

HB 2219: Consolidating Eligibility Intake

Oregonians who need some help are jumping through hoops – and the same hoops again – in order to receive the services that they need. Most low-income Oregonians in need of services are eligible for multiple types of assistance such as:

SNAP, WIC, OHP, Employment Related Day Care, Low Income Home Energy Assistance, Energy Assistance, Weatherization Assistance, Job Training, Employment Services, Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors, School Based Breakfast and Lunch, State Children's Health Insurance, Oregon Summer Food Service, or Unemployment Insurance.

There are Oregonians receiving more than one type of help, and many times, they've filled out separate forms to start the process for each. Within just the Department of Human Services, more than half of adults are participants in 2 or more programs. When it comes to kids, less than a quarter receive only one program.

Here are examples of some of the forms that we've found (*show folder*). One is 27 pages long, including instructions, questions, and attesting to truthfulness. We see lots of the same questions on each of these:

name, address, social security number, birthdate, sex, email address, phone number, race, ethnicity, information on each member of your household, monthly rent and utilities, all income sources and employment and other benefits for each member of the household. And questions like whether anyone in the household pregnant, is in school, and on and on.

There should be an easier way for Oregonians to apply for all of the services they are eligible for. HB 2219 directs the Department of Human Services to convene a work group, along with other agencies covering housing, employment, education, and child care – and the state's Chief Information Officer, to study how to create a consolidated application process to apply for and obtain assistance. Of course each program will need to review the application since eligibility criteria may be different, or they may need to ask an additional question or two. Some other states *have* been able to achieve this simplification – like Pennsylvania, and Washington. And there are a few examples of local agencies achieving some simplification, like a single application for more than one local program. After an initial assessment, a provider may ask a few additional questions but not start from scratch.

There's also the use of pre-emptive eligibility. That means if you've already qualified for one program, and data has already been verified, then you qualify for this one, too. The federal government even allows pre-emptive eligibility for certain programs, like energy assistance. Scarce resources can be moved from intake to direct services and case management.

The alternative is what people go through now: repeating their name, address, family, employment, housing cost, and other information over and over again. For an awful lot of people, their name and birth date is the same as it was yesterday and last week and last month; their address, their children, income sources.

A consolidated application will help both Oregonians applying for assistance, and the agencies and organizations that are working to help them. We should spend more time helping people and less time filling out forms.

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A single mother working multiple jobs to make ends meet will no longer have to spend hours filling out redundant forms for multiple agencies to receive the benefits that she and her children need and deserve.

The agencies that help her will no longer each have to spend time and money having employees individually audit the information that she submitted, repeating one another's work.

Other states have succeeded in making this idea – simplification - work. Pennsylvania has an award winning¹ online application process called Compass that allows individuals to submit and track their application all in one place. Instead of filling out multiple forms an individual can apply for: health care coverage including medical assistance, children's health insurance, and medical assistance for workers with disabilities; SNAP, Cash Assistance, Long Term Care, Home and Community Based Services for individuals with Intellectual Disabilities, Low Income Home Energy Assistance, Free and Reduced Price School Meals, and Child Care – all at once, all in one place.

Oregon can make consolidated application process work as well. I hope you'll support this effort to start the conversation.

¹ First Place in the State General Government category in Center for Digital Government's 2003 Best of Web competition.