



*In the Community to Serve®*

**CARES Advisory Group Meeting Agenda**  
**July 16, 2025 2:00 – 3:00pm Pacific**

<b>Advisory Group Member</b>	
Blue Mountain Action Council (BMAC)	Sylvia Schaefer
Benton-Franklin Community Action Connections (CAC)	Dalia Ochoa
Community Action of Lewis, Mason, & Thurston Counties (CACLMT)	Ester Castro, Stephenie Arnold
Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP)	Debbie Gregg
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council (CDCAC)	Tom Bonwell, Sarah Brito, Alan Walker
Kitsap Community Resources (KCR)	Kandi Balandran
Lower Columbia Community Action Center (LCCAP)	Kathy Bates
NW Community Action Center (NCAC)	Jose Alvarez
OIC of Washington (OIC)	Heidi Silva, Casandra Ochoa, Candi Jaeger
Opportunity Council (OPPCO)	Marie Stanley, Melissa Gong
Community Action of Skagit County (SCCAA)	Misty Velasquez
Snohomish County Human Services Dept (SCEAP)	Constance Hockett, Traci Baugh
WUTC Staff	Andrew Roberts, Andy Sellards, Corey Cook, Jacque Hawkins-Jones, Keith Quinata, Sylvana Sorrells
The Energy Project	Shaylee Stokes
Public Counsel	Kai Hiatt
NW Energy Coalition	Charlee Thompson
Department of Commerce	Michelle DeBell
<b>Cascade Natural Gas</b>	
Dan Tillis, Dir Customer Experience	Lori Blattner, Dir Regulatory Affairs
Teri Sovak, Mgr Customer Service, Credit & Collections	Noemi Ortiz, Mgr OR Conservation & Weatherization
Shannon Steed, Consumer Specialist	Jennifer Gross, Mgr Regulatory Affairs
Rodney Fowler, Business Analyst	

1. Follow up item postponed from June meeting
  - a. LIHEAP calculation method (Shay)
2. CARES Enrollment Numbers update
3. Inspire Development Centers partnership
4. Open Discussion

**Meeting notes:**

- **Decline in CARES Enrollments:** Rodney Fowler from CNGC discussed the decline in CARES enrollments from May to June. During this time, enrollments went from 17,413 to 17,266, resulting in a net change of 147 enrollments. 61% of disenrollments are due to account closures. Of the remaining 39%, many are temporarily disenrolled due to LIHEAP grants, and these will be re-enrolled once the credit balance is used up.

Rodney mentioned that no current data supports this trend but plans to enhance future reporting to include this information. He also aims to develop a dashboard for tracking enrollments and disenrollments.

- **LIHEAP Calculation Method:** Shaylee Stokes discussed the LIHEAP calculation method, explaining the mismatch between using discounted billing history to determine the LIHEAP grant amount and then the application of the grant on non-discounted bills. She proposed two solutions and recommended calculating LIHEAP based on the actual billing history, which will usually be a discounted bill for repeat CARES customers, and not pausing the CARES discount when the LIHEAP credit is applied. Shaylee requested that this change be implemented with the start of the new program year. Jennifer Gross from CNGC said Cascade would need to discuss this change internally to determine if the October 1<sup>st</sup> date would work. The change will require revised system programming, revised customer communications, and a tariff filing. If the timing is sufficient, Cascade's next step will be to provide the CARES Advisory Group with a draft tariff filing.
- **Inspire Development Centers Partnership:** Noemi Ortiz from CNGC presented the partnership CNGC has developed with Inspire Development Centers (Inspire) for enrollment of Inspire clients into the CARES program. She explained the application process and the eligibility criteria, highlighting the centers' role in verifying income and enrolling families.
- **Public Charge Rule Concerns:** Noemi notified the group that Inspire alerted the Company to their clients' concerns with the public charge rule, which disallows a person on the path for citizenship to utilize certain cash assistance funds. She reassured the group that the CARES program is not considered a public charge benefit and discussed the importance of addressing barriers that may prevent individuals from applying for services. Noemi mentioned plans to add reassuring language to the website to provide Peace of Mind to individuals concerned about the public charge rule.
- **Confidentiality and Data Sharing:** Cascade was asked if it would refer Inspire's clients to the agencies so the agencies could offer them other programs and services. Noemi mentioned the need to revisit consent language on the application form, which does not currently allow for sharing with the agencies. She also emphasized the need for maintaining confidentiality among the Inspire clients.
- **Future Collaboration:** Shaylee suggested organizing a program sharing or meet-and-greet between agencies and Inspire Development Centers to build direct connections and enhance collaboration.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Dashboard Development:** Develop and implement a dashboard to track monthly CARES enrollments and disenrollments, aiming to share it within the next one or two meetings. (Rodney)
- **LIHEAP Calculation Method:** Discuss internally the proposed change to stop pausing the CARES discount when LIHEAP credit is applied and assess any potential issues with the timeline for implementation by October 1st. (Jennifer)

- **Inspire Development Centers Partnership:** Revisit the consent process with Inspire Development Centers to determine if customer information can be shared with other agencies for additional program referrals. (Noemi, Jennifer)
- **Inspire Development Centers Partnership:** Consider organizing a program sharing or meet-and-greet event between agencies and Inspire Development Centers to build direct connections and relationships. (Noemi)