



MHBE

Small Business Programs Advisory Committee

June 28, 2023

1:00PM – 3:00PM

Online Via Google Meets

Members Present:

Jon Frank, Co-Chair
Lane Levine, Co-Chair
Brandon Burbage
Rob Cohen
Cindy Hipwell
Daniel Koroma
Richard Hughen
Rick Weldon
Ileana Gonzalez
Glenn Arrington
Alvin Helfenbein
Robert Poli

Mark Khatib
Sandy Walters

Staff

Theresa Battaglia
Johanna Fabian-Marks
Makeda (Mimi) Hailegeberel
Amelia Marcus
Rita Dyer
Betsy Plunkett

Members of the Public

Allison Mangiaracino

Welcome, Agenda, and Meeting Minutes

Jon Frank, Co-Chair, and Lane Levine, Co-Chair, opened the meeting. Mr. Frank encouraged Committee members to provide written comments for meeting minutes.

Mr. Frank presented the meeting minutes from the Committee's April 26 meeting for feedback and approval. Rob Cohen moved to approve the minutes as presented, and Rick Weldon seconded. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

Broker Awards Recap

Makeda Hailegeberel, Small Business Programs Manager at the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE), shared highlights from the first annual Broker Achievement Awards that the MHBE held on June 8. Detailed slides are available in the presentation for this meeting. She characterized the event as a huge success and an opportunity for the MHBE to thank the state's brokers, who go above and beyond for the agency. She noted that Governor Moore delivered a message for the event. Mr. Frank agreed that the event was a success and stated that he had heard feedback from brokers who expressed appreciation for the recognition.

Small Business Outreach Updates

Theresa Battaglia, Small Business Outreach Manager at the MHBE, presented a progress update on her small business outreach efforts. A detailed slide is available in

the presentation for this meeting. She noted that she recently attended the B'more BOLD business conference to promote the MHBE's small business offerings among small businesses and state agencies. She expressed looking forward to partnerships with the Maryland Department of Commerce's Business Development Regional Team; MarylandSaves (an organization dedicated to setting up retirement plans for small businesses); and Expanding Opportunities magazine, in which a published article will communicate successes small businesses have had through Maryland Health Connection (MHC) for Small Business.

Mr. Frank asked what size of businesses will be profiled in the article in Expanding Opportunities Magazine. Ms. Battaglia replied that she could reach out to the magazine to check and report back. Ms. Hailegeberel remarked on the engagement she has witnessed from small businesses at events that Ms. Battaglia has coordinated, noting that small business owners often offer insightful feedback.

Small Business Program Updates

Next, Ms. Hailegeberel provided an update on an idea raised in a previous Committee meeting by member Eugene Poole: his proposal was that the MHBE should collaborate with federal and state contract issuers to advocate for a requirement that contractors offer health insurance for their employees or provide incentives for contractors to do so. She stated that the idea has merit but that the MHBE must carefully evaluate the feasibility of implementing changes in federal requests for proposal (RFPs), which may fall beyond the MHBE's scope. Ms. Hailegeberel noted that MHBE staff have begun conversations with the MHBE's chief financial officer to determine how this change could be implemented in the MHBE's own RFPs. She added that she will provide the Committee with updates that arise.

MHC for Small Business Enrollment Platform

Ms. Hailegeberel then presented on the MHC for Small Business enrollment platform. Detailed slides are available in the presentation for this meeting. Brandon Burbage asked if the platform will allow companies to pay their bill through the platform or if they will still be required to have multiple billing partners. Ms. Hailegeberel answered that the MHBE will partner with a billing aggregation vendor that will allow bills to be paid through the platform.

Ms. Hailegeberel gave an overview of the capabilities of the current MHC for Small Business platform, noting that under the current process, groups complete the appropriate forms and deliver them directly to carriers, with groups highly encouraged to seek assistance from brokers and TPAs. Mr. Frank asked for confirmation that the process is currently done using paper forms, while Ms. Hailegeberel is presenting an online solution that will eliminate paper forms. Ms. Hailegeberel replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Hailegeberel continued her presentation, stating that the current portal allows employers and brokers to create an account and receive quotes. The portal does not currently facilitate enrollment, instead it provides information. Employers can register

their business and search for MHBE-authorized brokers by name, company National Producer Number, or ZIP code. The platform then allows them to select and confirm a broker.

Next, Ms. Hailegeberel shared information on the eligibility determination tool. Approved groups will receive an approval within minutes, while those who are not approved will be informed why they are ineligible. Mr. Frank asked if a broker may initiate the eligibility determination process or if only an employer can, expressing concern that some brokers may complete the process for their small group clients who are not ready. Ms. Hailegeberel answered that, currently, only the employer may initiate the eligibility determination process, although brokers are notified of whether their clients are approved or denied.

Mr. Frank asked why an employer might be denied. Ms. Hailegeberel responded that reasons include failing to meet minimum participation requirements, being located outside of Maryland, or having more than 50 employees. Johanna Fabian-Marks, Director of Policy and Plan Management at the MHBE, added that the eligibility determination tool consists of four yes-or-no questions, and an answer of “no” to any results in a denial.

Ms. Hailegeberel showed a sample approval letter an eligible group might receive. She then shared details on the process of receiving a quote through the current MHC for Small Business portal. She noted that there are multiple ways to complete the form to receive a quote and that employers can edit previously submitted forms to receive updated quotes.

Mr. Frank asked where an employer can choose between an employer- and an employee-choice model, noting that the amount of information required for each respective model varies greatly. Ms. Hailegeberel answered that the current platform does not contain this functionality but that it will be available in the future, with an employer able to select multiple carriers. She added that, on the current platform, a broker would need to work with the multiple carriers directly to enroll employees, providing them with all the necessary forms. Mr. Frank asked for confirmation that this process currently must be completed manually. Ms. Hailegeberel replied in the affirmative but noted that the MHBE seeks to automate it.

Daniel Koroma asked if there is a comparison tool that can be used prior to plans being chosen. Ms. Hailegeberel explained that the quote tool allows for comparison of plans and carriers but that this must ultimately be done by a broker.

Glenn Arrington asked how employers and brokers will know that they meet the minimum participation requirement in a case where employees are enrolling with multiple respective carriers. Ms. Hailegeberel responded that the MHBE is not directly involved in that process at present but that anyone with a valid waiver does not count against the minimum participation requirement. She explained that the verification process currently lies with the carriers, adding that some carriers ask for proof that any

non-participating enrollees are enrolled with another carrier, but noted that the MHBE will be responsible for verification in the future.

Mr. Arrington asked if all applications would be sent to each carrier, along with details on employee waivers, resulting in extraneous paperwork for the carriers. Ms. Hailegeberel replied in the negative with regards to the future process because enrollment will take place electronically. Mr. Arrington clarified that his question referred to the process that will be used in the interim. Mr. Frank responded that the existing process will continue until enrollment is transitioned to the electronic platform.

Mr. Frank noted that the need for employers to coordinate with all of the selected carriers if they want to offer an employee choice model is a major barrier. He stated that the MHBE should consider how to collect and redistribute data to the carriers that is accurate to the quotes employers were shown.

Mr. Burbage noted that the change to electronic enrollment will make the process similar to the Washington, D.C. exchange in that the MHBE will be responsible for ensuring minimum participation thresholds are met. He noted that this process will be much easier than the current one because it shifts that responsibility away from the small group themselves and their broker. Ms. Hailegeberel confirmed this is correct. She stated that the MHBE is in the early stages of planning this transition and will continue to provide updates.

The Committee tabled the remainder of the discussion on the discussion regarding enrollment functionality on MHC for Small Business until their next meeting. Referring to the project timeline shown, Mr. Frank noted that carrier integration and testing is not scheduled until June 2024, meaning that the employer choice model will be the focus in the short term. He noted that the employee choice model is unique to MHC but that the lack of carrier integration and automation make it hard to manage.

MHBE Employer & Employee Education

Ms. Hailegeberel then moved into a discussion on outreach and education efforts. Detailed slides are available in the presentation for this meeting. She described the target audience for these efforts as including small businesses of any size not currently offering health insurance to their employees: sole proprietors, microenterprises, non-profit organizations, and family-owned businesses. Within these businesses, educational materials will target owners, human resources (HR) personnel, key stakeholders, and employees. Mr. Frank commented that very small businesses are unlikely to have HR personnel, nor would owners feel comfortable managing health insurance for their employees independently. He stated that very small businesses, such as sole proprietorships and startups, may be the most receptive to outreach efforts. Ms. Hailegeberel agreed and clarified that HR personnel should be targeted at businesses where those positions exist.

Mr. Frank explained that the payroll vendors through which many small businesses administer benefits may offer an avenue for conversions to enrollment. He stated that

companies with HR personnel are likely to be offering benefits already and that there is little reason to seek enrollment from these businesses since the goal is to reach the uninsured. Sandy Walters agreed that larger groups likely already have their own HR departments and know how to offer health insurance benefits.

Mr. Koroma asked whether gig workers would be considered sole proprietors or microenterprises. Mr. Frank responded that they would likely be considered sole proprietors. He commented that a sole proprietor or microenterprise may move directly from learning about health insurance to sending their employees to MHC immediately because nothing is stopping them from signing up; many may qualify for significant subsidies.

Mr. Koroma pointed out that people kickstarting their business without knowing how fast it will grow represent another important situation to consider: it may benefit that growth to offer health insurance, complicating the decision to send employees to the individual market rather than the small group market. Mr. Frank responded that this is a good scenario for a business because, if they have a small enough group to qualify at the beginning, they can add employees and coverage without effects on the effective date. He also noted that they may eventually exceed the maximum number of employees for the small group market and need to move to the large group market. He stated, however, that a sole proprietor may be best served on the individual market.

Ms. Hailegeberel continued, reviewing the contents of a proposed employer guide that would cover small business health insurance concepts and terminology; the MHC for Small Business platform; the options available for employers through MHC and the factors they should consider when evaluating plans; information that employers need to know when offering their employees coverage; details on maintaining compliance; and information on resources and support, including an emphasis on utilizing brokers.

Mr. Frank asked who will create the content for this guide, highlighting the importance of the details. He also asked about the development timeframe for the guide. Ms. Hailegeberel explained that the content will be developed by the MHBE's internal Training Team, which develops trainings for brokers, call center employees, and navigators. She added that she will begin meeting with the team later this summer and will provide them with the Committee's feedback on the guide.

Mr. Levine asked if this material is meant to be used exclusively as a paper guide or if it will be used in a training presentation. Ms. Hailegeberel answered that it will be used as content for trainings and noted that brokers will likely share the material with employers and employees, along with their own materials. Ms. Fabian-Marks emphasized that MHBE staff seek feedback on the ideal format for delivery of this content.

Mr. Frank stated that the guide could be a paper document that employers could peruse at their leisure but that many small business owners would not be motivated to absorb the information. He suggested brokers could be required to complete a training before delivering the material to small businesses. Mr. Levine agreed that many employers

would not want to absorb the information independently. He suggested that a mock training could be run for employers and/or employees during a Committee meeting to assess their retention of the material. Mr. Frank agreed, characterizing the assessment of employees' understanding as crucial to reducing the state's uninsured population.

Mr. Koroma affirmed the value of feedback from focus groups. He commented that the focus group feedback his organization received during a recent update to their website indicated that consumers appreciate the use of infographics due to the ease with which they can be understood and their shareability between devices. Mr. Arrington suggested that a video could be created explaining the material, noting that this format may benefit visual learners. He stated that brokers could be involved in the video's development. Ms. Hailegeberel asked if Mr. Koroma can share an example of the infographics used on his organization's website. Mr. Koroma replied that the materials are still in development but that he can share them when they are made public.

Ms. Hailegeberel continued her presentation, moving onto a discussion of the proposed employee guide: the guide is similar to the employer guide, with both guides introducing health insurance concepts and terminology, the MHC for Small Business platform, and the plan options available on the platform. However, the "need-to-know" items that the guide communicates to employees differ from the corresponding items for employers, focusing more heavily on understanding their plan's coverage and benefits than on the logistics of offering a plan. Ms. Hailegeberel emphasized that the employee guide can be tailored to focus exclusively on the plan options their employer has made available.

Mr. Walters suggested that the types of plans be included in the "Understanding Coverage and Benefits" section as well as in the "Introduction to Health Insurance" section. Mr. Frank asked whether Mr. Walters has encountered a situation where the employer does not want employees to be educated on other types of plans besides the type that they have made available to their employees. Mr. Walters responded in the affirmative. Mr. Frank stated that the employee guide should be tailored to the type of plan the employer has chosen to offer their employees. He added that the breadth of the guide may increase depending on the employer's selection given that the employee choice model presents employees with many more options than the employer choice model. Mr. Arrington commented that there should be a link to reach brokers for support built into the material.

Ms. Hailegeberel continued, describing the curriculum aimed at helping employees understand the enrollment process; she highlighted the inclusion of information on certificates of coverage, which addresses a point brought up at the previous meeting. She added that the employee guide will direct employees on how to contact the relevant division at their carrier and MHC customer service.

Ms. Hailegeberel concluded her presentation by listing the training materials that the MHBE seeks to produce: a broker-guided in-person training, video modules, and guides in electronic and printed form. Employers and employees who complete the training will receive a certificate of completion, and the employer will receive an electronic badge

recognizing their completion of the training. She noted that the delivery method is up for discussion.

Discussion

Mr. Frank expressed doubt about the value of a certificate of completion for employees, stating that the value they receive is not the training itself but the receipt of coverage. He acknowledged that the certificate would confer important recognition on an employer, however. Mr. Arrington agreed regarding the certificate of completion for employees and commented that the training may fail to attract employers and may instead overwhelm them. Mr. Frank pointed out that certifying employers' completion of the training shows that employers value insurance for their employees, even for employers who do not choose to offer health insurance. Mark Khatib agreed with the points that had been made and emphasized that requiring training may introduce undue complexity that could be a hindrance. He stated that training should be voluntary, noting that most groups lean on their brokers to be certified.

Mr. Levine pointed out that the employer certification allows employers to achieve recognition by potential new hires and industry colleagues, noting that he advertises his business's provision of health insurance in job postings. He argued that employers who do not offer health insurance can still include the certification in their communications as a sign that they value health insurance for their employees. Mr. Koroma characterized this as the value proposition for employers to gain the certification.

Mr. Koroma asked if the certification for employers would be the same certification that brokers receive, commenting that the employer certification should be different because employers do not need the intensive knowledge that brokers do. Ms. Hailegeberel answered that the employer certification could be different. Mr. Frank noted that broker training may include the additional skill of presenting to small groups on the options available. Mr. Walters asked if adding a certification will be an additional hurdle to brokers or to small businesses offering their employees' health insurance. Mr. Frank replied that the training may be best used by connector entities (CEs). He also pointed out the need to keep the information unbiased.

Mr. Arrington agreed that the training should be voluntary. He acknowledged the value of recognition but cautioned that calling the training a certification may lead some to the erroneous assumption that employers with the certification can take the place of a broker. Mr. Frank clarified that he was not thinking of the employer being certified and agreed that certification should be reserved for brokers.

Ms. Hailegeberel began presenting a series of discussion questions, which are included in full in the presentation for this meeting. She first asked if the curriculum presented would help employers understand and obtain coverage for their employees and asked the small business owners on the Committee what other materials would be helpful. Mr. Weldon answered that the materials are headed in the right direction. Mr. Frank agreed and commented that further refinement is needed but that the Committee is moving

toward the ideas set forth in the Small Business and Nonprofit Health Insurance Subsidies Workgroup.

Mr. Frank asked the Committee for any additional criteria for the target audience of this outreach. Mr. Arrington pointed out that most brokers must shop for insurance for themselves, and many are also small business owners. He added that the target audience should be “micro-groups” who do not employ HR staff. He stated that the value of the information should be presented at the forefront of outreach efforts in order to stimulate buy-in. Mr. Koroma suggested holding focus groups to get direct feedback from the intended audience.

Ms. Hailegeberel asked if there are other delivery methods that could be useful for presenting the curriculum. Mr. Arrington replied that an announcement on all major social media platforms should accompany the release of this curriculum, as well as an in-person event with booths for carriers, vendors, and brokers. Mr. Frank agreed and commented that local chambers of commerce could play a major role in disseminating the curriculum given their long-running advocacy for action in this area and have been underutilized. Mr. Weldon noted that local chambers of commerce are overwhelmingly made up of small businesses, with most member organizations employing less than ten people; he estimated that tens of thousands of employees across the state could be reached through targeted outreach for free using existing communications that local chambers of commerce distribute to their member organizations.

Betsy Plunkett, Director of Marketing and Web Strategies at the MHBE, noted that the MHBE has reached out to the chambers, many CEs became members of local chambers of commerce to spread the word about the MHBE’s programs. She noted that the MHBE will undertake a more complete push for small business marketing after the MHC for Small Business platform is rehailed. She added that Ms. Battaglia will be reaching out to chambers of commerce regarding the MHBE’s small business programs. Mr. Weldon noted that a state organization like the MHBE should not be obligated to join individual chambers of commerce to disseminate information, and he stated that he will take up that issue as the responsibility of his organization, the Maryland Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives.

Ileana Gonzalez asked if the MHBE is using LinkedIn to spread the word about its small business efforts, remarking on the potential the platform holds for engagement. Ms. Plunkett replied in the affirmative, explaining that the MHBE highlighted the Broker Achievement Awards through the platform and expressing the desire to do more advertising there.

Ms. Hailegeberel asked the Committee what steps an employer should have to take to obtain an MHC for Small Business badge showing their support for employees’ health insurance coverage. She also asked if receipt of this badge should be contingent on a broker reporting back to the MHBE on having met with an employer to educate them about health insurance options. Ms. Gonzalez responded in the affirmative, characterizing this as a useful step through which the broker may comment on the

employer's receptivity to the material and the MHBE can tweak the material according to how it is being received. Mr. Walters commented that the information in the educational materials must be clearly communicated, and that the Committee should review the materials before they are dispersed. Ms. Gonzalez and Mr. Frank agreed.

Mr. Koroma asked the employers in the Committee to share their thoughts. Mr. Lane suggested that employers be asked to check the coverage status of each employee after being guided through the educational materials, similar to how employees must certify that they read an employee handbook. He added that language may be added to the business's operating procedures to mandate that new hires will be asked about health insurance. Mr. Arrington commended Mr. Lane's suggestion but noted that health information privacy laws may complicate the collection of information on employees' health insurance statuses.

Ms. Hailegeberel explained that the next meeting will take place on July 26, 2023.

Mr. Frank adjourned the meeting.

Public Comment

None offered.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:44 PM.

Chat Log

00:00:06

Amelia Marcus -MHBE-: Note that this meeting is being recorded

00:05:18

Theresa Battaglia -MHBE-: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8MYaCp6Lpc>

00:05:18

Daniel Koroma: Mimi - you can share the link here

00:05:31

Theresa Battaglia -MHBE-: I just sent it

00:06:00

Daniel Koroma: Thank Theresa!

00:12:28

Theresa Battaglia -MHBE-: Thanks Mimi.

01:05:19

Rita Dyer -MHBE-: we have an outstanding ticket for tango simplification

01:09:31

Rick Weldon: As far as partners, we should be looking to the MD local & county Chamber network, the county subsidized business incubators, the Main Street programs, the Rural MD Council and the military/business councils.

01:17:15

Betsy Plunkett -MHBE-: Thanks, Rick. We partner with some of these, and will look into the others.

01:18:57

Rick Weldon: Betsy- Let me know if you need help making any of the connections. Most of these entities work specifically very microenterprises, startups and sole proprietors.

01:19:32

Betsy Plunkett -MHBE-: Great! Thanks.

01:30:57

Glenn Arrington: Are you meaning like Seedco in our area?

01:32:35

Glenn Arrington: So the chamber members need to including the broker invites so we should make sure those folks are aware of the events

01:33:42

Rick Weldon: Glenn- I would ONLY involve my Chamber in this if I had all of my broker members a part of the conversation. I'll share that with my counterparts as a "best practice"

01:35:11

Glenn Arrington: That is great as an active member with Harford and Cecil that is awesome!