Home Energy Assistance Program

CAA Training for PY2024

WELCOME!

Agenda Overview

PY2024 HEAP CAA TRAINING
AGENDA (DRAFT)
June 27, 2023
8:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m.

| Topic	Presenter
Welcome, Opening Remarks, Agenda Overview	Troy Fullmer
Bridge LMS and Highlights from PY2023	Troy Fullmer
Changes for PY2024 HEAP	Troy Fullmer
The Roles of Intake Workers and Certifiers, Certifier Checklist	Lori McPherson
Online Application Process	Lori McPherson
DHLC Only, Requested Fuel Type and Related Questions in HEAP Cloud	Lori McPherson
Denial Reversals	Lori McPherson
HEAP Cloud- Common Errors and Reviewing & Entering Comments	Laura James
Break	
Application Changes: Change of Address, Product, Vendor	Laura James, Mercedes Knowles, Zach O'Ben, CAA Volunteers
Lunch Break	
Questions and Answers- Open Discussion	All
Wrap Up and Adjourn	
Evaluations	Emailed to attendees

WHAT IS BRIDGE?

Bridge is an online learning portal that allows you to access training from most computers and mobile devices.
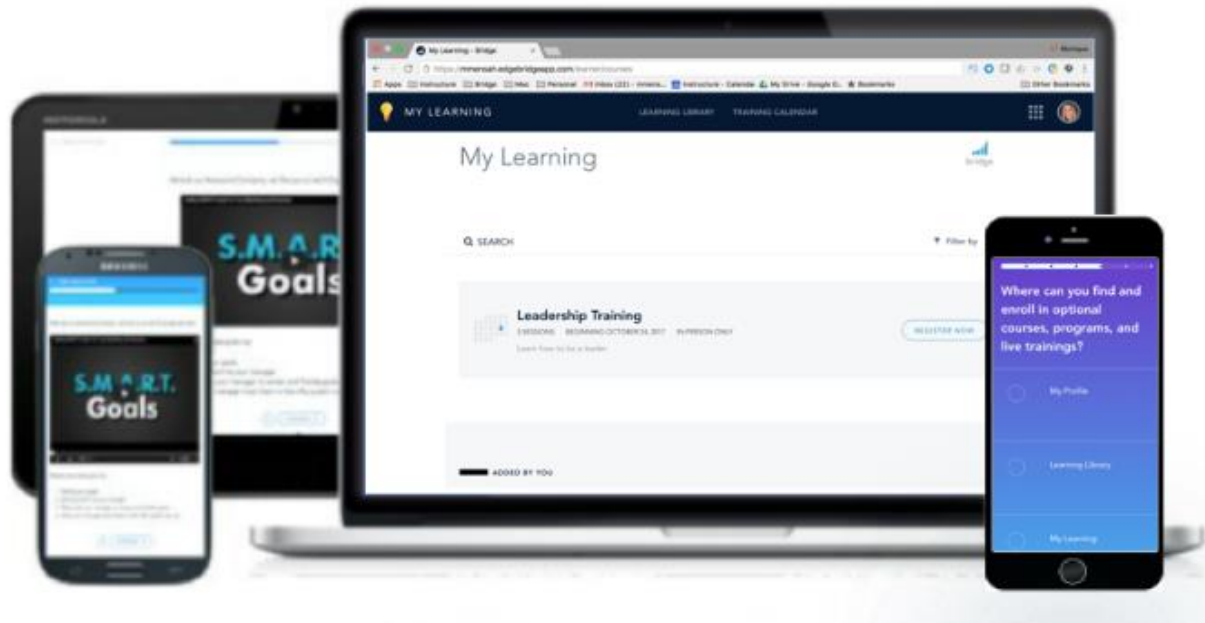
WHY ARE WE USING BRIDGE?

Bridge allows MaineHousing to provide Community Action Agency personnel training that is accessible, readily available, up to date, and on demand.
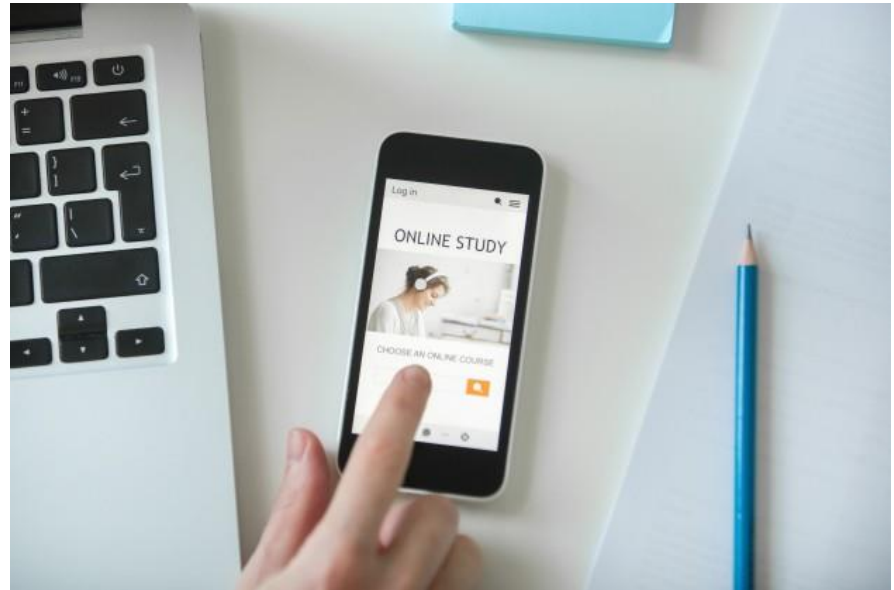
Learning Management Modules

- **Introduction & Training Resources**
- **Grant Overview**
- **Communications, Use of Handbook, LIHEAP Email**
- **Eligibility**
- **Income**
- **Categorical Income Eligibility**
- **Self-Employment**

Learning Management Modules (cont.)

- **$21 Heat & Eat Benefits**

- **Benefit Calculations**

- **Benefits & Payments**

- **Abbreviated Application Process**

- **Benefit Return Basics**

- **Low Income Assistance Plan (LIAP)**

BRIDGE

Learning Management Modules (cont.)

- CHIP Certification

- Appeal Process

- Freedom of Access Act

BRIDGE

Highlights from PY2023

Highlights from PY2023

Early Start to Program Year-

- **CAAs started taking PY2023 applications on July 18- about a 5 week head start.**
  - CAAs took over 59,000 HEAP applications.
  - Over 19,000 new applicants.
  - Program ended April 12, due to exhaustion of HEAP fuel assistance funding.

Highlights from PY2023 (cont.)

- **Online Application-**
  - Over 2,400 applicants started their application through the online application portal.

- **Mid Maine Community Action-**
  - Started certifying applications for a few other CAAs and certified over 700 applications.

What's New in PY2024?

Changes in PY2024

Design Heat Load Calculation (DHLC) Only-

- DHLC will be the only method used in the calculation of benefits. The consumption based method will no longer be used.

- Annual consumption data will still be collected and used for reporting purposes.

Changes in PY2024 (cont.)

- **CAAs will have the ability to process Denial Reversals**

- **Clients using firewood will receive their benefit as a direct check**

- **Benefits will be calculated using "requested fuel type" vs. primary heating system fuel type.**

Changes in PY2024 (cont.)

- **Regular HEAP fuel assistance benefits can pay for certain fees associated with the delivery of fuel.**

- **MMCA will be HEAP subgrantee for Lincoln and Sagadahoc counties.**

Questions

ROLES OF INTAKE AND CERTIFIERS

MaineHousing
MAINE STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

What is your Role?

Role of Intake

- Reviews prior year comments
- Creates New Application
- Merges On-line Apps
- Interviews Applicant
- Entering data in HEAP Cloud
- Gathers documents
- Enters Clarifying Comments
- Prepares Forms

Application Sections

▶ Comments

▶ Primary Applicant

▶ Application

▶ Family

▶ Income

▶ Vendor and Consumption

▶ Document

▶ Change History

Comments
Role of Intake

Review Prior Year Comments

Primary Applicant Section
Role of Intake

- Name

- Phone Numbers

- Email Address

- Service/Mailing Address

- County

- Questions

Primary Applicant Section
Role of Intake

- Go over the information that is prepopulated.

- Enter new or change information

- Merging Self-Intake Applications with a prior year Application

- Verify that the information is correct
  - Proper case
  - Service and Mailing Address
    - Spell out address i.e., Street, Road, Lane
    - PO Boxes have a different City

Application Section
Role of Intake

Enter/Review:

- Active check box

- Applied Date

- Application Method

- Dwelling Information

- Landlord Information

- Questions –Ask them as written in HEAP Cloud.

Family Section
Role of Intake

- Household members' names
- DOB
- SSN
- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Marital Status
- Medical Insurance
- Education
- Demographics

HOUSEHOLD

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God

Income Section
Role of Intake

- Income Period
- Income Type
- Income Amount
- Income Frequency

Vendor and Consumption Role of Intake

- Requested Fuel Type
- Heating System Location
- Priority
- Condition
- Fuel vendor
- Account Number
- Account Name

Document
Role of Intake

	Document	Document Status	Comment	Revised Date	Attached File Name
☐	HEAP Required Documents				
☐	US Lawful Status Verification				
☐	Government issued photo ID				
☐	HEAP Application (signed)				
☐	Permission to Share				
☐	Income Worksheet				
☐	Income Documentation				
☐	Odd Job Income Affidavit				
☐	Self Employment Worksheet				
☐	Document Verification Form				
☐	Medical/Dental Receipts				

Completed Application Role of Intake

- Printing the application
- Preparing Forms

Certifying HEAP Application

The process of determining an Application Eligible or Ineligible

- **Within 30 business days**
- **Certified in HEAP Cloud**

Role of Certifier

Verifying

Resolving

Reviewing

Determining
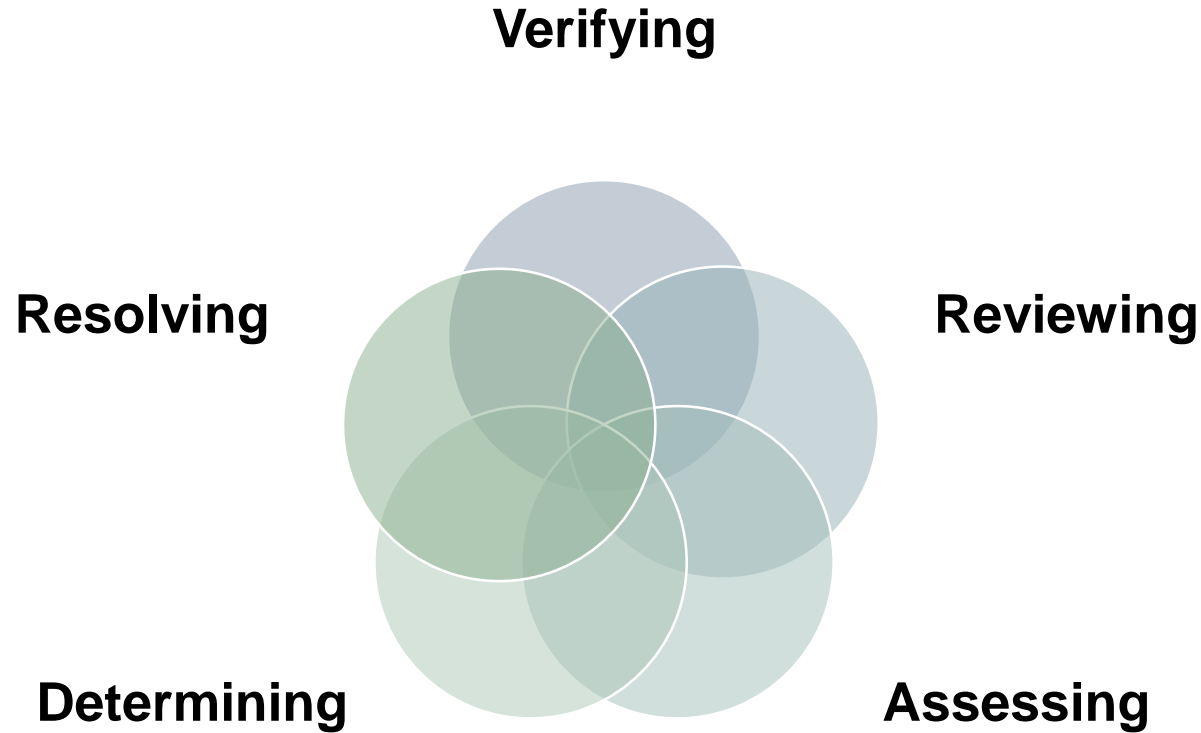
Assessing

VERIFYING

- **Are all the documents in the application file?**
- **Are all the documents signed by appropriate persons?**

REVIEWING

- **Application file**
- **Forms**
- **Income documentation**
- **HEAP Cloud**

ASSESSING

Application File and HEAP Cloud

- **Does it make sense?**

- **Do Comments and documentation tell the entire story?**

DETERMINING

- **Is Income sufficient to meet Basic Living Expenses?**

- **Is all Household Income accounted for?**

RESOLVING

- **Inconsistencies and errors**

- **Outstanding questions**

CERTIFIER CHECKLIST

HEAP Certifier Checklist

Reviewing of the HEAP Application File and HEAP Cloud

- [ ] Put all HEAP Documents in order as listed on the Bundle.
- [ ] Review the application for any changes made by the applicant.
  Update HEAP Cloud Application and make comments of changes as necessary.
- [ ] Review the Reminder Form and verify that all items checked have been received.
  If missing, document what is missing in the document section of HEAP Cloud.
- [ ] Review all pertinent forms for completion. Example: Signatures
  Document what is missing on the form in the Document section of HEAP Cloud.
- [ ] Review all Income documentation and finalize the Income Worksheet.
  Document what is missing in the Document section of HEAP Cloud.
- [ ] Enter all countable income for each household member in the Income section of HEAP Cloud.

Before Certifying in HEAP Cloud

- [ ] Verify Household Member's Information.
- [ ] Verify Applicant's Address Information.
  Address must match Utility Bill and/or other documents submitted by the applicant.
- [ ] Verify Phone Numbers and Email Address.
- [ ] Verify all income has been entered into HEAP Cloud and matches Income Worksheet.
- [ ] Verify Heating System and Fuel Type information.
- [ ] Verify Vendor Information.
  Verify the name on the Account.
  Verify the account numbers are correct and review notes made at
  Intake. Verify the utility account number matches the utility bill.
- [ ] Verify that the Fuel Allowance is correct based on the Subsidized Housing Form or 50058/50059 or RD Form.
- [ ] Verify all pertinent documents are received and completed.
- [ ] Identify any information that is missing in the document section.

Questions
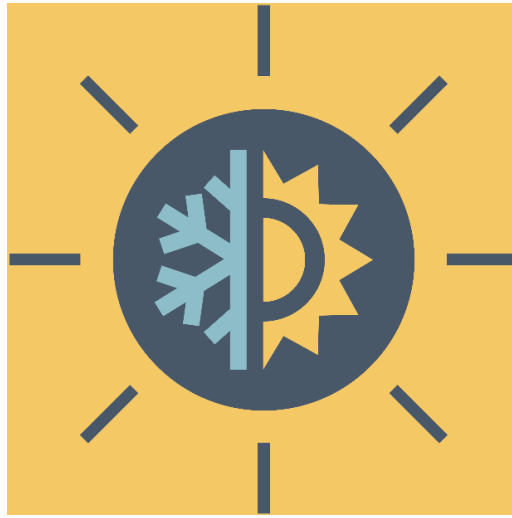
Online Application Process-Appendix I

Design Heat Load Calculation Only
and
Changes in the Vendor & Consumption Section

Design Heat Load Calculation Only
and
Changes in the Vendor & Consumption Section

No More Consumption Based Benefit Calculation

In the past, HEAP fuel assistance benefits were determined using one of two methods-

- Consumption Based
- Design Heat Load Calculation (DHLC)

Starting with PY2024, fuel assistance benefits will be calculated <u>only</u> using the DHLC method.

Advantages of Using DHLC Only

- Will help standardize benefit amounts, working to provide a more consistent benefit amount for households from year to year.

- Applications will be able to be certified without having to wait until consumption data is entered into the HEAP system of record.

Changes in the Vendor & Consumption Section

With the change of Using DHLC Only:

- Selecting DHLC Reason will no longer be required **AND**
- Several questions in the Vendor & Consumption Section will no longer be required to ask.

Changes in the Vendor & Consumption Section (cont.)

In the past, part of the benefits calculation was based on the Primary Fuel Type.

Starting PY2024, for Applicant(s) that have more than one heating system, will now have the option to request what fuel type the benefit will be calculated on regardless of Heating System priority.

Changes in the Vendor & Consumption Section (cont.)

* <u>Exception</u>: If Applicant resides in subsidized housing and receives a utility allowance, the Requested Fuel Type must match the fuel type for which the Applicant receives the utility allowance.

Below is what the new field name will be in HEAP Cloud:

Questions

Denial Reversals

Questions

Common Errors

Common Errors

- Duplicate applications

Confirmation ✕

ℹ️ There is an existing UNCERTIFIED application. Do you want to continue?

No Yes
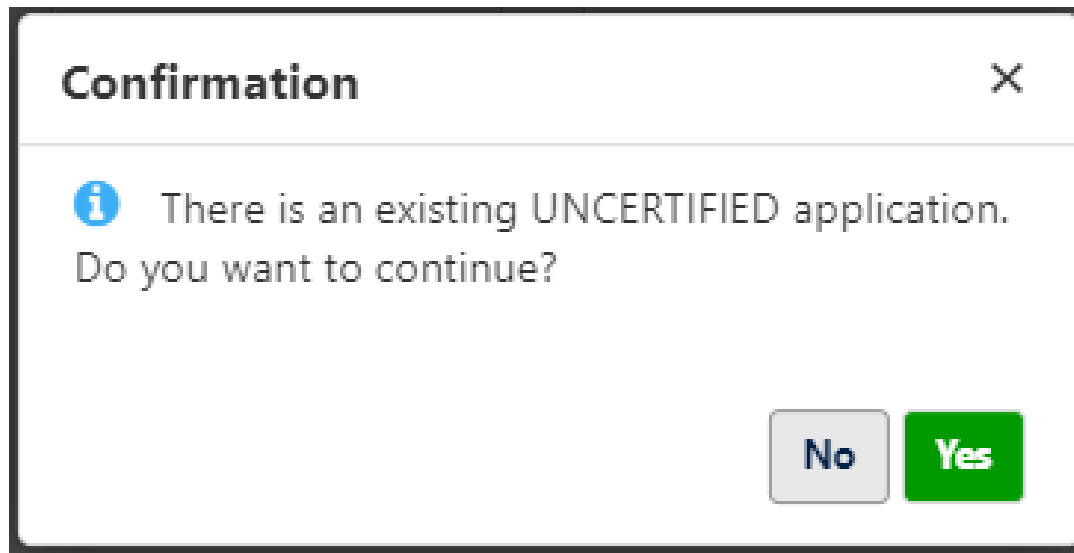
Not stopping and pausing when this message was received has caused HUNDREDS of duplicate applications

Common Errors

Best Practice: Open & review your upload

- Not uploading all application documents

- Uploading documents that are not legible
  - Dark scan
  - Partial document

- Uploading documents to the incorrect slot

  - e.g. – bundle into the Government issued Photo ID

- Cleanup of US Lawful Status Verification & Government issued photo ID when Household composition changes.

Common Errors

- Electric bill is not in a Household member's name but "Same As Applicant" checkbox is selected

- Service address on electric bill does not match the HEAP Cloud service address

- Electricity account number is not updated when a new from prior application is created but the client has moved or changed account numbers

- Service &/or mailing address does not match uploaded documents

Common Errors

- Benefits Tab not being reviewed, causing payment to go to incorrect vendor

- Comments not being entered
  - Applicant is responsible for heat but a direct check is selected for payment. Reason? No Vendor in the area? Account is in the landlords name? Wood Client?

  - Upfront was sent to Vendor

  - Address discrepancy due to 911 change

Common Errors

- Applicant moves and changes vendors between Program Years; however, the prior year application is not updated nor is a benefit return completed

- Comment left on Application stating client is deceased or has moved out of state but a benefit return is not being completed

- Not Verifying the Address after completing a Change of Address

  Address status is not Approved or Verified

Questions

Home Energy Assistance Program-
Comments in HEAP Cloud

Comments in HEAP Cloud

Application - ⬛⬛⬛ **- Application pending**

⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛ ✕

Application Info | Benefits | History

▼ Comments

Comment

Your Comment Here

Save Comment | **Show Comments History**

Purpose of the comment section in HEAP Cloud:

- **Capture information requires further explanation or clarification**

- **Represent the situation and be clear to anyone reviewing**

- **Returning client? Review the Comment History to get an overall understanding of the Applicant's past situation, and how it may (or may not) be relevant to the new Program Year**

Freedom of Access Act

Freedom of Access Act

- Ensures the accountability of the government to the citizens of the State.

- Potentially all correspondence of an agency and/or public official could be considered a public record.

NEVER SAY SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE LOCAL PAPER.

- TIP O'NEILL -

Comments in HEAP Cloud

Comment

Potentially all correspondence of an agency could be considered a public record. It is important to remember this when typing an email, leaving a voicemail or makings notes or comments that the public might see. Personal matters and negative comments are best left outside the workplace.

Comments in HEAP Cloud

CAAs should exercise reasonable judgement when entering comments in HEAP Cloud. In the following slides we will review comments that reveal too much personal information, are inappropriate, and could be considered offensive. These comments should have been left off the application or written in a more appropriate fashion. Please know that this is a sensitive and a very important topic.

Comments in HEAP Cloud

Comment

▬ has AIDs- don't schedule in person appointment

Comment

Client has been recommended to apply for SSDI for ▬ as he is on the autism spectrurm.

Comment

Applicant seems retarded but didn't ask

Comment

Stupid- can't read or write

Comment

▬ died of covid RIP

- Applicant has disability/is a person with a disability

- Applicant is now deceased

Comments in HEAP Cloud

Not prepared at all. didn't know SSI numbers Account numbers.

what can I say. Down right nasty. We may not get his letter from SSI he argued that he doesn't get one. And he gave it to us in the same breathe.

Sounds like a women but really a man

➢ **Client's pronouns are he/him**

is trans going through sex change

➢ **Mary now identifies as male**

"It's not what you say, It's how you say it."

- **Is the comment relevant to the HEAP application?**

- **If the applicant read this, how would they feel?**

- **Is there a better way to convey the information?**

❖**Think about how you would feel if someone wrote such things about you**

STOP

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Comments in HEAP Cloud

Guidelines for Appropriate Comments

- It isn't about being "right"; it's about being respectful & considerate.

- Avoid language that may marginalize or offend a particular group of people.

- Demonstrate understanding that all applicants deserve the same service regardless of disability, race, culture, religion, gender, or sexual orientation

Your words have power. Use them wisely.

Just a friendly reminder...

- When you write a comment in HEAP Cloud you are not only representing the Applicant, but yourself, the Agency you work for, MaineHousing, and the HEAP Program.

- If you're unsure how to write up a situation, type it in Word and give to a co-worker or manager to review.

- Comments should be clear, accurate, and summarize the situation in order for anyone who reviews the application to understand the circumstance. This is a timesaver for both the CAA & MaineHousing with client inquiries.

DIRTY LAUNDRY GOES HERE

NOT HERE

- **Comments may be reviewed for a Fair Hearing, Fraud Investigation or Audit.**

- **When writing in HEAP Cloud you are creating a record that could be requested by:**

    1. **The applicant or their attorney**
    2. **Law Enforcement**
    3. **A regulatory agency**

- ❖ **These types of requests <u>do happen</u>, and when they do, MaineHousing is obliged to give them what they ask for**

"The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."
— Mark Twain

Questions

BREAK

SECTION 30:
APPLICATION CHANGES
(Shannon Muise- YCCAC)

SECTION 31:
CHANGE OF VENDOR (BENEFIT RETURN)
(Heather Fasulo- TOA)

SECTION 32: CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR CHANGE OF PRODUCT

(Mercedes Knowles- MaineHousing)

SECTION 33:
EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION UPDATE SITUATIONS
(Laura James & Zach O'Ben- MaineHousing)

Knowledge Check

LUNCH

Questions and Answers
&
Open Discussion
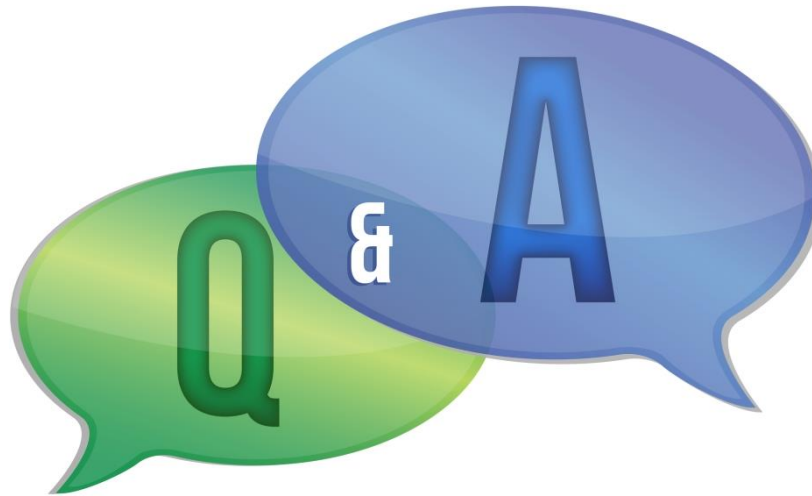
Question/Situation #1

Please go over the differences between rent-controlled properties, subsidized housing and LIHTC. How can we easily determine which it is?

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

Reference applicable chart in Handbook. In this type of situation, it is important to determine if the Household receives a subsidy. Rent controlled and LIHTC properties don't necessarily receive a subsidy. Consult with your Manager and reach out through the liheap@mainehousing.org email if additional assistance is needed.

Question/Situation #2

Two separate households on one property. One lives in a house and the other lives in an outbuilding. The outbuilding had a wood stove, electricity was shared with the main home. Second client uses the bathroom in the home. Is the 2nd client eligible for a separate benefit? Is this one household, or a roomer/boarder? How do we proceed?

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

Need more details- situation/agreement between households, kitchen in outbuilding, eligible dwelling for outbuilding, etc.?

Question/Situation #3

There is a 3 unit house. Wife and ex-husband both live in the home but separate floors. However, they still file taxes together and they are self-employed. Wife is the only one that applies. She claims that the ex-husband receives all the rental income that is included in their joint tax return. How should we proceed?

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

Is this really a house, or a multi-unit building? Are these separate floors or units? Should the ex-husband be included on the application? If they file taxes together with the rental income shown on the return, the income is part of what would be considered for her program eligibility.

Question/Situation #4

Client applies in December. Student is home from college but will be returning to at the end of winter break. Do we include the student in the household? (Assume client is not working).

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

If the college student resides in the unit on the date of application, the Applicant decides if college student is included/excluded on application per Handbook.

Question/Situation #5

How do we calculate income from Canadian pensions? All we see is the deposited US amount on their bank statement and/or the year end pension statement in Canadian dollars. How do you get them to match or see if it is gross or net?

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

Research exchange rates to determine if what is deposited matches up with the statement. Use site such as www.exchangerates.org How have CAAs handled this type of situation in the past?

Question/Situation #6

Please go over S Corps and what we need to look for on taxes.

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

MaineHousing is working to develop a module for Bridge to cover this topic.

Question/Situation #7

How do we process an application where one of the household members was already listed on a previous application that had already been certified in the program year? (Ex. Daughter was listed on app in August but moved out in December and applied with their roommates in January).

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

Need clarification with this situation. We would need specific App. ID in order to assess the situation.

Question/Situation #8

Client living in a home that they do not own but they don't rent it either (ex. Deceased parent's home). Do we process as rent or own?

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

Need more details for each specific situation.

Question/Situation #9

How are medical deductions determined?

RESPONSE/DISCUSSION-

See Section 12.B.2 of HEAP Handbook-

If a Household is ineligible due to being over income, the CAA will deduct eligible medical expenses from the Household's gross income in an amount only enough to make the Household income eligible. A medical expense will be considered eligible if:

i. It was not reimbursed by insurance;

ii. Applicant made the payment within the one month or 30-day income verification period for monthly income OR the 12-month period prior to the Date of Application for annual income; and

iii. It is allowable under IRS Publication 502 (ex. hospital and doctor bills, medical and dental insurance premiums, prescriptions, and the cost of transportation to and from medical appointments).

Question/Situation #9

Example for a Household of 3:

Household's Gross Income-Monthly :	$4,731.50
Household's Gross Income-Annually :	$56,778.00
FPL Income limit for HH of 3 in HEAP Cloud:	$52,778.00 Annually
Over Income By:	$4,000.00 Annually **OR** $333.33 Monthly

Household must provide either:

- $4,000.00 in paid medical expenses for the 12-month period prior to the Date of Application; **OR**
- $333.33 in paid medical expenses for the income verification period (one month or 30-days).

EQUAL HOUSING
OPPORTUNITY

Maine State Housing Authority ("MaineHousing") does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identify or expression, marital status, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, age, familial status or receipt of public assistance in the admission or access to or treatment in its programs and activities. In employment, MaineHousing does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identify or expression, national origin, ancestry, age, physical or mental disability or genetic information. MaineHousing will provide appropriate communication auxiliary aids and services upon sufficient notice. MaineHousing will also provide this document in alternative formats upon sufficient notice. MaineHousing has designated the following person responsible for coordinating compliance with applicable federal and state nondiscrimination requirements and addressing grievances: Lauren Bustard, Maine State Housing Authority, 26 Edison Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330-6046, Telephone Number 1-800-452-4668 (voice in state only). (207) 626-4600 (voice) or Maine Relay 711.