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Field Operations Memo 2009-18
March 25, 2009

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: The Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on SNAP, TAFDC, EAEDC and EA

Overview

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA, also known as the Economic Stimulus Package) was recently signed into law. It contains a provision that increases maximum SNAP benefit levels by 13.6 percent. The minimum benefit level for eligible one- and two-person households has also increased.

Note: All other eligibility factors for SNAP remain unchanged. For example, the Standard Deduction, the Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs) and the gross and net income standards remain the same.

The ARRA also provides for a one-time payment of \$250 to persons who receive SSI, RSDI, federal veterans benefits, or Railroad Retirement benefits and for an increase of \$25 per week to persons who receive unemployment benefits.

A full SNAP COLA is not likely to occur for several years since the benefit levels were significantly increased as part of ARRA. A partial COLA that includes an adjustment of the Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs) and the shelter deduction may occur in October, 2009.

Purpose of Memo

This memo discusses:

- the increase in SNAP benefits;
 - the automatic update of SNAP households
 - closed SNAP households

Purpose of Memo (Continued)

- notification
 - state letter and mass.gov updates
 - clients formerly certified at zero benefit
 - the one-time payment of \$250 to recipients of SSI, RSDI, federal veterans benefits and Railroad Retirement benefits;
 - the temporary increase in unemployment benefits; and
 - other considerations.
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Automatic Update of SNAP Households

Effective April 1, 2009, the maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes will increase. (See Attachment A). The minimum SNAP benefit level for categorically eligible one- and two-person households will increase from \$14 to \$16.

All active SNAP cases, including Bay State CAP and TBA cases were automatically recalculated as of the close of business on 3/20/09, using the increased standards. These benefits will be automatically authorized. The newly calculated benefit amount will be displayed on the Active by Grantee Name view, under Assistance Unit Lists.

Closed SNAP Households

Closed SNAP households, including Bay State CAP households, owed additional benefits for the April 1, 2009 increase will be issued benefits. These closed households will:

- have benefits dated and issued in mid-April 2009;
- be listed on the Closed/Denied Within the Last Two Months view under Assistance Unit Lists.

Note: In mid-April the “Last Paid” date and “Benefit” amount column on this view will identify which households received a prorated SNAP benefit amount for the period between April 1, 2009 and the household’s cyclical start date for April.

Notification

DTA will inform clients of the SNAP benefit increase through a planned press release, an update on the mass.gov website, newspaper advertisements and informational posters placed in TAOs and the offices of our community partners. Individual client notices will not be sent.

In addition, starting the week of March 23, 2009, the annual School Breakfast mailing will include a generic enclosure (Attachment B) that will inform clients of the SNAP benefit increase. The annual School Breakfast mailing goes to certain TAFDC and SNAP households with school-aged children.

**State Letter
and mass.gov
Updates**

A State Letter implementing changes related to ARRA will be issued.

The Issuance Tables on the mass.gov website will be updated on or before April 1, 2009 to reflect the SNAP benefit changes. The Maximum Allotment table and the Minimum Benefit Level figure will also be posted on mass.gov on or before April 1, 2009.

**Clients Formerly
Certified at
Zero Benefits**

After the implementation of the ARRA increase, certain categorically eligible households who were formerly certified at zero will now receive a SNAP benefit in their EBT accounts. These households (approximately 500) will be mailed a notice (Attachment C) informing them of the new benefit amount and of the mailing of an EBT card and PIN to access these benefits.

**One-time
Payments to
Recipients of
SSI, RSDI,
Veterans and
Railroad
Retirement
Benefits**

A one-time payment of \$250 will be issued to recipients of SSI, RSDI, federal veterans benefits and Railroad Retirement benefits.

The one time payment is noncountable income for TAFDC, EAEDC, EA and SNAP. Checks for this one-time payment will be paid separately from monthly benefit checks. Accordingly, this payment information will not populate the Other Income window in BEACON since it will not be available through the SDX or BENDEX interfaces.

For TAFDC, EAEDC and EA this payment is a noncountable asset for the month in which it was received and the following nine months.

**Temporary
Increase of
Unemployment
Benefits**

Beginning on March 25, 2009, extra unemployment benefits of \$25 per week will be paid through December 31, 2009. The extra \$25 will be paid to persons currently receiving unemployment benefits and persons who are newly approved for unemployment benefits.

Persons approved for unemployment benefits before January 1, 2010 will be grandfathered in and allowed to receive the extra \$25 per week for the duration of their unemployment benefit period but will not be paid the extra \$25 for any claim week beginning after June 30, 2010.

The ARRA-based unemployment benefit increase is retroactive to February 22, 2009. DUA has also advised that retroactive payments for the period between February 22 and March 24 will be issued between March 25 and March 31. For SNAP purposes this retroactive payment will be treated as noncountable income but will be countable as an asset in the month of

**Temporary
Increase of
Unemployment
Benefits
(Continued)**

receipt. Remember, for most SNAP cases, assets are noncountable. For TAFDC and EAEDC and EA purposes, the retroactive payment should be considered a lump sum according to TAFDC, EAEDC and EA regulations at 106 CMR 204. 250, 106 CMR 321.250 and 106 CMR 309.020(E).

The extra \$25 per week will neither show as an independent line item nor be included in the unemployment benefit amount shown on the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen. DUA has advised DTA, however, that any person receiving at least \$1.00 in unemployment benefits will receive the extra \$25 per week.

If using the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen to verify a client's unemployment income, the case manager **must add \$25 to the client's Weekly Pay Rate as displayed on the screen, before entering the amount on BEACON.** This must be done at application, reapplication, reevaluation or recertification unless the client claims that his or her unemployment benefit has ended.

Unemployment benefits, **including the extra \$25 per week, are countable income for TAFDC, EAEDC, EA and SNAP.**

**Other
Considerations**

When calculating shelter expenses for residents of a licensed group home, review the instructions under the **For DTA Use Only** section of the *Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents* form (FS-ACSE). **Remember to use** the new maximum allotment for a household of one which is now \$200.

When calculating the cost of doing business for households containing boarders who are not a part of the SNAP household (see 106 CMR 365.200 (B)), one option is to use the maximum allotment level based on the number of boarders. Be sure to use the new maximum allotment levels.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.

Attachment A

MAXIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS		
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	MAXIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS as of October 1, 2008	MAXIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS as of April 1, 2009
1	\$ 176	\$ 200
2	\$ 323	\$ 367
3	\$ 463	\$ 526
4	\$ 588	\$ 668
5	\$ 698	\$ 793
6	\$ 838	\$ 952
7	\$ 926	\$1,052
8	\$1,058	\$1,202
	Each additional HH member will increase by \$132	Each additional HH member will increase by \$150

**Massachusetts Supplemental
Nutrition Assistance Program
(SNAP)**
(Formerly Food Stamps)



Your SNAP Benefits Are Going Up!

Why are my benefits going up?

- There is a new law called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. You might have heard it called the **Economic Stimulus Package**.
- Because of the law, you get more Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

How can I use the extra benefits?

- Use your extra benefits to **buy food** at your grocery store.

When will I receive the extra benefits?

- You will receive the extra benefits starting in **April 2009**.
- The extra benefits will be part of your monthly allotment and **added automatically** to your EBT card. **You do not have to contact your case manager.**

How much extra will I receive?

- **Look at the table** below to see how much more you may receive each month. For example, if there are 3 people in your household and right now you receive \$250 each month, then in April you would get \$313 each month (\$250 + \$63).
- Remember any changes that occur in your case may affect your benefit amount.

Number of People in Your Household	Increase Up To
1	+ \$24
2	+ \$44
3	+ \$63
4	+ \$80
5	+ \$95
6	+ \$114
7	+ \$126
8	+ \$144
Each extra person	+ \$18

Note: The minimum benefit will be increased from \$14 to \$16. Some households with 1 or 2 people who currently receive the minimum benefit will increase to \$16 a month. Others may receive more, depending on your household income.

- To find out how much money is in your account, call 1-800-997-2555 for your balance.

Will there be a cost-of-living adjustment in October?

- Because of this adjustment no cost-of-living adjustments are expected in the near future. You will receive notification of the next cost-of-living adjustment when it occurs.



Attachment C

{BEACON_USER_STREET_ADDRESS_CAN#}
{BEACON_USER CITY, STATE, ZIP}

Important Notice - Read Carefully
Este Mensaje Es Importante - Lea Cuidadosamente

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

{RECIPIENT_NAME}
{RECIPIENT_ADDRESS}
{RECIPIENT_CITY/TOWN, STATE, ZIP}

{RECIPIENT_SSN}
{BEACON_USER_OFFICE_NAME}

MM/DD/YYYY

Important Notice About Your Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Case (formerly Food Stamps)

Dear {GRANTEE}:

Previously, you received a notice saying that because your countable income was over the limit for your household size, you would not receive SNAP (food stamp) benefits at that time. The notice also said that the Department would keep your case open in case a change in your household's circumstances qualifies you for benefits.

Now, as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, also known as the Economic Stimulus Package, which went into effect on April 1, you are eligible for monthly SNAP benefits in the amount of {BENEFIT_AMOUNT}. Your first month's SNAP benefits and any amount owed to you from April 1, 2009 have been deposited into an EBT account for you.

In a few days, you will receive an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card in the mail to get these SNAP benefits. You will also receive a Personal Identification Number (PIN) in a separate envelope. These mailings might not be received on the same day. This EBT card can be used like an ATM or bank card at most food stores and supermarkets to buy food. You will need your PIN to use the card. If you have an old EBT card, please destroy it when you receive the new EBT card. The new card will cancel out the old card.

If you have any questions, you should call {WORKER_PHONE_NUMBER} and ask for your worker {WORKER_NAME}.

If you have trouble reading or understanding this notice, you may also call Recipient Services toll-free at 1-800-445-6604.