

## From the Hotline

**Q.** A food stamp applicant reported that she is living at her friend's apartment. She has verified her portion of the rent and utilities through cancelled checks. In this situation, do I need to have a completed Shared Housing Verification form (VLA) (Rev. 10/2006) before approving the AU?

**A.** No. The Shared Housing Verification form can be a convenient method of verifying housing and shared living arrangements, but it is not required as the only method of verification. Shared shelter costs can be verified in a variety of ways, including a copy of the applicant's sublet agreement, rent receipts, cancelled checks, or other proof of the applicant's portion of the shelter costs.

**Q.** When a client who is living with a roommate states that she is purchasing and preparing her meals separately from her roommate, is any type of written verification necessary?

**A.** No. Unless you have reason to believe that the information your client is reporting is questionable, it is not necessary for a client to verify that he or she is purchasing and preparing separately from a roommate. The "purchase and prepare" rule only needs to be verified when the information provided by the household is questionable. Remember, however, to put a note on the BEACON Narratives Tab explaining the situation.

In accordance with 106 CMR 361.620, "questionable" information is information that is inconsistent with statements made by the applicant, with other information on the application or previous application, or with other information known to the Department.

### EA - S2H Toolbox Relocation Initiative Clarification

EA

Field Operations Memo 2007-27A

This memo provides clarification that:

- the housing obtained through the S2H initiative is transitional housing that will lead to permanent housing at the end of the 12-month period;
- if the family is unable to maintain the S2H housing or loses the housing through no fault of its own, the family may still be

eligible for EA shelter benefits since the 12-month rule would not apply;

- an S2H payment for rent will not affect the food stamp benefits; any *S2H Toolbox Relocation Initiative* or *Toolbox* payment must be excluded as income; and food stamp benefits are based on the client's portion of the rent; and
- the family is responsible for maintaining its income after placement; they must notify the agency that is providing stabilization services if they begin having financial difficulties.

### Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Fuel Assistance Program Initiative and Clean-Up

FS

Field Operations Memo

2007-31

2007-31A

Food Stamp Program rules at 106 CMR 364.400(G)(2) allow Assistance Units (AUs) receiving or anticipating receipt of Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) fuel assistance payments to have food stamp benefits calculated using the maximum heating/

cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). These AUs are considered to be paying utility expenses even if there is no separate charge for utilities. Receipt of a fuel assistance payment also entitles these AUs to public utility discounts administered through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

For the past year, DTA, DHCD and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute have collaborated to develop and implement a new fuel assistance program. This collaboration resulted in the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

The H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program will provide certain FS AUs with a \$1.00 H-EAT fuel assistance check each year. This is a one-time benefit for 12 months. In July 2007, the first H-EAT fuel assistance payments will be mailed to approximately 39,000 FS AUs. July 2007 FS benefits were recalculated using the heating/cooling SUA for recipients of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

Field Operations Memo 2007-31 identifies H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria, explains the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD, discusses client benefits and describes the DHCD client brochure.

A delay in issuing Field Operations Memo 2007-31, resulted in the Heating/Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) being removed from approximately 600 H-EAT eligible FS AUs, as AU Managers were not informed of this change. Field Operations Memo 2007-31A provides instructions for correcting these AUs so that July 2007 benefits can be increased. In some instances, a supplemental payment for July must be calculated and issued. An FS H-EAT Clean-Up Report identifying the impacted AUs was transmitted along with this memo.

## **Virtual Gateway Enhancements and the Elimination of the Signature Page for Food Stamp Applications**

FS

Field Operations Memo 2007-32

Currently scheduled for July 18, 2007, the Virtual Gateway online food stamp application will be modified to comply with the USDA minimal application requirements of name, address and signature.

It will also be enhanced to allow applicants to submit an electronic signature. This enhancement will streamline the application process and eliminate the need for a Web applicant to sign and return the Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalty Warning (RR/FSP-1B). In addition, the one-page Application For Food Stamp Benefits (For Pure SSI Households) (FSP/SSA-1) has been modified to contain attestation language and eliminate the signature page for SSI applicants. The RR/FSP-1B has also been revised and reissued as a Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties form.

This memo informs TAO staff about:

- the minimum requirements change;
- the electronic signature functionality;
- the revised FSP/SSA-1 form; and
- the revised RR/FSP-1B form.

On July 18, 2007 Central Office will send TAOs an e-mail message to confirm the implementation of the Virtual Gateway changes.

“Try not to be a man of success, but rather to be a man of value.”  
Albert Einstein