



*Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance*

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**Online Guide Transmittal 2017-82B
October 27, 2017**

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  Paul Sutliff, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: Update: Cross Programs: Applications as a Result of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria

Overview

On August 25, 2017 Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas. Approximately a week later Hurricane Irma hit several Caribbean islands before making landfall in Florida. On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico.

While the full extent of damages and loss has not yet been realized, the severity of these storms has made it necessary for people to evacuate the devastated areas. Some evacuees have sought out family and friends in Massachusetts.

Purpose

The purpose of this Online Guide Transmittal is to advise staff about procedural changes for verifying duplicate participation for individuals and families from Puerto Rico who apply for TAFDC and EAEDC.

**Puerto Rico
Public
Assistance**

Puerto Rico operates a Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) for the purchase of food. They do not provide SNAP benefits. Seventy-five percent of the NAP benefit is to purchase food at certified retailers. Twenty-five percent of the benefit is in the form of cash to purchase food at certified and non-certified retailers through Puerto Rico's electronic benefits transfer system.

**Puerto Rico
Public
Assistance
(continued)**

Puerto Rico also receives federal TANF funds to operate cash assistance programs. When clients from Puerto Rico apply for TAFDC or EAEDC, the case manager must ask them if they received cash assistance in Puerto Rico in order to determine eligibility for cash assistance in Massachusetts.

Reminder: Staff are reminded that for SNAP, duplicate participation is not a concern as Puerto Rico's NAP benefits are considered to be inaccessible for SNAP eligibility purposes. Therefore, verification of NAP benefits or case closure for individuals who were previously *only* participating in NAP must not be requested.

Note: There will be notations on the Narrative tab by designated Central Office staff who are conducting outreach to applicants from Puerto Rico. TAO staff should not be concerned with these case actions.

Eligibility

While the eligibility for DTA-administered benefits has not changed, the devastation from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria is extraordinary. Applicants who have fled the storm-affected areas may have little or no documentation. Case managers must use every means possible to assist the applicant in obtaining necessary verifications. This includes utilizing data matches and sources, collateral contact (such as a family member to establish identity) or the applicant's self-declaration, if no other documentation is available. Staff are reminded to be detailed in their narratives as to steps taken to assist in the verification process.

Reminder: Staff are reminded that there is no durational requirement for Massachusetts residency nor is a client required to intend to live here permanently.

Tracking

Applicants who have relocated to Massachusetts due to Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Irma or Hurricane Maria must have the appropriate reason recorded on BEACON. Effective August 31, 2017 a new type, Hurricane Harvey was added to the Source list on BEACON. Effective September 12, 2017 Hurricane Irma was added and effective September 22, 2017 Hurricane Maria was made available. It is critical that the correct type be selected for these applicants to ensure accurate tracking.

Verification of Duplicate Participation

Requests for termination of cash assistance and/or SNAP benefits can be sent to the following emails by state:

- Florida: email SNR.D 11.SFL.CallCenter@myflfamilies.com.
- Georgia: ga.paris@dhs.ga.gov
- Louisiana: cara.shields@la.gov
- Virgin Islands: emmanueline.archer@dhs.vi.gov

Use the subject line "Hurricane IRMA Verification".

Texas:

For termination of benefits in Texas call: 1-877-541-7905 and follow the prompts.

Updated Procedures for Puerto Rico Verification

Puerto Rico:

If the applicant says yes to receipt of cash benefits in Puerto Rico, ask if the cash received was part of the NAP benefit, or if it is strictly a cash benefit program.

If the cash received is the cash portion of the NAP benefit, it is not accessible and is not countable for TAFDC or EAEDC. The TAFDC or EAEDC case should be processed following established procedures.

If the cash is a TANF benefit, it is countable for TAFDC and EAEDC and can be accessed in Massachusetts. The case manager must verify that the TANF cash assistance in Puerto Rico is closed, or, if the applicant says it is still open, assist the applicant with closing the case. As cash application interviews must always be conducted in person, the case manager must have the applicant sign a *Voluntary Consent to Release Information* (VARI-01) form and immediately assist the applicant to request a case closure or to verify the termination, as applicable.

To verify closure or request closure of TANF cash assistance in Puerto Rico contact:

Jeanette Rivera

787-289-7600 ex: 2408

Email: Jeanette.rivera@familia.pr.gov

#1) Fax: 787-289-7614

#2) Fax: 787-289-7621

**Day 30 of the
Application**

If by Day 30 of the application process, the case manager is not able to verify cash case closures due to storm-related factors, and if the applicant had previously stated their cash case was closed, the TAFDC or EAEDC case must be opened provided all other eligibility factors are met. Be sure to document on the Narrative tab all actions taken to verify the case closing.

Important: TAFDC and EAEDC applications should not be held up for proof of application for Unemployment Compensation from Puerto Rico.

**Obsolete
Transmittal**

This Online Guide Transmittal obsoletes 2017-82A

Questions

If you have any policy or procedural questions, after conferring with the appropriate TAO personnel, please have your Systems Information Specialists or TAO management email the DTA Mailbox.

Systems issues should be directed to the Systems Support Help Desk.
