

Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

As I write, the COMECC (Commonwealth of Massachusetts Employees Charitable Campaign) is underway. By now you will have received your personalized contribution sheet and the booklet explaining many of the details of COMECC. Quoting from the booklet, "(COMECC) is the one opportunity state employees have to share in the spirit of giving, in order to assist those who might be experiencing hardship or temporary crisis in their lives." But when I look at the list of agencies and organizations which can benefit from a COMECC contribution, I think those who benefit from a gift go beyond those in a crisis situation. The beneficiaries include you, your children, your parents and all the citizens of our Commonwealth.

COMECC gives YOU the ability to decide where your money will go. And the list of possibilities is incredibly long and varied. From health issues, to children, to the elderly, to the environment, to families, to community and social concerns, to animals and wildlife, the range of options is vast. You can select a large, nationally known health-related organization or the community group down the street that helps provide care for an aging relative. You can select a group which you believe is providing a necessary service and where you might like to do some volunteer work but your hectic schedule just doesn't allow the time. You can select several organizations and divide your contribution among them. The most important thing is: you decide.

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From the Forms File

New Forms

13-214-1000-05

RHAPS (10/2000)

Referral for Housing Assistance Program Services

This form is used to refer an EA-eligible family to a Housing Assistance Program (HAP) provider. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2000-30 for more information on the use of this form.

02-752-1000-05

24-EX-AR (10/2000)

Additional Extension Request

Recipients will use the *Additional Extension Request* form to request another extension of their Transitional Assistance benefits after previously receiving an extension of their 24-month time limit. This form can be used if the recipient is currently in an extension. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2000-29 for more information. The Spanish version will be available soon.

Revised Brochures

18-134-1000-05

YRTK-CAM (Rev. 10/2000)

Your Right to Know

02-238-1000-05

YRTK-VTN (Rev. 10/2000)

Your Right to Know

18-135-1000-05

YRTK-RUS (Rev. 10/2000)

Your Right to Know



BEACON Release 2.0 Conversion Validation

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2000-28

- Following the completion of the *BEACON Release 2.0 Concepts, Conversion and Crosswalks* Training, Implementation Managers, TAO Supervisors and AU Managers will validate a sample of converted data to reinforce what was learned at training and identify any problem areas.
- This memo informs TAO Staff how to:
 - validate that a caseload has been converted to BEACON Release 2.0 for every AU Manager in a TAO;
 - validate an AU Manager's specific caseload;
 - validate a sample of benefit discrepancies;
 - validate a sample of data types; and
 - send information to the BEACON Action Center.

FYI

FSP Policy Clarification - "SEP" Accounts

We have been advised by USDA that Simplified Employer Pension (SEP) plans, recognized by banks and the Internal Revenue Service as IRAs (Individual Retirement Accounts), must be counted as assets in accordance with 106 CMR 363.140(B).

A SEP plan is basically an IRA completely funded by the employer on behalf of eligible employees. This arrangement has been expanded to let employees make elective tax-deferred contributions to SEPs through salary reduction for firms with 25 or fewer employees.

A SEP account must be *counted* as an asset in the same way an IRA is treated in determining food stamp eligibility. See 106 CMR 363.130(D).



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Every month I talk to you about the work that we as an agency do every day. That work frequently involves people in crisis and in need of temporary help. I believe that the fact that we work for a human service agency says we are concerned about our fellow citizens and want to help those in need. COMECC offers us an opportunity to broaden how we help and who we help. COMECC is your charitable campaign. What you may give and which organization you may designate to receive your gift is your private decision. I simply urge you to consider those who may benefit and the value in non-monetary terms your gift will have.

This month we celebrate Thanksgiving. A day for food, football, family and, of course, the giving of thanks. As you prepare for this holiday and perhaps reflect on some of the things you have for which you are thankful, consider that a COMECC contribution may add to that list. A cure for a disease affecting a loved one, a solution to a day care or after-school care problem, preserving a beautiful piece of land so that your grandchildren may enjoy it just as your children do, a woman and her children finding a way to escape a violent situation—your contribution can lead to all of these things.

My reflection on things for which I am thankful always includes each and every one of you. Your continued hard work, dedication and professionalism make me both proud and thankful to head this agency. I wish you and your family the happiest of Thanksgivings.

Sincerely,

Claire McIntire
Commissioner

From the Hotline

Q. A food stamp applicant received TANF benefits in another state within the past 12 months. Is the assistance unit categorically eligible for food stamp benefits due to receipt of TANF within the past 12 months?

A. No. Since TANF requirements vary from state to state, receipt of TANF benefits in another state within the past 12 months does not ensure categorical eligibility in Massachusetts. However, receipt of TANF benefits in Massachusetts within the past 12 months would make the food stamp applicant categorically eligible.

Q. How long do I certify a food stamp case which is categorically eligible due to receipt and/or authorization for Income Eligible Child Care (IECC)?

A. Certify the food stamp case for the length of IECC eligibility. According to the Office of Child Care Services, IECC can be authorized for a maximum of six months and can be preauthorized at the end of each period.

Q. I have a family requesting reimbursement for the amount they paid for a funeral which was less than \$1,500.00. Can they receive a reimbursement?

A. No. Payments can only be made directly to the funeral home vendor.

Q. I have an applicant for food stamp benefits who is receiving \$289.00 a week in Unemployment Compensation and has provided me with a statement printout from DET that indicates that her benefit is based upon \$330.00 pretax, \$41.00 in taxes deducted and a "net" payment of \$289.00. In entering the countable amount on the PACES Worksheet, should I use the actual income received (i.e., \$289.00) or the gross benefit amount (i.e., \$330.00)?

A. When determining eligibility for food stamp benefits, the full amount (pretax or gross) must be used. The same is true for TAFDC, EAEDC and EA.

Q. I am looking at the ViewDirect Screen and see payments issued to recipients coded CP and PA. Does this mean the recipient received those payments?

A. No. ViewDirect showing the code PA indicates that the money was allocated to this agency, not the recipient. If there is a code of CP Non PA, the money has been allocated to the recipient.

TAFDC Extensions Beyond the 24-Month Period

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2000-29

This memo issues:

- guidelines for extension decisions;
- guidelines for appropriate extension activities; and
- clarifications to the extension request process.

Thibault vs. Department of Transitional Assistance **Lawsuit**

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 99-2F

- This memo informs TAO Staff that DES is reviewing and making disability determinations (approvals and denials) on Thibault-related cases.
- As decisions are made, DES will send all Thibault-related disability determinations to Central Office.
- Local Office Quality Control (LOQC) is responsible for informing the AU Manager of the necessary casework activities following the DES disability determination.
- LOQC will forward a Thibault Processing Document informing the AU Manager of the case actions to be performed along with the DES letter explaining the approval or denial of the disability request, and a special Department notice(s) to inform the recipient of the actions taken on his or her case.

- The AU Manager is responsible for completing the casework activities outlined by LOQC on the Thibault Processing Document, mailing the recipient the DES letter and any special Department notices forwarded by LOQC, updating the Thibault Processing Document and answering questions from any recipient impacted by these actions.
- A completed copy of the Thibault Processing Document must be faxed by the TAO Director or designee to Central Office LOQC located in the Davis Square TAO at (617) 727-7697.

Emergency Assistance and the Housing Assistance Program

EA Field Operations Memo 2000-30

A new EA housing service program, the Housing Assistance Program (HAP), has been created to provide EA-eligible families with a variety of housing-related benefits and services. HAP replaces the Homelessness Intercept Program (HIP). HAP will be available in two phases: the first phase, prevention services for families at risk of losing their current housing began on October 16, 2000; and the second phase, shelter services, is scheduled to begin in January 2001. This memo:

- describes the prevention services that the HAP provider will offer to the EA-eligible family;
- outlines AU Manager responsibilities for identifying families who may benefit from HAP prevention services;
- details the process which will be used to determine HAP eligibility and refer families for HAP prevention services; and
- includes a list of the HAP providers with the geographic area they serve and the referral form.



Quality Corner

For the last few months we have been focussing on errors caused by, or that could have been prevented by, AU Managers. Last month we suggested looking at all aspects of a case, including both TAFDC and food stamps to be sure benefits have been paid correctly. The three errors this month are also that type.

Who shares the expenses in the household?

A recent error case involved, on the face of it, a request for an extension of the time limit. A recipient was receiving TAFDC and food stamps for herself and three children. In applying for an extension, the recipient reported that she was needed as a caretaker for her mother. The verification was received and the exemption was granted. The AU Manager, however, never explored the living situation beyond the cash assistance case and the exemption request. No change was made in the food stamps.

Since the mother is disabled and over 60 years old, she can be a separate household since the household meets the 165 percent of poverty test. By becoming a separate household, the group received more food stamps than they would as a single household. Since her mother also paid \$100 per month toward the rent, however, the utility expenses must be pro-rated between the two households.

How do you get by?

In the second error case, a mother and her son received TAFDC of \$486 and food stamps of \$210. Her rent is \$400 per month plus electricity.

When Quality Control interviewed the recipient, she had moved to an apartment she shared with friends where her total expenses were only \$150. She did not report the move to her AU Manager.

While her case was not in error at her first address, it was certainly questionable. After paying her rent and electricity bills, the recipient had about \$50 cash for ALL other expenses each month. Recipients can get by for a short time even with expenses above their income. But sooner or later, they must get some additional income or move to more affordable housing. If she moves or gets some more income, the case will probably be in error – a recipient

error that the AU Manager could have avoided.

What do I do when someone's job ends?

The third case involved a recipient whose job ended in late April. The AU Manager knew about it through the monthly report that was received in the office on May 12. This would have been in time to adjust the June food stamps, but the AU Manager did not make the change until June 9. By then it was too late to affect June, the sample month.

In this instance the AU Manager should have done two things to make the case correct. First, the AU Manager should have acted on the monthly report right away. In this circumstance a few weeks would have prevented a very large error. Second, the AU Manager should have issued a supplement to correct for lost benefits. Beginning in May this case was eligible for more food stamps than it received. By restoring lost benefits timely through a supplement, the AU Manager could have minimized the error that could have occurred in May as well.

FYI

When a Referral to DES Is Not Required

The AU Manager must determine if a referral to DES is necessary:

- when a TAFDC applicant is claiming an exemption due to a disability, or a two-parent household is applying as incapacitated, or
- when an EAEDC applicant is applying as disabled.

If the applicant has written notification from SSA or an administrative law judge of being considered disabled for purposes of SSI or SSDI, **no referral to DES is required** (see 106 CMR 203.530 or 106 CMR 320.200). **Any person eligible for SSI is not eligible for EAEDC.**

For an applicant with a prior case, the AU Manager must check the prior case record for a TAFDC or EAEDC disability determination; if a disability determination is found and the duration has not expired, it can be used for TAFDC or EAEDC. If no disability determination is found, the AU Manager must check the Eligibility Data screen on MMIS to see if the applicant is receiving MassHealth. (For types of MassHealth coverage refer to

the MassHealth Benefits desk guide.) If the applicant has an active MassHealth status, the AU Manager must call 1-800-888-3420 to verify that a disability determination has been made. If DES has completed a disability determination and found the applicant to be disabled, the AU Manager must obtain the duration date.

If the prior TAFDC, EAEDC or MassHealth disability determination has not expired, the applicant is still considered disabled under TAFDC or EAEDC. **A referral to DES is not required at this time.** The AU Manager must enter the appropriate code for the month of expiration in Block 40 of the PID (EP Code).

Note: If an EAEDC applicant is within 60 days of his or her 65th birthday, the AU Manager must approve the application as elderly (see 106 CMR 320.100), if otherwise eligible. **Do not refer him or her to DES.**

For more detailed information refer to the Disability Determination Guide.

Happy Thanksgiving
from the staff of
Policy, Procedure and
Program Management



FYI

Food Stamp Notice to Income-Eligible Child Care Recipients

This notice was distributed to income-eligible child care recipients by child care providers throughout the state. It tells income-eligible child care recipients that under expanded food stamp categorical eligibility rules they may now be eligible for food stamp benefits. As a result of this notice, income-eligible child care recipients may apply for food stamp benefits.

See Field Operations Memo 2000-16 for information regarding processing applications for income-eligible child care recipients.

**Do you have a child care subsidy?
You may be eligible for food stamp benefits.**



- Under new food stamp rules, **most** families receiving subsidized child care **ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMP BENEFITS.**
- The amount of food stamp benefits depends on your family's income, your shelter costs, your child care co-pay, and any child support you pay.

Here are some examples (but you don't have to match an example to be eligible):

| Family size | Gross monthly earnings | Monthly Child care co-pay | Monthly shelter costs | FOOD STAMP BENEFITS |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Parent and 1 child | \$1250 | \$70 | \$700 | \$ 89 |
| Parent and 2 children | \$1600 | \$165 | \$650 | \$ 94 |
| Parent and 2 children | \$1900 | \$255 | \$900 | \$ 91 |
| 2 Parents, 2 children | \$2100 | \$240 | \$950 | \$131 |

You are eligible even if you have a car or other assets.

Apply at the local office of the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). Call 1-800-941-2900 (toll free) for the office nearest you.

- To qualify under the special rules for people receiving a child care subsidy, you will need your Child Care Application and Fee Agreement or your Informal Child Care Voucher Form or a DTA form completed by the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency or your contracted day care provider.
- If you cannot go to the DTA office because of your work or training hours, you can (1) ask DTA to do the interview on the phone, (2) ask DTA if there is a worker you can see before or after regular office hours, (3) have an adult you trust apply for you as an "authorized representative."

You can also get an application and advice from Project Bread Food Source Hotline, 1-800-645-8333 (toll free, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.).

Every
Job
is
a
Good
Job

