Working toward action plan goals
  + Final session and exit from services
* Clients are eligible for financial incentives (up to $100) after completion of identified Financial Literacy activities. Incentive activities include:
  + Intake session ($25)
  + Completed Budget and Credit Report ($25)
  + Minimum Four (4) Completed Activities ($25)
  + Exit Session ($25)
* Clients are eligible for financial assistance (phone and internet access only) to support participation in Financial Literacy services. Vendor payments are required.

## Enrollment

* HELP-Link enrollment requires completion of:
  + Data entry and enrollment in the management information system
  + Documented verification of HELP-Link eligibility
  + Completion of a suitable employment and training plan - signed by the client
  + Referral to financial literacy services

## Ongoing Appointments

* Enrolled HELP-Link clients must participate in frequent and regular appointments with a career coach to track and document program progress.

HELP-Link Closure and Follow-Up

* Enrollment will close when participation in employment and training plan services ends.
* Employed HELP-Link clients are eligible for transition to HELP-Link Follow-up when they complete employment and training plan services and financial literacy requirements.
  + Unemployed HELP-Link clients and clients who have not completed financial literacy requirements (or are non-compliant) are not eligible to transition to HELP-Link Follow-up.
  + Diversion Assistance, Training Support Scholarship, and Workforce Development Grant clients are not eligible for HELP-Link Follow-up.
* HELP-Link Follow-up may continue for up to twelve (12) months (month of transition plus 11 months). HELP-Link Follow-up will end sooner if the client is no longer employed or per client request. The client may opt to re-enroll in HELP-Link at any time during HELP-Link Follow-up but must meet eligibility and appropriateness criteria.
* Clients are eligible for Work Support Payments after 30 days in HELP-Link Follow-up.

#### Work Support Payments

* Work support payments:
  + are intended to enable a client to maintain employment
  + are only allowable for expenses incurred during HELP-Link Follow-up
  + must be paid directly to a vendor (all vendors must be willing and able to submit a W-9 form to receive payment)
  + must adhere to guidelines in the Cost Principles, Allowable Costs and Unallowable Costs Policy
  + are not appropriate for reoccurring basic needs or monthly expenses
    - Waivers for reoccurring basic needs or monthly expenses must be pre-approved by MTDLI Central Office and will only be approved on a limited basis with appropriate justification.
* Work support payment requests must document the need for assistance and be completed prior to receipt of the payment. The work support payment request must include:
  + A brief description of the expenditure;
  + Dollar amount requested;
  + Documentation that the client is currently employed; and
  + Signatures of both staff and client, as well as the date the request was signed.

# Administrative Requirements

* Feedback to and from both DPHHS and MTDLI to communicate client involvement in HELP-Link and services provided.
* Provide data and information to legislative subcommittees regarding program participation, expenditures, and outcomes.
* Provide data and reports to DPHHS as needed.

# Oversight and Evaluation

* Oversight and evaluation will be conducted by the Program Manager and/or designee(s).

# References

* [2015 Montana Legislature Senate Bill 405](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2015/billhtml/SB0405.htm)
* [2019 Montana Legislature House Bill 658](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2019/billhtml/HB0658.htm)
* 2021 Montana Legislature House Bill 614
* [Montana Code Annotated (MCA), 39-12](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0390/chapter_0120/part_0010/sections_index.html)