Montana Department of
LABOR & INDUSTRY

HELP-Link Program

2018 Fiscal Year End Report

Montana Department of Labor & Industry
Commissioner Galen Hollenbaugh

HELP-Link is a voluntary workforce program for adults enrolled in certain types of Medicaid that increases labor force participation rates among low-income households and increases employment and wages of participants. The program was established by the 2015 Montana Legislature, and launched on January 1, 2016. This report provides background information on the program, participation levels, and outcomes of participants through June 30, 2018.

Since the start of the program in 2016, there have been over 25,000 Montanans enrolled in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid who have also received career and training services. Not all clients received services funded by HELP-Link; most were assisted through federally funded workforce training programs, stretching state funds to cover more clients. There have been roughly 3,000 people specifically enrolled in HELP-Link.

For the over 25,000 Montana Medicaid recipients receiving some type of workforce training from MTDLI, 62% are employed in the quarter after completing training. The employed percentage increases to 70% within a year after training. About 58% experience wage increases in the year after participation (compared to the year before), with a median increase of $8,060 annually. Those trained specifically using HELP-Link funds have even better outcomes, likely due to the greater intensity of services provided through HELP-Link.

Executive Summary

HELP-Link is a voluntary workforce program designed to assist Medicaid-eligible adults aged 19 to 64 who earn less than 138% of the federal poverty level. The goal of the program is to improve the long-term employability of the client, thus reducing their reliance on Montana Medicaid for health insurance. Clients are not just placed in a job, but given training and support to obtain more stable and higher paying employment in the long term. Not all types of Medicaid are eligible for HELP-Link; the program primarily targets adults paying premiums for Medicaid coverage through SB 405 (2015 Session).1 The Montana Department of Labor & Industry (MTDLI) operates the HELP-Link program, and coordinates with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) for program operation. Additional details on the HELP-Link program can be found in the section "How Does Help-Link Work?"

Amanda Childers, a single mother from Thompson Falls, used HELP-Link to become a certified nursing assistant. The program allowed her to go to school in Missoula, work, and have health coverage for herself and her two children.

"The Help-Link program has helped me to get on my feet," Amanda said. "It's opened doors to go down a career path, in the medical field, to better support myself and my kids. And without that program, I don't think I'd be where I'm at today."

KXLH.com, 7/18/2018, "Medicaid expansion enrollment in MT passes 91k"

Recent research has suggested that HELP-Link increased labor force participation rates of low-income Montanans by 6 to 9%.[2] Given Montana's short worker supply and low unemployment rates, the potential improvement in labor force participation caused by HELP-Link is critical not just to the long-term economic outcomes of the clients, but also to the state of Montana. The new workers recruited to Montana's labor force and trained through HELP-Link are critical resources to our state's businesses, who struggle to find a sufficient workforce to expand operations.

Because HELP-Link funds are limited, Montana Medicaid enrollees are typically assisted through other workforce programs to stretch program dollars. Since the start of the program, 25,244 Montanans who were enrolled in the HELP-Link-eligible types of Montana Medicaid have received career and training services from MTDLI. There have been 2,968 people with services specifically paid for with HELP-Link funding. The graphic below illustrates participation levels by state fiscal year (SFY). Additional details on participation are included in the "How Many People Have Been Served?" section.

Figure 1: Participation by State Fiscal Year

	SFY 2016 (6 months)	SFY 2017	SFY 2018
MTDLI & Medicaid Clients	4,609	12,664	19,396
HELP-Link Clients	620	1,942	1,687
HELP-Link Clients Enrolled in Training	82	400	400

[1] Specifically, adults in the following Medicaid types: MA60 and MA80 ACA Medicaid Adult; MA50 ACA Parent/Specified Caretaker Relative; MA20 ACA Pregnant Woman; MA56 ACA Family Extended; and MA55 ACA Family Transitional. Please see http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/Portals/56/Documents/WSDPolicy/HELP%20Link%20Policy.pdf?ver=2017-11-30-111931-307 for eligibility and program guidelines.

[2] Ward, Bryce and Bridge, Brandon. "The Economic Impact of Medicaid Expansion in Montana" April 2018 by Bureau of Business and Economic Research, funded by The Montana Healthcare Foundation and Headwaters Foundation. Available at http://www.bber.umt.edu/pubs/health/MedicaidExpansionImpact2018.pdf. Accessed July 2018.

Because of the intensive training and services offered through HELP-Link, it can take several years for clients to complete the program. Most clients receive career services, such as resume assistance and career planning, and then exit the program. However, for participants interested in pursuing training, HELP-Link supports them throughout their educational program (as long as they meet program requirements). One of the most common occupation pursued by HELP-Link clients is Registered Nurse, which typically requires bachelor's degree training. Most apprenticeship programs also take four years. Therefore, the "completion rate" of high-intensity clients is relatively low at this time because not enough time has passed for individuals to finish their training.

HELP-Link has been successful in improving employment and wage outcomes of participants. Among those receiving HELP-Link funds for training, 81% of HELP-Link participants were employed in 2017, and 71% of participants have increased wage earnings after completion of their training. The average wage increase was $8,712 annually. However, these outcomes only include the small number of people who finished training through the end of 2016, and who had a full year of wage earnings data after training to measure annual wage increases. For MTDLI & Medicaid Clients in the first three quarters of 2017 (those who are both in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid and also in MTDLI workforce programs), 62% are employed in the quarter after training with 71% posting higher wage earnings. The section "Success of HELP-Link" provides further details on the employment and wage outcomes of clients, and on the methodology used to evaluate the likelihood of moving off Montana Medicaid.

Finally, many policy leaders have expressed interest about the barriers faced by clients, the services provided, the referrals to other organization, the demographics of clients, and other issues. Most of this information is organized in the appendixes in a Frequently Asked Questions format.

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What is HELP-Link?

HELP-Link is a voluntary workforce training program designed to improve the employment and wage outcomes of individuals enrolled in certain types of Montana Medicaid, with the goal of reducing clients' reliance on Medicaid for health insurance and improving Montana's workforce. The program was created in the 2015 Legislative Session through the Montana Health and Economic Partnership Act, more commonly known as the HELP-Act (Senate Bill 405). HELP-Link officially launched on January 1, 2016. The 2017 Legislative Session continued the program by earmarking existing workforce training dollars for HELP-Link. The HELP-Link program is set to expire at the end of SFY 2019.

The primary benefit of HELP-Link participation is the individualized career planning and training assistance received by clients, helping them move up the career ladder to more secure, stable, and higher-paying employment. Among HELP-Link clients who completed training by the end of 2016, 71% experienced wage increases after completing the program, and the average increase was $8,700 annually.

For many HELP-Link participants, participation involves a one-on-one career planning session, with follow-ups to ensure that the client is achieving the goals set in their individualized employment plan. Examples of potential goals include the completion of short-term soft skill training, drafting of resumes or job applications, completion of an associate's degree, or contacting an outside nonprofit for assistance in financial management. Some HELP-Link clients also qualify for education or work-based learning funding up to $12,000 for in-demand jobs, allowing these workers to earn the certifications and degrees needed for stable, good-paying jobs. The most common training funded is for nursing and truck driving certifications.

Participation in HELP-Link or two other qualifying workforce programs also may help Montana Medicaid recipients keep their health insurance coverage if they fall behind on their premiums or copayments. Montana's Medicaid program requires most recipients pay premiums and copays for coverage. Nonpayment results in a cancellation of coverage unless the participant meets certain criteria. Participation in HELP-Link is one of the several possible criteria preventing disenrollment, although it must be combined with another qualifying criteria to prevent cancellation of Medicaid coverage. In addition, participants must still pay all premiums and co-payments due, with payment withheld through the tax system. Stated simply, HELP-Link provides participants with career assistance and can help them maintain health coverage while delaying payment of premiums and copayments.

Because of the similarities between HELP-Link and two existing labor force programs, the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and the Workforce Innovations & Opportunities Act (WIOA), individuals are provided the workforce exemption for participation in any of these three programs.[3] Roughly

Program Summary:

*HELP-Link provides **individualized career planning and training assistance** to help clients achieve higher wages and more secure and stable employment. HELP-Link participation may also qualify for the workforce disenrollment exemption, allowing participants to retain health coverage if payment of premiums or copays is overdue. The **individual still must pay the amount owed**, with settlement occurring*

[3] WIOA focuses on serving low-income Montanans, while RESEA assists recently unemployed Montanans through partnership programs providing intensive services.

2,995 people used HELP-Link, WIOA, or RESEA to meet the requirements for the workforce disenrollment exemption in SFY 2018. MTDLI does not have information on whether this exemption was used to delay payments – DPHHS makes the determination of whether an individual qualifies for the two exemptions needed. MTDLI simply reports to DPHHS that individuals are eligible to meet the workforce disenrollment exemption.

In addition to HELP-Link, WIOA, and RESEA, individuals in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid are often served through other federally funded workforce programs. Over 25,244 people enrolled in the qualifying types of Montana Medicaid also received MTDLI career and training services; these individuals are referred to as "MTDLI & Medicaid Clients."[4] This terminology is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Terminology

Montana Medicaid includes all individuals covered by Medicaid in Montana. SB405 (2015 Session) directed MTDLI to provide workforce training to adults added to Medicaid under Medicaid Expansion. MTDLI serves this population with many different programs. MTDLI & Medicaid Clients refer to individuals co-enrolled in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid and MTDLI workforce programs. HELP-Link clients are a sub-set of the MTDLI & Medicaid Clients and refer only to those receiving services paid for through the limited HELP-Link funding appropriated by the Montana Legislature.

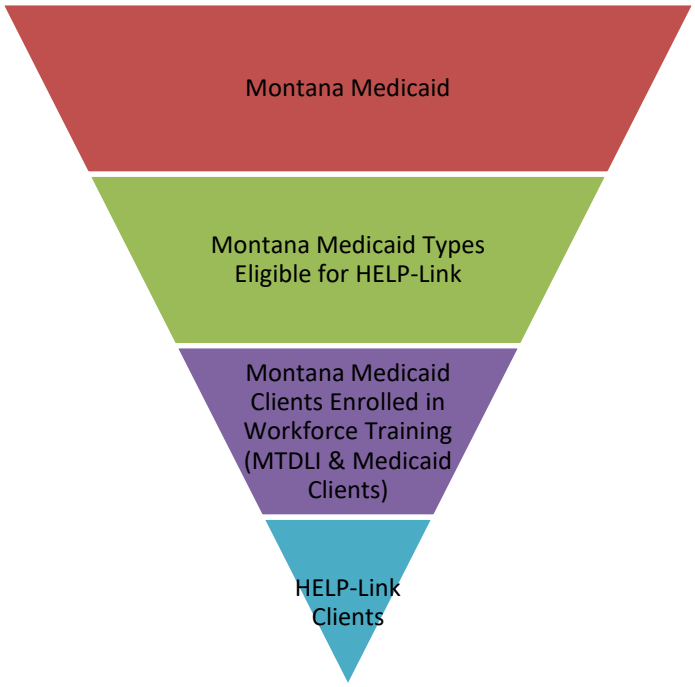


Figure 3 illustrates the many different programs used to serve MTDLI & Medicaid Clients. The most commonly used funding to serve those in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid are the Wagner-Peyser funds. Roughly 280 Registered Apprentices are also enrolled in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid. Roughly 3,000 individuals were specifically served with the state funds appropriated for HELP-Link.

[4] The qualifying types of Montana Medicaid include those added as "Medicaid Expansion." See footnote 1.

Figure 3: Participation of in MTDLI Workforce Training Programs by State Fiscal Year for Montana Medicaid Populations

	SFY 2016 (6 months)	SFY 2017	SFY 2018	Total
MTDLI & Medicaid Clients	4,609	12,664	19,396	25,244
HELP-Link Clients	620	1,942	1,687	2,966
HELP-Link Clients that received training assistance	82	400	400	597
HELP-Link Clients that Completed Training	65	192	213	411
Registered Apprenticeship	147	245	238	280
RESEA	681	1,484	1,421	2,167
WIOA	734	1,238	1,156	1,617
100% Appointment	695	1,682	1,503	2,488
Wagner – Peyser	3,633	11,511	18,538	23,613
Other	1,1203	1,694	1,539	2,134
Table only includes individuals in eligible types of Montana Medicaid.				

How does HELP-Link work?

When Montanans enroll in eligible types of Montana Medicaid, they are directed to MontanaWorks.mt.gov, where they automatically receive a survey about their employment situation, barriers to employment, and an offer to participate in MTDLI workforce programs. Participants also can complete the survey in a Job Service Montana office. Participants are also notified of their eligibility for HELP-Link through communications sent by DPHHS.

The completion of the survey starts the HELP-Link enrollment process. Since 2016, roughly 12,270 Montanans completed the HELP-Link survey. To continue the enrollment process, clients must make an in-person visit to a Job Service Montana office. During the visit, individuals review their survey assessment with a workforce consultant and gain assistance completing an Individualized Employment Plan. Using the information gathered from the HELP-Link survey and in consultation with the client, Job Service Montana staff specify the trainings and other actions suggested for improved employability. Workforce consultants direct participants into a good career matching their interests; provide information on in-demand jobs, wages and benefits; or use the Montana Career Information System (MCIS). Staff also provide clients with information on the local labor market, identifying careers that are in-demand with good prospects for employment. This career advice is then combined and structured into the Individualized Employment Plan, providing the client with a step-by-step checklist to a better job and higher pay.

Once an individual completes signs their Individualized Employment Plan, they become a HELP-Link participant. These steps are illustrated in Figure 4. **Participants must complete a qualifying workforce planning, training, or job search activity every 90 days to remain active in HELP-Link.**

From the point of full enrollment, the services provided through HELP-Link depend on the needs of the client and can be quite varied. Due to the wide range of employment barriers faced by clients, HELP-Link stresses the provision of flexible and customized career assistance. HELP-Link clients often meet several representatives of different government and non-profit agencies. Cases are handled with a team approach so that Job Service Montana staff can coach clients through the array of applications and paperwork needed to enter training programs.

HELP-Link assists participants in five ways:

- Employment services and career planning
- Workforce and educational training
- Work-based learning
- Supportive services
- Referrals to other service providers

These five tools are reviewed in more detail below.

Employment Services and Career Planning

Job Service Montana staff provide participants with low-cost employment assistance to help them connect with their local labor market. These services include resume assistance, mock interview practice, and information about local job opportunities. Figure 5 summarizes the services received by HELP-Link clients. The definition of each service can be found in the appendix. Workforce and labor market information and HELP-Link appointments are the most common services provided because they are required to become a HELP-Link participant.

Intake meetings with clients to develop an Individualized Employment Plan last at least one hour, but clients with more intensive needs often require employment guidance involving four hours or more of staff time. Case management for HELP-Link clients costs roughly $180 per client.

Figure 5: Wagner-Peyser Services Received by HELP-Link Exiters		
Information Services		
	One Stop Delivery System Info & Services	1,296
	Workforce & Labor Market Information	2,605
	Referral to Federally Funded Training Programs	1,706
Wagner-Peyser Staff Assisted Services		
	Career Assessment/Diagnostic Testing	953
	Career Counseling	281
	Client Intake	2,138
	Employment Counseling	1,068
	Employment Plan	75
	Interviewing Skills	422
	Job Search Assistance	2,594
	Placement Assistance	510
	UI Assistance	53
Program Appointments		
	HELP-Link	2,816
	RESEA	1,232
	100% / Montana Way	511
Total		**2,968**

Notes: Data compiled on 7/3/18. Excludes services provided before becoming a HELP-Link participant.

Workforce and Educational Training

Some HELP-Link participants choose for more meaningful participation by completing a workforce or educational training program. HELP-Link provides funding for individuals to pursue education and training programs in careers that fit the participant's interests, are in-demand, and that lead to a recognized credential or degree. The HELP-Link funding allows for approximately 115 clients to be funded in educational training per semester. HELP-Link funding does not supplant funding available to participants through college financial aid offices, scholarships, or other funding sources. Except for loans, these other sources must be exhausted before HELP-Link will fund the training. Workforce training can also cover the classroom or formalized training portion of apprenticeship training.

Some of the most common careers pursued by participants who received funding for training were heavy tractor-trailer truck drivers, nursing assistants, registered nurses, computer and information systems managers, and bookkeeping and accounting clerks. Figure 6 lists the most common occupations pursued by HELP-Link participants and the Montana median wage for those occupations. Many of the occupations offer wages high enough to lift the individual and their family above the Montana Medicaid eligibility threshold. For example, the median wage for registered nurses of roughly $65,000 would likely be enough to raise a family of five out of poverty and above the Montana Medicaid eligibility threshold. Truck driver wages of $43,400 would be sufficient to lift a small family out of poverty and above the eligibility threshold.[5]

[5] MTDLI cannot determine the number of people who will be above the threshold because information on family size and other sources of income is not captured by MTDLI.

Figure 6: Most Common Occupations Pursued by HELP-Link Clients

OCCUPATION PURSUED	Number	Percent	Median Wage
Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer	73	11.72%	$43,400
Registered Nurses	45	7.22%	$64,560
Personal Care and Service Workers, All Other	33	5.30%	$35,270
Medical Records and Health Information Technicians	25	4.01%	$35,630
Medical Assistants	18	2.89%	$32,650
Nursing Assistants	16	2.57%	$26,350
Computer and Information Systems Managers	10	1.61%	$101,130
Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants	10	1.61%	$26,350
General and Operations Managers	9	1.44%	$83,550
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	9	1.44%	$42,950
Dental Assistants	9	1.44%	$36,700
Healthcare Support Workers, All Other	9	1.44%	$32,860
Medical Secretaries	9	1.44%	$30,860
Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychologists	8	1.28%	$55,370
Real Estate Sales Agents	8	1.28%	$33,690
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	8	1.28%	$34,260
Social and Human Service Assistants	7	1.12%	$27,110
Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	7	1.12%	$53,920
Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	7	1.12%	$22,530
Executive Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	7	1.12%	$49,050
Welders, Cutters, Solderers and Brazers	7	1.12%	$38,300

Source: MTDLI compiled on 7/3/18. Median wages reported by May 2017 Occupational Employment Statistics (OES).

Work-Based Learning

HELP-Link clients can opt for receiving job-based training, with some clients receiving subsidized wages to compensate employers for the additional training requirements of the client. Formalized apprenticeships and work-based learning experiences help to develop soft and/or job-specific skills prior to obtaining a license or credential. Apprenticeships offer HELP-Link clients the chance to earn a paycheck while learning the skills needed to obtain an industry-recognized credential. Since 2016, 280 MTDLI & Medicaid Clients participated in Registered Apprentice programs through the Montana Department of Labor & Industry.

However, most HELP-Link clients are served through on-the-job training other than Registered Apprenticeships. Subsidized wages for work-based training were the most expensive component of HELP-Link supports on a per-client basis in 2016, with an average cost of roughly $1,700 per client.

Supportive Services

HELP-Link participants enrolled in training or work-based learning programs are also eligible to receive supportive services from MTDLI. Supportive services refer to financial assistance provided to address specific employment barriers identified by the staff and client in the Individualized Employment Plan. Assistance could include paying for textbooks, tools, or transportation needs. Supportive services often pay for gas, auto repairs, work-related tools, safety equipment, or to address other financial barriers that might prevent a client from attending educational classes or work-based learning. MTDLI can intervene to make sure clients continue

working or switch to better-paying, more suitable jobs. Due to a limited budget and the high cost of addressing some barriers, staff and program managers closely review supportive service payments.

Supportive services often provide the difference between retaining employment and moving up a career ladder, or losing a job for clients. One participant was a commercial truck driver looking for way to stay closer to home and care for his family (which includes a child with special needs). He received a local job offer paying several dollars more per hour, but the job required him to bring his own tools. HELP-Link was able to purchase the needed equipment. In FY 2018, roughly 296 individuals received intensive one-on-one supportive services through HELP-Link with an average payment of $500.

Not all supportive services are paid through HELP-Link funds. HELP-Link leverages funding available through federal programs to stretch program dollars, often collaborating with programs offered through DPHHS to provide seamless support for participants working toward employment success and self-sufficiency.

For years, Dairen Driskell moved from job to job in the construction field, suffering from inconsistent hiring and economic ups and downs. Dairen wanted steadier work in commercial driving.

Partnering with Great Falls College/MSU and working with case managers from multiple different programs, Job Service Montana staff helped Dairen complete CDL training and licensing. Using a collaboration of several national workforce services programs along with HELP-Link, Dairen received assistance for tuition, rent, work boots, utilities, a background check, DOT physical test, and food, gas, and hotel costs incurred when he had to travel out-of-town for his Hazardous Materials endorsement.

Dairen has performed exceptionally well in his training and passed all the requirements of the program and final CDL exam. Within a week of getting his CDL, Dairen was offered and accepted employment working as a truck driver, achieving his career goals.

Referrals to Other Service Providers

HELP-Link clients often face multiple challenges that prevent them from being able to pursue, obtain, and keep a high wage job. These barriers may include lack of transportation, lack of housing, lack of childcare, poor physical health, mental illness, and domestic violence. While many of these barriers can be addressed through HELP-Link, some are more appropriately addressed by other government agencies or nonprofits. Job Service Montana staff can also assist HELP-Link clients by referring them to appropriate service providers and working with that organization to provide comprehensive case management.

Figure 7 illustrates the number and type of referrals recorded for HELP-Link clients. The table only includes clients who received services and funding specifically through the HELP-Link program, not through other workforce programs. The most common referrals were to an employer for a specific job, to WIOA or other workforce program providers, or to the Office of Public Assistance (i.e. housing, subsidized childcare, food stamps, or TANF). Healthcare, internet service, or financial counseling referrals are often made for clients whose lack of a job has put them in a tenuous financial situation, including having difficulties paying bills, declining consumer credit, or lack of stable online access. Such secondary referral needs are included in the Individualized Employment Plan, with Job Service Montana staff recommending local non-profit partners who can assist clients on these issues. The primary need of clients – finding a better job – is addressed immediately.

Figure 7. Referrals

REFERRAL	COUNT	REFERRAL	COUNT
Auxiliary aides and services for participants with disabilities	25	Placement to a Job	94
Childcare	51	Referral to Federally Funded Training Programs	219
Financial counseling	26	Referred to Training	275
Health care	49	Referred to WIA Services	343
Housing	41	Referred to WIOA	1,070
Internet Services	32	SNAP/Food Stamps	120
Job Referral	1,768	TANF	22
Placed in Other Employment	280	Transportation	35
Placed in Training	180	Vet Referred to WIA Training	21
Placed in WIA	555	Vocational Rehabilitation	138
Total			**2,464**

Notes: Data compiled on 7/03/18. Excludes referrals that occurred before they became an active participant.

How much Does HELP-Link Cost?

The total amount of funding allocated for the HELP-Link program was $1.8 million for the 2016-2017 biennium, followed by $885,400 of existing MTDLI workforce training funds in SFY 2018. Activities covered by this funding include direct services and case management for clients, as well as department administrative functions and expenditures to oversee the program. Because demand for HELP-Link services exceeded the allocated funding in SFY2018, MTDLI supplemented the original appropriation with an additional $90,280 in state special revenue funds, spending $758,679 in SFY 2018 in total.

In addition, DPHHS provided $73,446 in TANF funding for those individuals who were both HELP-Link eligible and TANF eligible. This funding is limited to subsidies for employment, training and supportive services for those individuals who qualify under both programs. Figure 8 illustrates the HELP-Link funding spent in SFY 2018 by type. HELP-Link appropriation for SFY 2019 is $888,531. However, there will be no additional TANF funding in this new state fiscal year.

Of the total amount spent on HELP-Link (including the HELP-Link Plus TANF funding), 57% went directly to participants, with an additional 28% spent on providing case management and other services to clients. Case management includes the development of individualized employment plans, resume assistance, and other required services for HELP-Link enrollment. Overhead costs comprised only 15% of the overall budget. The majority of funding went to providing employment-related education to the 400 clients who qualified in SFY 2018, with training costs of roughly $970 per client. Training typically includes a short-term training program such as truck driving, but may also cover tuition at the local college. Training costs may also fund courses needed for Registered Apprenticeship. Roughly $160,000 was spent on supportive services in SFY 2019. Supportive services include items such as gas to get to work or training, boots, training materials, or other costs associated with the client participating in work or training.

Figure 8. Spending for State Fiscal Year 2018

	HELP-Link	HELP-Link Plus	Total Spent	Number of Participants	Cost Per Participant
Administration	**$158,006**		**$158,006**		
Case Management	**$297,491**		**$297,491**	**1,687**	**$176**
Training & Support	**$520,182**	**$73,446**	**$593,628**	**454**	**$1,308**
Training	$346,487	$41,358	$387,845	285	$1,361
Supportive Services	$145,963	$12,905	$158,868	296	$537
OJT Reimbursements	$27,732	$19,184	$46,916	27	$1,738
Total			**$1,642,754**		

Notes: Total spending includes HELP-Link and HELP-Link Plus. Total includes spending from July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018.

What is being done to grow HELP-Link participation?

HELP-Link enrollment continues steady growth with more Montanans participating in the program each month. Current participation levels are exhausting available funding, and efficiencies have been made to increase participation beyond the forecasted levels. However, given the positive outcomes of existing participants, it is natural to wonder if program expansion would benefit Montana's economy.

First, its important to point out that the voluntary nature of HELP-Link likely results in the current participants being the most motivated to achieve better work outcomes. Self-selection into workforce training likely biases outcomes positively. Second, the ability to train with HELP-Link funds is quite limited. The appropriated funding was fully exhausted in SFY 2018, and MTDLI subsidized excess participation with other state special revenue funds. The ability to use other workforce training funding has been very helpful in increasing the services provided to the Montana Medicaid population, but not all participants qualify for other types of funding. Expansion of the program would require greater funding, possibly at a higher per participant cost if clients were forced to participate.

Take-up for voluntary HELP-Link exceeds take-up rates for other programs. The 17% take-up rate for HELP-Link in 2017 compares favorably with other workforce development programs administered by MTDLI (average take-up of roughly 10%). However, take-up rate comparisons can be challenging because there is no accurate measure of all potentially eligible populations across every program.

MTDLI has undergone limited, cost-effective marketing and enrollment campaigns to increase HELP-Link participation. MTDLI launched a robust digital and print media education campaign in select markets, including Great Falls, Kalispell, and Billings in the first year of the program. HELP-Link participation data indicates the education campaign was successful, with slightly higher enrollment rates during the outreach. Follow-up marketing efforts have been undertaken as budget allows, typically consisting of low-cost email contacts and small advertising buys on Montana radio or newspaper outlets.

However, most program education occurs through local Job Service Montana offices, who promote HELP-Link to community members through face-to-face contact. Staff also pro-actively contact individuals who have completed a survey, but have not come into the Job Service Montana office to complete enrollment. MTDLI has

chosen to focus enrollment efforts towards those who have completed the survey to indicate interest. Given limited staff time and funding, focusing on those who are motivated and ready to take career steps offers the most fruitful outcomes and most efficient use of funds. Other Montana Medicaid participants often have health circumstances, family requirements, or other constraints that make it difficult to dedicate time to career improvement.

One known barrier to HELP-Link participation is the in-person appointment required for HELP-Link. This requirement can reduce participation in rural areas that are located far distances away from Job Service Montana offices. The in-person appointment often lasts between one and four hours, not including travel time, which may be particularly difficult for clients who are tenuously employed, or who already have challenges with taking a full day off work, organizing childcare, and arranging transportation. Job Service Montana staff can help arrange transportation or childcare for the appointment.

Success of HELP-Link

HELP-Link and other MTDLI workforce training programs have increased clients' employment and wage outcomes. Further, the available data suggests that participation in workforce training may also reduce reliance on Montana Medicaid for insurance. MTDLI uses quarterly administrative records from the Unemployment Insurance system to identify wage and employment outcomes of participants after completion. Wage information from the UI system lags actual employment by at least two quarters, meaning that employment and wage data through the 4th quarter of 2017 was available for this report. MTDLI recommends using wage data for a full year after program completion because Montana's seasonal economy often results in large variations in wage earnings when comparing data from one quarter to the next. However, outcomes from one quarter after completion is also provided, thus allowing more clients to be included in the metrics.

Employment Outcomes Using One Full Year of Wage Data

Using a full year of post-program completion data provides the most accurate view of program outcomes, but also limits the number of clients who can be evaluated. Only individuals who completed in 2016 have a full year of post-completion wage data available. Among the 3,150 MTDLI & Medicaid clients that completed MTDLI workforce training programs in 2016, 70% were employed after completing their training program. Over 58% of those employed had higher wages in the year after completing the program, with a median wage increase of $8,057 over the previous year. The median wage after completion remained low at $16,784.

Outcomes for those specifically funded through HELP-Link are better, which is expected given the additional funding and staff time spent on HELP-Link clients. Among the 81 HELP-Link clients who completed training programs by the end of 2016, 81% were employed after completion, and 38% were no longer on Montana Medicaid in the following years. Among those employed, 71% experienced wage increases, with the median increase equal to $8,712.

Preliminary Employment Outcomes Using Quarterly Wage Data

Preliminary outcome information on more recent clients also suggests that workforce training has been successful in increasing wages and employment. MTDLI & Medicaid Clients completing workforce training programs through the third quarter of 2017 appeared to have positive outcomes when comparing the quarter after participation to the quarter before participation. Such a quarterly analysis should be considered

preliminary because Montana's highly seasonal economy results in a wide variation in employment and wages from quarter to quarter. Among the 5,487 MTDLI & Medicaid Clients who completed workforce training programs in the first three quarters of 2017, 62% were employed in the quarter after completion. Among those employed, 71% had a wage increase for the quarter, with the median increase being $2,956.

Challenges Facing HELP-Link

The HELP-Link program has shown promising success to date. However, it is a pilot project with only temporary authorization from the Montana Legislature and no permanent funding. The program is set to expire at the end of SFY 2019 and will require the State Legislature to reauthorize and fund it if it is to continue in future years. In addition, current funding is an earmark of existing MTDLI funds, which unavoidably reduces the level of funding available for other programs. Further, permanent funding must account for program administration costs. Current funding is authorized for client services and program operations, making it difficult to accomplish expected tasks like reporting and oversight.

Finally, the in-person interview required for enrollment in HELP-Link is known to decrease take-up rates in rural areas that are far away from Job Service Montana offices. Alternative arrangements have been considered but funding constraints have prevented anything from being developed and implemented. The lack of access in rural areas is inconsistent with MTDLI's mission of providing effective workforce services to all Montanans.

Appendix: Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about HELP-Link

What are the Barriers to Employment Faced by HELP-Link participants?

Montana HELP Plan recipients are required to fill out a survey to provide important background information on their employment situation and any employment barriers limiting their income potential. The information from the survey helps Job Service Montana staff address the client's needs and find suitable employment or training. The barriers to employment identified on the survey are summarized in Figure A1. Participants do not rank barriers, but select all that apply. Only 40% of survey completers identified an employment barrier. Others may not have felt they faced barriers to employment, or were already in a good employment situation. Personal finance or bad credit issues are the most frequent barrier to employment, followed by felony or misdemeanor conviction.

Figure A1. Barriers to Employment

Barrier	HELP-Link Participants		HELP-Link Survey Completers	
	Total	% of Total Identifying Barriers	Total	% of Total Identifying Barriers
Personal finances/credit history	226	16.9%	1471	26.3%
Felony/misdemeanor conviction	168	12.6%	1265	22.6%
Lack of transportation	130	9.7%	1139	20.4%
Poor physical health	113	8.4%	778	13.9%
Mental illness	88	6.6%	655	11.7%
Physical disability	85	6.4%	532	9.5%
Lack of childcare	75	5.6%	810	14.5%
Lack of housing	69	5.2%	585	10.5%
Lack of telephone	57	4.3%	554	9.9%
Caring for a family member with health issues	51	3.8%	483	8.6%
Learning disability	47	3.5%	320	5.7%
Probation	37	2.8%	346	6.2%
Drug or alcohol addiction	35	2.6%	264	4.7%
Domestic violence	26	1.9%	193	3.5%
Court mandated programs or classes	16	1.2%	150	2.7%
Pending felony/misdemeanor	8	0.6%	139	2.5%
Number Identifying At Least One Barrier	**1,338**	45.1%	**5,593**	45.6%
Total	**2,968**		**12,270**	

Source: MTDLI compiled on 07/03/18

What are the Demographic Characteristics of HELP-Link Survey Completers?

The HELP-Link survey also asked about the respondent's employment situation. Figure A2 shows the answers to the other survey questions for all survey completers and for HELP-Link participants. Roughly, 60% of the survey completers were unemployed at the time they completed the survey, and 70% expressed interest in finding a full-time job. In addition, while roughly 15% of respondents were working at jobs paying less than $9.00 per hour, over 20% were earning over $15 per hour. Wage earnings of $15 or more in their previous job suggests many survey respondents already have the skills necessary for self-sufficiency. Respondents at lower wage levels in their prior job may be better targets for training.

Figure A2. HELP-Link Survey Answers

QUESTION	*ANSWER*	*HELP Link Participants*		*Survey Completers*	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Are you currently employed? *Full time is defined as an individual that works 35 hours or more per week in a single job. Part time is defined as an individual that works less than 35 hours per week in a single job.*	**No**	**1,020**	**38.2%**	**6,922**	**60.0%**
	Yes - Full-Time Seasonal	26	1.0%	241	2.1%
	Yes - Full-Time Year-Round	109	4.1%	1,241	10.8%
	Yes - Part-Time Seasonal	64	2.4%	386	3.3%
	Yes - Part-Time Year-Round	162	6.1%	1,291	11.2%
Are you currently enrolled for credit in any accredited college?	**No**	**837**	**58.2%**	**5,728**	**85.7%**
	Yes	43	3.0%	375	5.6%
Are you willing and able to seek and accept full-time work?	No	180	6.0%	1,373	11.6%
	Yes	**1,174**	**39.2%**	**8,487**	**71.7%**
Do you currently hold multiple jobs*? Only consider jobs where you are paid.*	**No**	**1,327**	**49.6%**	**9,570**	**83.4%**
	Yes	35	1.3%	394	3.4%
Have you been discharged from U.S. military service in the last year?	**No**	**1,334**	**49.7%**	**9,752**	**86.1%**
	Yes	7	0.3%	50	0.4%
Have you made specific efforts to find employment in the last month?	No	295	10.2%	2,599	22.2%
	Yes	**1,056**	**36.5%**	**7,276**	**62.0%**
Please indicate the per hour wage of your most recent job from the ranges listed below*. If you hold multiple jobs, please indicate the wage of the job offering the highest per hour wage.*	Less than $8.05	27	1.0%	253	2.3%
	$8.05 to $9.00	199	7.5%	1,463	13.0%
	$9.01 to $10.00	170	6.4%	1,437	12.8%
	$10.01 to $11.00	149	5.6%	1,374	12.3%
	$11.01 to $12.00	130	4.9%	1,066	9.5%
	$12.01 to $13.50	133	5.0%	1,005	9.0%
	$13.51 to $15.00	156	5.9%	922	8.2%
	$15.01 and above	**368**	**13.9%**	**2,193**	**19.6%**
What is the highest level of education you have received?	Less than High School	59	2.2%	498	4.4%
	HS Diploma/GED/HiSET	**456**	**17.3%**	**3,732**	**33.0%**
	Some College - no degree	**433**	**16.4%**	**3,100**	**27.4%**
	Associates Degree (2 year)	187	7.1%	1,117	9.9%
	Bachelor's Degree (4-year)	159	6.0%	1,110	9.8%
	Master's Degree	37	1.4%	234	2.1%
	PhD or Professional	9	0.3%	40	0.4%

Notes: The individuals included are only those people who completed a HELP-Link survey. Complied on 7/03/18.

Where are Participants Located?

Figure A3 illustrates the number of participants and survey completers by county.

Figure A3: Participation by County

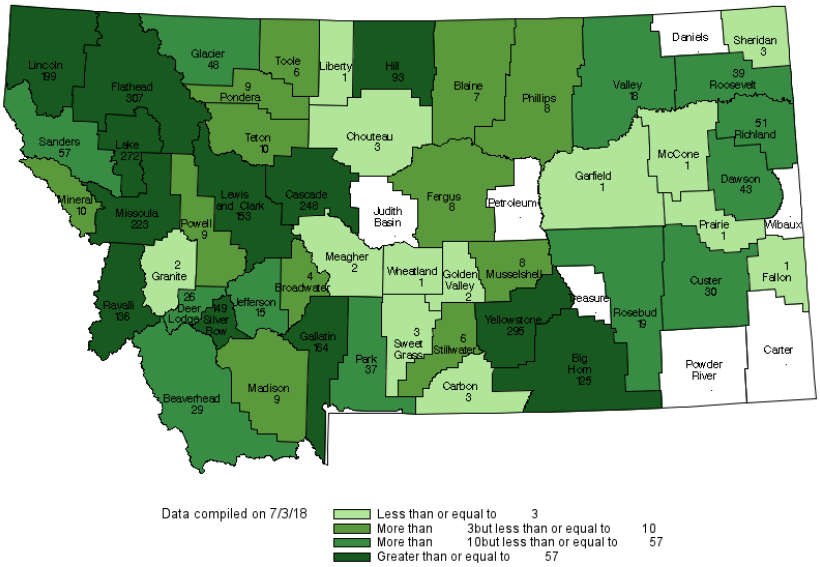
COUNTY	MTDLI & MEDICAID CLIENTS		HELP-LINK PARTICIPANTS	
	Number	Average Monthly Growth Rate	Number	Average Monthly Growth Rate
BEAVERHEAD	190	1.0%	29	0.0%
BIG HORN	507	1.8%	125	1.1%
BLAINE	136	1.8%	7	0.0%
BROADWATER	69	1.9%	4	0.0%
CARBON	83	2.3%	3	0.0%
CARTER	5	1.9%		
CASCADE	2,602	1.8%	248	1.5%
CHOUTEAU	43	2.8%	3	3.4%
CUSTER	385	2.2%	30	3.9%
DANIELS	5	4.3%		
DAWSON	254	1.7%	43	1.3%
DEER LODGE	276	2.1%	26	0.3%
FALLON	22	2.2%	1	0.0%
FERGUS	292	2.5%	8	1.1%
FLATHEAD	2,076	1.8%	307	1.7%
GALLATIN	1,162	2.2%	164	2.2%
GARFIELD	8	1.1%	1	0.0%
GLACIER	620	1.4%	48	0.4%
GOLDEN VALLEY	7	4.8%	2	0.0%
GRANITE	25	1.9%	2	0.0%
HILL	737	2.1%	93	2.5%
JEFFERSON	123	1.6%	15	0.0%
JUDITH BASIN	13	1.4%		
LAKE	1,410	1.8%	272	1.4%
LEWIS AND CLARK	1,640	2.3%	153	1.8%
LIBERTY	12	4.6%	1	0.0%
LINCOLN	824	1.2%	199	1.4%
MCCONE	10	0.0%	1	
MADISON	58	1.2%	9	2.1%
MEAGHER	18	2.1%	2	0.0%
MINERAL	73	1.9%	10	3.0%
MISSOULA	2,981	2.1%	223	2.2%
MUSSELSHELL	79	1.4%	8	0.0%
PARK	296	1.8%	37	0.0%
PETROLEUM	2	5.9%		
PHILLIPS	48	2.0%	8	0.0%
PONDERA	113	2.1%	9	2.1%
POWDER RIVER	8	5.9%		
POWELL	122	2.2%	9	0.0%
PRAIRIE	16	4.0%	1	
RAVALLI	898	1.6%	136	0.2%
RICHLAND	325	1.6%	51	0.7%
ROOSEVELT	518	2.0%	39	3.8%
ROSEBUD	148	1.8%	19	4.7%
SANDERS	351	1.6%	57	2.2%
SHERIDAN	16	1.1%	3	0.0%

SILVER BOW	1,137	2.2%	149	0.6%
STILLWATER	80	1.5%	6	3.4%
SWEET GRASS	19	2.0%	3	0.0%
TETON	70	1.6%	10	0.9%
TOOLE	88	2.3%	6	0.0%
TREASURE	4	2.4%		
VALLEY	177	1.3%	18	0.5%
WHEATLAND	20	2.4%	1	0.0%
WIBAUX	6	1.5%		
YELLOWSTONE	3,653	2.1%	295	1.8%

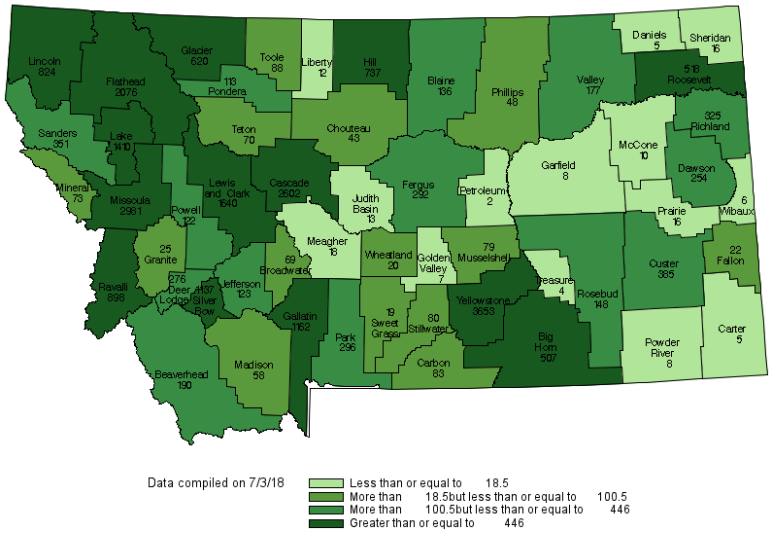
Source: Data as of 07/03/18. Average monthly growth rate over the past 12 months.

Where are HELP-Link Clients Located?

HELP-Link Participants by County



DLI Clients by County



Types of Services Provided to HELP-Link Participants

Wagner-Peyser Client Services (2018)

Service	Description
Information Only (Intake Not Required)	
One Stop Delivery System Info & Services (Info Only)	Outreach, intake & orientation to information & other services available through the one-stop delivery system
Referral to Federally Funded Training Programs (Info Only)	Provision of information relating to the availability of and appropriate referrals to federally-funded training programs available within the one-stop delivery system and, when appropriate, other workforce development programs. May include WIOA Title I programs [Adult, DW, Youth], TAA, Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Corps.
Referral to Federal/State Assistance & Other One-Stop Programs (Info Only) *[This service is not currently available in MWorks]*	Provision of information relating to the availability of assistance services and appropriate referrals to those programs and services, including programs and services within the one-stop delivery system and, when appropriate, other workforce development programs. May include: • UI • TANF (may include provision of opportunity to initiate application either with paper app or links to the application website) • SNAP • Financial literacy services • HELPLink/HELPLink Plus • IWT • JMG • State Displaced Homemaker • HUD E&T Programs • National Farmworker Jobs Program • Apprenticeship • Native American & American Indian Programs • Community Services Block Grants • Senior Community Service Employment Program [SCSEP] • Re-Entry Employment Programs • Business Start-Up Resources • Self-Employment/Entrepreneurial Resources • Any other Federal or State assistance program Provision of information relating to the availability of supportive services and appropriate referrals to those services, including: • child care • child support • medical or child health assistance available through Medicaid and CHIP • benefits under SNAP • assistance through the earned income tax credit • assistance under a State program for TANF, and other supportive services and transportation provided through that program • Health insurance assistance • Child support assistance • Tax preparation support
Workforce & Labor Market Information (Info Only)	Provision of workforce and labor market employment statistic information, including the provision of accurate information relating to local, regional, and national labor market areas, including: • Job vacancy listings in labor market areas; • Information on job skills necessary to obtain the vacant jobs listed; • Information relating to local occupations in demand and the earnings, skill requirements andopportunities for advancement for those jobs; • Information on in-demand industry sectors & occupations; • Information on nontraditional employment.

System Generated Services	
100%/ MontanaWay Orientation	Outreach & orientation provided during 100%/MontanaWay appointments - can be done individually or in a group. **[Recorded automatically by system when appointment is completed.]**
HELP-Link/HELP-Link+ Service	HELP-Link/HELP-Link+ individual counseling session including creation of an employment plan. **[Recorded automatically by system when appointment is completed.]**
RESEA Service	RESEA individual counseling session including creation of an employment plan and the provision of relevant Workforce & Labor Market Information. **[Recorded automatically by system when appointment is completed.]**

Wagner-Peyser Participant-Level Services (Require Intake)	
Career Assessments/ Diagnostic Testing	One-on-one direction in the use of career assessment and diagnostic tools and assisting in the interpretation of the results to help the seeker to make an informed employment, occupational, training or career decision. • TABE • MCIS • CAPS/COPS/COPES • **Career Scope** • **Chapter 31 Vet Testing**
Career Counseling	Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area tailored to a specific participant; coordination of services to support a participant's development of a career pathway and utilization of training and/or employment services; services that increase awareness of career opportunities aligned with local and regional employment needs; providing a structured process for analyzing skills and interests, formulating long-term goals and devising strategies to achieve them using tools such as MCIS Career Planning Tools – **service must include interpretation of results**
Client Intake	Comprehensive assessment of the skill level and service needs of individuals - may include in-depth interviewing and evaluation to identify employment barriers and appropriate employment goals and collection of Wagner-Peyser program data elements.
Employment Counseling	Provision of customized labor exchange services, individually or in a group setting, to assist in obtaining or retaining employment. **(replaces "Intensive Services" for Chapter 31 veteran services)**
Employment Plan	Development of an individual employment plan, to identify the employment goals, appropriate achievement objective, and appropriate combination of services for the participant to achieve his or her employment goals, including the list of, and information about, eligible training providers.
Financial Aid Eligibility Assistance *(this service is not currently available in MWorks)*	Assistance in establishing eligibility for programs of financial aid assistance for training and education programs not provided under WIOA.
Interviewing Skills	Instruction on the content and format of types of interviews, providing assistance in the preparation of interviews including mock interviews, analyzing past interviews, providing feedback.
Job Search Assistance	• **Application Instructions & Guidance** - instruction on the content and format of an application and providing assistance in the development and production of the same • **Assistance with Job Matching** - Working one on one with a seeker to help analyze their work history, education, interests, skills and provide help with finding relevant jobs • **Cover Letter Assistance** - instruction on the content and format of cover letters and providing assistance in the development and production of the same • **Resume Assistance** - instruction on the content and format of resumes and providing assistance in the development and production of the same • **Job Search Workshops** – an organized activity that provides instructions on job-related information such as resume writing, application preparation, interviewing skills and/or job lead development • **Job Search Planning** – development of a plan [not necessarily written] that includes the necessary steps and timetables to achieve employment in specific occupational, industry or geographic area
Placement Assistance	• **Job Development** – assistance in the development and facilitation of a possible job by acting as liaison and developing an employment relationship between employer and seeker; includes setting up an OJT, apprenticeship or other Work-Based Learning • **Employment Referral** - A referral to employment includes significant staff involvement and is the act of bringing to the attention of an employer a job seeker or group of registered job seekers who are available for a job.
UI Assistance	Provision of information and meaningful assistance to individuals seeking assistance in filing a claim for unemployment compensation. Meaningful assistance means: • providing assistance on-site using staff who are well-trained in UI claims OR • providing assistance by phone or via other technology.

Does HELP-Link Target High-Demand Jobs?

To make sure program participants receive meaningful training that improves job opportunities and increases wage potential in their local community, HELP-Link prioritizes program dollars to participants enrolled in training for high-demand occupations with specialized training. High-demand occupations are determined by MTDLI's employment projections, which are confirmed as top jobs using job openings data. The training must lead to an industry-recognized credential or license.

Has the Identity Management System been Implemented?

MTDLI implemented the statutorily-mandated identity management system in January 2017. This system presents a knowledge-based quiz to all individuals filing for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to confirm identity. If the customer fails the quiz; an identity for that customer cannot not be located to generate a quiz; or the customer does not complete the quiz in the allotted time; the solution prevents the customer from continuing the online UI claim filing process. For the first year of production, the department paid the solution provider $316,470.

In calendar year 2017, over 57,000 unique identities were assessed by the solution provider. Over 80% passed the quiz and could complete their UI claim; just under 20% failed. The solution found a record to authenticate a UI claimant's identity 96% of the time. Almost 14,000 transactions were stopped by the solution.

Over 4,100 customers sought assistance from claims processing staff to initiate or complete their UI claim after failing the online quiz. In these situations, UI staff asked the customer over the phone to answer questions generated by the solution. More than 81% passed, including nearly 3,000 who first failed a quiz when filing online. Of the 1,100 who failed when assisted by staff, an identity record could not be found in the solution for 522 customers; another 369 customers failed the quiz twice (both online and over the phone).

Assuming monetary eligibility and potential average weekly UI benefit amount of $332, a solution-based stoppage in 2017 could be preventing a fraudulent claim loss of between that amount or a maximum 28-week claim amount of $9,296. If just 10 percent of the solution stoppages averted a fraudulent claim and the payment of one week of UI benefits, the avoided loss to the trust fund would exceed $450,000.

In 2017, using resources independent of the solution, the department detected 133 UI claims filed using fraudulent or stolen identities. Although most were "not eligible" for UI benefits, 62 were. Had the department not caught these "eligible" claims, over $25,000 would have been paid in first week UI benefits alone. Unfortunately, $1,700 was paid out on four UI claims because it took more than week to detect the stolen identity. These UI claims passed the solution.

Going forward, the Department of Labor & Industry will be sharing nationally known IP addresses associated with fraudulent UI claims with the solution provider so that can be another measure against which identity authentication could be assessed.