



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

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**Online Guide Transmittal 2020-29
April 13, 2020**

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  **Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management**

Re: Cross Programs: Temporary Waiver of Certain SNAP Application Interviews

Overview

Staff must make all efforts to process SNAP applications quickly and accurately using the best information available for purposes of verifying program eligibility.

In response to the increased volume of SNAP applications stemming from the COVID-19 state of emergency, effective immediately, the United States Department of Agriculture- Food and Nutrition Services (USDA-FNS) has waived the requirement to conduct SNAP application interviews when all mandatory verifications are satisfied. This waiver impacts the way applications will be handled as it related to processing for both expedited and ongoing benefit issuances.

Purpose

The purpose of this Online Guide Transmittal is to advise staff that certain SNAP Application Interviews are being waived until further notice and the expedited issuance process has temporary procedural modifications.

Procedural Considerations

Applications with all Mandatory Verifications

If an application is received and all questions related to mandatory verifications have affirmative yes or no answers, for example, income or U.S. citizenship status, and staff are able to verify all mandatory verification elements by accessing external databases and information provided by the applicant, then the SNAP Application Interview must be waived. The application must be processed using the available information.

If there are outstanding optional verifications, staff must make 3 cold call attempts to obtain verbal self-declarations, and issue a Verification Checklist (VC-1) only if unsuccessful. If a VC-1 must be sent, the application is to be processed immediately without giving credit for the outstanding optional expenses.

Exception: If processing the application without giving credit for expenses results in application denial, you must wait to process the application until the client provides verifications or Day 30, whichever occurs first.

If all mandatory verifications are available, SNAP applications must be processed for regular, ongoing benefits. Staff must answer “No” to all expedited screening questions for these cases but make every effort to issue ongoing benefits within 7 days to satisfy expedited timelines.

Applications with Outstanding Mandatory Verifications

Interviews cannot be waived unless/until the mandatory verifications are satisfied. This may include situations where information related to mandatory elements must be clarified.

If there is missing information but the applicant was previously known to BEACON and you can reasonably ascertain the missing information, contact is not required.

If an applicant was recently known to have different circumstances, for example, additional household members or sources of income, but only indicated a household of one or reported that there was no source of income on the new application, you must process the application using the information reported on the application, as long as there are no other outstanding elements.

Exception: SNAP Applications that come from MassHealth (indexed as SNAP Application – MH Senior Applications) must be treated as having missing mandatory elements because they only collect basic demographic information for the head of household.

Applications with
Outstanding
Mandatory
Verifications
(Continued)

When an application is received that has outstanding mandatory elements, staff must make 3 cold call attempts to reach the applicant. If the cold call attempts are unsuccessful, staff must issue a VC-1 that specifically identifies what is outstanding. Staff must follow the procedures outlined in the Online Guide page SNAP Simplified Reporting – Interim Report under the “Establishing Contact at IR When Information is Incomplete, Questionable, or Contradictory” section in conjunction with verification procedures. References to “Interim Reports” must be substituted for “SNAP Application”.

A SNAP Application Interview must be scheduled when a VC-1 for mandatory verifications is issued.

Staff must use the free-form text boxes on the VC-1 **and** Appointment Scheduler to include the following information:

“You are receiving a Verification Checklist and an Application Interview Appointment. We have modified procedures due to COVID-19. If you provide the verifications we are requesting, we will not need to interview you.”

If the client provides the mandatory verifications, an interview is no longer needed. In that instance, staff must cancel the scheduled interview and process the SNAP application.

If an interview is missed, BEACON will automatically generate a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI). If mandatory verifications are not provided, BEACON will automatically deny the application for failure to provide which will allow for a reinstatement should the client satisfy the requirements within the allowable timeframes.

Coding Interviews in BEACON

BEACON has a new SNAP application interview waived option of “COVID-19: Interview Waived”. This option must always be selected, even if an interview may be required.

If the applicant is required to have an interview because mandatory verifications are outstanding, an interview must be scheduled. If the interview is missed, BEACON will automatically issue a NOMI; staff intervention is not required.

If the applicant was required to have an interview because mandatory verifications were outstanding, but the applicant subsequently provided those verifications, the scheduled interview must be cancelled.

Staff must write a Narrative to reflect the waiver of the interview due to COVID-19 along with any other pertinent information about the case.

EBT Card Issuance

With the temporary waiver of SNAP application interviews, staff must follow the procedures outlined below regarding EBT card issuance.

If the applicant was previously an active client, you must attempt a cold call to see if a new EBT card is needed.

- If the cold call is unsuccessful and the case was active within a year, do not issue an EBT card.
- If the cold call is unsuccessful and the case was active more than a year ago, issue an EBT card centrally.

If the applicant is brand new, you must mail the EBT card centrally. A cold call is not required unless there are outstanding verifications.

Reminder: You must verify the identity of the applicant before issuing an EBT card. Even cases approved at zero must have an EBT card issued in accordance with the guidelines above.

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 them to DTA.Procedural Issues.

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