

Questions from June 8, 2018 Stakeholder Call regarding benefits counseling for Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) and Work Incentives Network.

Introduction: Employment First has requested that benefits counseling services be included in the Home and Community Based Services waiver as part of Employment Path services that will hopefully take effect July 1, 2018. There will be two levels. Level One can be authorized up to three hours. It is basic information and referral. Level Two can be authorized up to 12 hours and results in a benefits counseling report. This is typically for someone who just started working and has hours and wages and needs information on how their benefits may be impacted.

The Oregon Employment Rule, 411-315, will be modified to show that benefits counseling is now an acceptable part of Employment Path Community services. This includes a department-approved certification, the core competencies, and an outline of the requirements in the rule and definitions. There also will be a worker guide and new expenditure guidelines published by July 1, 2018.

Work Incentives Network (WIN) is offering to train 20 people to become certified benefits counselors who will then be able to provide benefits counseling through Employment Path Community services.

The initial week-long training is in-person, classroom-style, and will be July 23-27 at the DHS Training Facility, 126 E. Lincoln St., Woodburn. Additional study and training will take place over the next month with Provisional Certification and the ability to begin providing services scheduled for Aug. 30, 2018.

Sign up for the training at:

<https://ilearn.oregon.gov/ContentDetails.aspx?id=59FCE520CEBB4DE3852223B48E69970>

The training offered by WIN is free, but agencies will be responsible for their own travel costs. This is an intensive training because benefits counseling is a complicated service that impacts a person's finances and must be administered with great care. If providers are not able to attend the WIN training, Oregon also recognizes the benefits counseling certifications offered by [Virginia Commonwealth University](#) and [Cornell University](#).

As a reminder, the training is currently full. However, DHS will do its best to make sure we have representation across the state and across providers – so if you are dedicated to taking the training, please do add your name and organization to the wait list. DHS will notify participants by July 6, 2018.

Questions from the June 8, 2018 call:

Question: Will there be advocates taking the benefits counseling training?

Answer: You must be a Medicaid-enrolled provider to deliver Employment Path Community right now because it is a waiver service. But, for instance, if the Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition enrolls as a Medicaid agency with an employment endorsement and completes the training requirements, they would be able to provide this service.

Question: Prior to authorizing an individual's plan, do we need to see if WIN has any openings for benefits counseling?

Answer: No, this is basic benefits counseling service even at Level Two. It's a total of 15 hours. WIN can provide more complex benefits counseling. The intent is to free up time for WIN to do more complex benefits counseling and certified providers can do the more introductory and initial benefits counseling. WIN currently has 1,000 people in the queue and the majority need a basic level of service. Currently the initial benefits counseling service is not available through WIN due to the wait list. The hope is to reduce that wait and focus on the people who need more complex benefits counseling services. The most underserved are people who may be reluctant to even look for a job because they have little or no information about the benefits of working and the options available to help them manage benefits while working. The hope is to reduce the wait lists so programs such as WIN and Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) can focus on people who need complex benefits counseling services.

Question: When will final determinations be made on who gets accepted into the training?

Answer: Tentatively right now we hope to make a determination no later than July 6.

Question: I am visually impaired and need adaptive software. How do I make sure the training and other resources will be accessible?

Answer: When you sign up for the training in iLearn, you can note there any accommodations needed. Please always let us know if you need an accommodation so we can ensure we have it available.

Question: Employment Path Community is currently set as an hourly rate. Wondering if there is consideration of turning benefits counseling into an outcome-based payment like Discovery?

Answer: We requested a Policy Option Package to fund benefits counseling but it wasn't approved at the legislative level. We acknowledge this is a lot of training and certification at the Employment Path Community rate. Longer-term we want to look at other options. For instance, if we could have a one-on-one rate for Employment Path Community, that would impact benefits counseling because it is a one-on-one service. At this time, this is an hourly rate – up to three hours for Level 1, and up to 12 hours for Level 2. If an individual does not require the entire number of hours for the service, only the hours used should be billed.

This is not designed to limit a person's access to Employment Path Community service. This particular type of Employment Path Community has an hour allocation, but the individual can also receive ongoing Employment Path services in addition to benefits counseling.

Question: Since Employment Path Community is usually only billed when you spend time with a person, does that mean with benefits counseling you can bill time to do documentation?

Answer: You do need to meet with the person but you wouldn't make them sit with you while you build the report, which you can bill for.

Question: Does this count against the person's 25 hours of authorized services?

Answer: Yes, but this is a short-time service so hopefully wouldn't impact other services. However, we would look at an exception if they are getting benefits counseling done while also working and could run out of hours.

Question: We are a small agency. I am interested in training for myself and another employee. Can multiple staff from one agency be certified as benefits counselors?

Answer: We know that we will have agencies that want more than one staff members training. For this initial round, we want to make sure we have representation around the state with different agencies. However, we will offer future trainings.