Montana Department of
LABOR & INDUSTRY

HELP-Link Program

2019 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 about 32,000 Medicaid-enrolled Montanans who have received services funded by HELP-Link and federally funded workforce training programs, stretching state funds to cover more clients.

For the Montana Medicaid recipients receiving some type of workforce training from MTDLI, 63% are employed in the quarter after completing training. The employed percentage increases to 72% within a year after training. About 83% of those who were employed experienced a wage increase in the year after participation (compared to the year before), with a median increase of $8,700 annually.

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"

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, 32,000 Montanans who were enrolled in the HELP-Link-eligible types of Montana Medicaid have received career and training services from MTDLI. There have been 4,257 people with services specifically paid for with HELP-Link funding. Additional details on participation are included in the "How Many People Have Been Served?" section.

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.

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[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.

HELP-Link has been successful in improving employment and wage outcomes of participants. Among Montana Medicaid recipients who completed some type of workforce training from MTDLI, 72% were employed in the year after training, with 83% of those employed experiencing a wage increase in the year after completion. The median wage increase was $8,700 annually. These outcomes include roughly 13,100 clients who completed their training through the 1st quarter of 2018, and who had a full year of wage earnings data after training to measure annual wage increases. The section "Success of HELP-Link" provides further details on the employment and wage outcomes of clients.

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 program was continued by the 2017 Legislature with funding coming from existing workforce training dollars. The 2019 Legislature changed the program to include HELP-link participation among new community engagement requirements, and made other changes. However, the changes made by the 2019 Legislature did not affect program operation during state fiscal year (SFY) 2019, and are therefore not applicable for this report. The below description explains the operation of the program through the end of June 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 MTDLI & Medicaid clients who engaged in workforce training by the first quarter of 2018, 83% of those employed experienced wage increases after completing the program, and the median 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, 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 Medicaid enrolled Montanans with incomes above the poverty level keep their health insurance coverage if they fall behind on their premiums Montana's Medicaid program requires some recipients pay premiums and copays for coverage. Nonpayment results in a cancellation of coverage unless the participant meets certain criteria. Participation in workforce programs 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, with payment withheld through the tax system. Stated simply, HELP-Link provides participants with career assistance and can help them maintain health coverage. Because of the similarities between HELP-Link and two existing labor force programs, the Reemployment Services and Eligibility

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 is overdue. The **individual still must pay the amount owed**, with settlement occurring on their tax return.*

Assessment (RESEA) and the Workforce Innovations & Opportunities Act (WIOA), individuals are provided the workforce exemption for participation in any of these three programs.[3]

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. About 32,000 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] funds. Roughly 300 Registered Apprentices are also enrolled in the eligible types of Montana Medicaid. Roughly 4,250 individuals were specifically served with the state funds appropriated for HELP-Link, and the rest of the 32,000 were served through other MTDLI funds and programs.

Figure 1: Participation of in MTDLI Workforce Training Programs by State Fiscal Year for Montana Medicaid Populations

	SFY16 (6 Months)	SFY17	SFY18	SFY19	Total
MTDLI Montana Medicaid Clients	4,276	10,921	16,657	13,616	31,999
Help-Link Clients	604	1,525	1,058	1,159	4,257
HELP Link Clients that Received Training Assistance	82	438	466	436	884
HELP Link Clients that Completed Training	5	203	241	226	670
Other Federally Funded Programs					
RESEA	352	887	767	911	2,774
WIOA	585	1,015	937	848	2,015
100% Appointment	574	1,157	796	710	3,136
Wagner-Peyser	3,110	9,653	15,645	12,581	30,496

Note: Table only includes individuals in eligible types of Montana Medicaid. Clients can be co-enrolled in programs.

How does HELP-Link work?

When Montanans enroll in eligible types of Montana Medicaid, they are directed to MontanaWorks.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. To continue the enrollment process, clients must make an in-person visit to a Job Service Montana office.[5] 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

[3] WIOA focuses on serving low-income Montanans, while RESEA assists recently unemployed Montanans through partnership programs providing intensive services.
[4] The qualifying types of Montana Medicaid include those added as "Medicaid Expansion." See footnote 1.
[5] Current policy allows for phone appointments under extenuating circumstances.

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 2. **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 3 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.

Figure 3: Wagner-Peyser Services Received by HELP-Link Participants	
Information Services	
One Stop Delivery System Info & Services	1,958
Workforce & Labor Market Information	3,572
Referral to Federally Funded Training Programs	2,286
Wagner-Peyser Staff Assisted Services	
Career Assessment/Diagnostic Testing	1,217
Career Counseling	487
Client Intake	3,146
Employment Counseling	1,447
Employment Plan	446
Interviewing Skills	552
Job Search Assistance	3,406
Placement Assistance	644
UI Assistance	423
Program Appointments	
HELP-Link	3,754
RESEA	1,744
Total	**4,257**

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, with encouragement given to pursue careers that fit the participant's interests and that are in-demand. The HELP-Link funding allowed for 150 clients to pursue education and training in FY2019. 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, personal care workers, and bookkeeping and accounting clerks. Figure 4 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 $65,960 would likely be enough to raise a family of five out of poverty and above the Montana Medicaid eligibility threshold. Truck driver wages of $45,400 would be sufficient to lift a small family out of poverty and above the eligibility threshold.[6]

[6] 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 4: Most Common Occupations Pursued by HELP-Link Clients

OCCUPATION PURSUED	Number	Percent	Median Wage
Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer	77	11.7%	$45,430
Registered Nurses	45	6.8%	$65,960
Personal Care and Service Workers, All Other	33	5.0%	$35,950
Medical Records and Health Information Technicians	22	3.3%	$36,940
Nursing Assistants	21	3.2%	$28,820
Medical Assistants	15	2.3%	$34,070
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	12	1.8%	$35,540
Dental Hygienists	11	1.7%	$74,230
Dental Assistants	11	1.7%	$36,850
Computer and Information Systems Managers	10	1.5%	$98,140
Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants	10	1.5%	$28,820
Healthcare Support Workers, All Other	10	1.5%	$34,490
General and Operations Managers	9	1.4%	$84,590
Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	9	1.4%	$23,890
Executive Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	9	1.4%	$50,010
Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychologists	8	1.2%	$60,540
Pharmacy Technicians	8	1.2%	$34,630
Personal and Home Care Aides	8	1.2%	$23,640
Medical Secretaries	8	1.2%	$31,370

Source: MTDLI compiled as of 7/1/19. Median wages reported by May 2018 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, 300 MTDLI & Medicaid Clients participated in Registered Apprentice programs through the Montana Department of Labor & Industry.

Only a few HELP-Link participants received funding for on-the-job training. Subsidized wages for work-based training were the most expensive component of HELP-Link supports on a per-client basis in 2019, with an average cost of roughly $2,700 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 FY2019, roughly 154 individuals received intensive one-on-one supportive services through HELP-Link with an average payment of $1,020.

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 5 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 5. Referrals

REFERRAL	COUNT	REFERRAL	COUNT
Auxiliary aides and services for participants with disabilities	33	*Placement to a Job*	123
Childcare	72	*Referral to Federally Funded Training Programs*	438
Financial counseling	43	*Referred to Training*	257
Health care	66	*Referred to WIA Services*	481
Housing	70	*Referred to WIOA*	1,390
Internet Services	45	*SNAP/Food Stamps*	191
Job Referral	2,314	*TANF*	38
Placed in Other Employment	351	*Transportation*	58
Placed in Training	180	*Vet Referred to WIA Training*	30
Placed in WIA	705	*Vocational Rehabilitation*	168
Total			**3,245**

Notes: Data compiled on 7/01/19. Excludes referrals that occurred before they became an active participant.

How much Does HELP-Link Cost?

The funding allocated for the HELP-Link program in SFY 2019 was $888,531 of existing MTDLI state special revenue funds. Because demand for HELP-Link services exceeded the allocated funding in SFY 2019, MTDLI supplemented the original appropriation with an additional $50,620 in state special revenue funds for a total expenditure of $939,151. 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.

Of the total amount spent on HELP-Link, 53% went directly to participants, with an additional 32% 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 training and support to the 250 clients who qualified in SFY 2019, with costs of roughly $1,703 per client. Training typically includes a short-term training program such as truck driving, but may also cover tuition at the local college. 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 6. HELP-Link Spending for State Fiscal Year 2019

	Total Spent	Number of Participants	Cost Per Participant
Administration	**$147,399**		
Case Management	**$297,621**	**1,159**	**$176**
Training & Support	**$494,131**	**249**	**$1,703**
Training	$298,800	150	$1,992
Supportive Services	$157,515	154	$1,022
OJT Reimbursements	$37,816	14	$2,701
Total	**$939,151**		

Notes: Total includes spending from July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019.

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 has exhausted 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.

The ability to train workers with HELP-Link funds is quite limited. The appropriated funding was fully exhausted in SFY 2019, 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 prioritized enrollment efforts towards those who have completed the survey to indicate interest, 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. 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 1st quarter of 2019 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 training through the 1st quarter of 2018 have a full year of post-completion wage data available. Among the 13,093 MTDLI & Medicaid clients that completed MTDLI workforce training programs by the 1st quarter of 2018, 72% were employed after completing their training program. Of those employed, 82% had higher wages in the year after completing the program, with a median wage increase of $8,700 over the previous year. The median wage after completion remained low at $18,500.

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 388 HELP-Link clients who completed training programs through the 1st quarter of 2018, 84% experienced wage increases, with the median increase equal to $10,650.

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 fourth quarter of 2018 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 21,600 MTDLI & Medicaid Clients who completed workforce training programs through the end of 2018, 63% were employed in the quarter after completion. Among those employed, 70% had a wage increase for the quarter, with the median increase being $2,100. Those funded specifically with HELP-Link funds (which typically allow for more intensive services) had better outcomes with 71% employed in the quarter after participation and 78% of those employed experiencing a wage increase, with a median increase of $3,026.

Conclusion

The HELP-Link program has shown promising success to date, with strong employment and wage outcomes for clients. Wage and employment outcomes improve further with greater program involvement, suggesting that the tiered system of support is a cost-effective solution to delivering training and work assistance to those with greatest need.

In addition to the current positive outcomes, MTDLI is committed to continuously improving the program to provide cost-effective and successful work training assistance. The 2019 Legislature made significant changes to the program, The process changes that the new program will require are currently being developed, with different options under evaluation to find the most cost-effective manner of engaging clients. Further, MTDLI is

also currently engaged in research to identify an effective way to deliver services to more rural and reservation areas, who currently have lower participation rates due to the travel needed to attend in-person appointments at the closest Job Service Office. MTDLI is committed to successfully implementing the changes made by the 2019 Legislature to provide quality services to the Montana workforce.

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 48% 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	276	6.5%	1,721	12.1%
Felony/misdemeanor conviction	195	4.6%	1,441	10.2%
Lack of transportation	162	3.8%	1,340	9.4%
Poor physical health	156	3.7%	957	6.7%
Mental illness	114	2.7%	779	5.5%
Physical disability	112	2.6%	643	4.5%
Lack of childcare	103	2.4%	941	6.6%
Lack of housing	89	2.1%	682	4.8%
Caring for a family member with health issues	82	1.9%	585	4.1%
Lack of telephone	66	1.6%	636	4.5%
Learning disability	61	1.4%	382	2.7%
Probation	50	1.2%	416	2.9%
Drug or alcohol addiction	47	1.1%	327	2.3%
Domestic violence	38	0.9%	231	1.6%
Court mandated programs or classes	20	0.5%	175	1.2%
Pending felony/misdemeanor	13	0.3%	151	1.1%
Number Identifying At Least One Barrier	**1,838**	**43.2%**	**6,796**	**47.9%**
Total	**4,257**		**14,186**	

Source: MTDLI compiled on 07/01/19

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 13% of respondents were working at jobs paying $9.00 per hour or less, 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**	**885**	**35%**	**5,204**	**58%**
	Yes - Full-Time Seasonal	25	1%	184	2%
	Yes - Full-Time Year-Round	99	4%	955	11%
	Yes - Part-Time Seasonal	54	2%	293	3%
	Yes - Part-Time Year-Round	148	6%	990	11%
Are you currently enrolled for credit in any accredited college?	**No**	**622**	**60%**	**3,917**	**86%**
	Yes	35	3%	249	5%
Are you willing and able to seek and accept full-time work?	No	141	5%	988	11%
	Yes	**1,048**	**37%**	**6,446**	**69%**
Do you currently hold multiple jobs*? Only consider jobs where you are paid.*	**No**	**1,159**	**46%**	**7,218**	**80%**
	Yes	30	1%	306	3%
Have you been discharged from U.S. military service in the last year?	**No**	**1,163**	**46%**	**7,365**	**83%**
	Yes	6	0%	31	0%
Have you made specific efforts to find employment in the last month?	No	236	9%	1,917	21%
	Yes	**944**	**34%**	**5,513**	**60%**
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	19	1%	151	2%
	$8.05 to $9.00	162	6%	993	11%
	$9.01 to $10.00	139	6%	1,032	12%
	$10.01 to $11.00	133	5%	1,022	12%
	$11.01 to $12.00	115	5%	815	9%
	$12.01 to $13.50	122	5%	822	9%
	$13.51 to $15.00	135	5%	750	9%
	$15.01 and above	**339**	**13%**	**1,754**	**20%**
What is the highest level of education you have received?	Less than High School	41	2%	308	3%
	HS Diploma/GED/HiSET	**377**	**15%**	**2,707**	**31%**
	Some College - no degree	**380**	**15%**	**2,399**	**27%**
	Associates Degree (2 year)	182	7%	953	11%
	Bachelor's Degree (4-year)	139	6%	852	10%
	Master's Degree	36	1%	181	2%
	PhD or Professional	10	0%	31	0%

Notes: The individuals included are only those people who completed a HELP-Link survey. Complied on 7/01/19.

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	Over-the-Year Growth	Number	Over-the-Year Growth
BEAVERHEAD	222	23%	35	6%
BIG HORN	582	20%	148	13%
BLAINE	171	21%	14	40%
BROADWATER	88	26%	9	50%
CARBON	106	26%	11	83%
CARTER	6	20%	0	--
CASCADE	3,166	25%	358	34%
CHOUTEAU	50	25%	8	14%
CUSTER	478	33%	58	57%
DANIELS	7	40%	0	--
DAWSON	332	33%	64	56%
DEER LODGE	341	22%	36	20%
FALLON	28	27%	3	200%
FERGUS	383	41%	11	38%
FLATHEAD	2,655	30%	469	45%
GALLATIN	1,442	29%	248	39%
GARFIELD	6	20%	1	0%
GLACIER	755	24%	76	33%
GOLDEN VALLEY	7	40%	1	0%
GRANITE	29	26%	2	0%
HILL	925	32%	132	39%
JEFFERSON	157	30%	17	31%
JUDITH BASIN	23	44%	0	--
LAKE	1,741	27%	329	18%
LEWIS AND CLARK	2,180	28%	222	23%
LIBERTY	16	33%	2	100%
LINCOLN	1,000	25%	279	47%
MADISON	81	45%	14	17%
MCCONE	16	45%	2	100%
MEAGHER	22	22%	3	50%
MINERAL	97	26%	12	9%
MISSOULA	3,902	33%	325	41%
MUSSELSHELL	86	15%	12	50%
PARK	351	29%	49	44%
PETROLEUM	5	67%	0	--
PHILLIPS	60	25%	8	0%
PONDERA	142	27%	11	22%
POWDER RIVER	10	25%	0	--
POWELL	161	26%	11	10%
PRAIRIE	17	42%	1	0%
RAVALLI	1,147	34%	200	43%
RICHLAND	383	26%	62	19%
ROOSEVELT	666	29%	51	34%
ROSEBUD	200	38%	33	65%
SANDERS	439	29%	78	37%
SHERIDAN	27	108%	6	50%
SILVER BOW	1,467	32%	171	14%

STILLWATER	102	24%	17	89%
SWEET GRASS	23	21%	3	0%
TETON	86	26%	14	17%
TOOLE	116	32%	6	0%
TREASURE	5	25%	0	--
VALLEY	211	24%	21	17%
WHEATLAND	22	16%	0	--
WIBAUX	12	100%	2	--
YELLOWSTONE	4,627	29%	546	50%

Source: Data as of 07/01/19. Growth rate over the fiscal year.

Figure A4: HELP-Link Participations by County

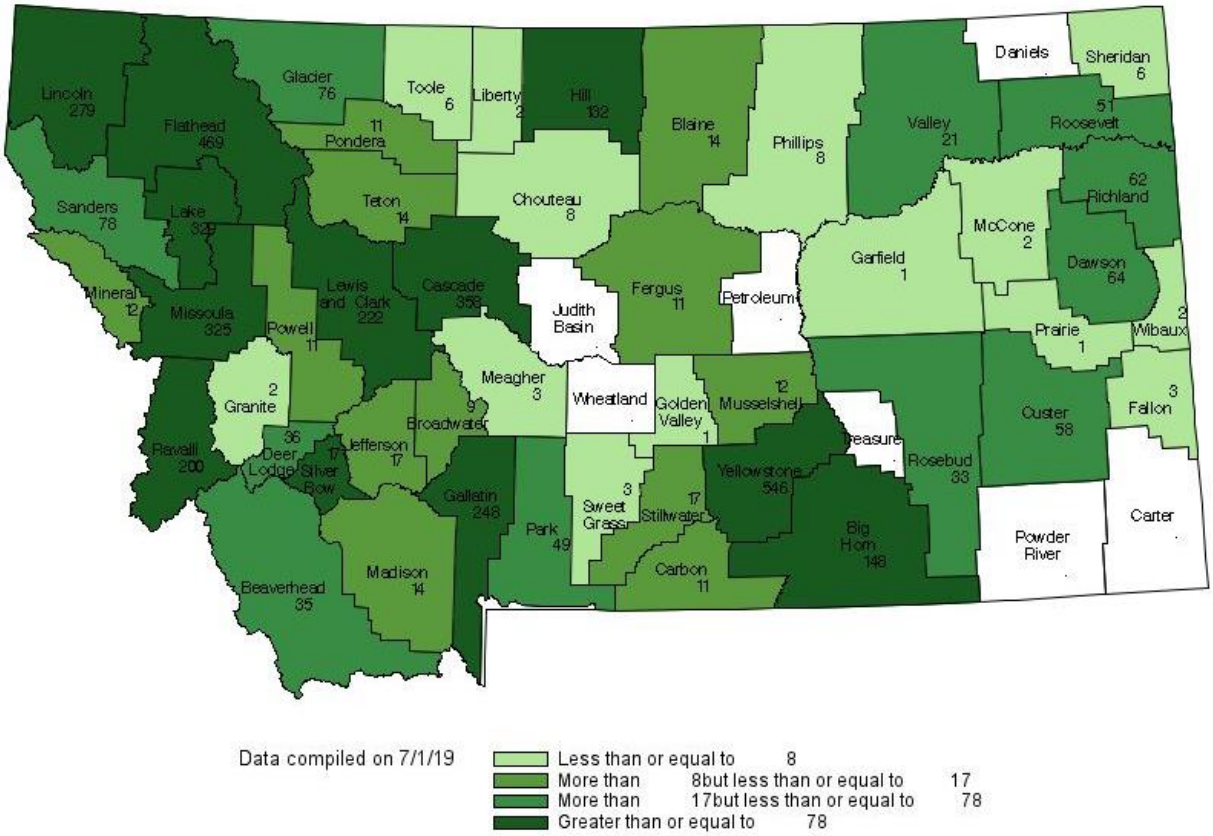
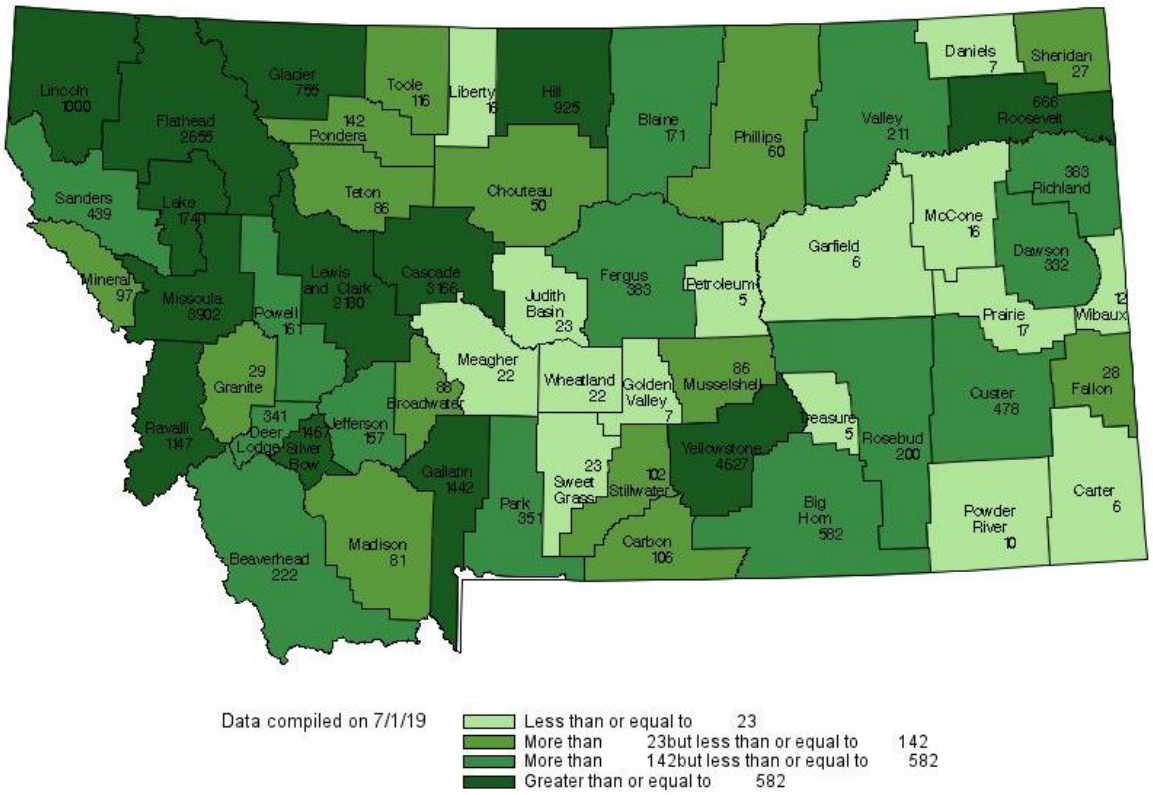


Figure A5: DLI Client Participations by County



Types of Services Provided to HELP-Link Participants

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.