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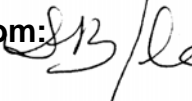
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02111

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary

JULIA E. KEHOE
Commissioner

Operations Memo 2011-14
April 12, 2011

To: Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  Stephanie Brown, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations

Re: SNAP: Cost-of-Living Changes

Overview

The cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) is a mass change that is applied to the entire SNAP caseload. The COLA is usually effective on October 1 each year, coinciding with the beginning of the federal fiscal year. For various administrative reasons, the COLA has been postponed twice since October 2010. USDA has now mandated that all states apply the 2011 COLA standards. This recalculation will impact the household's monthly benefit for May.

SNAP eligibility charts and issuance tables remain unchanged, however, the following elements of the COLA will change effective May 1, 2011.

- **Shelter Deduction** - The maximum shelter deduction (for households without an elderly or disabled member) **has decreased to \$458.**
- **Standard Deduction for Household Sizes One, Two and Three:** The standard deduction for household sizes one to three **has increased to \$142.** The standard deduction for household sizes four and above remains unchanged.
- **Standard Utility Allowance (SUA)**
 - The Heating/Cooling SUA **has decreased to \$575;**
 - The Nonheating SUA **has decreased to \$353;** and
 - The Phone SUA **has decreased to \$41.**

Based on the significant reduction of the Heating/Cooling SUA and the Nonheating SUA, many SNAP households experienced a decrease in SNAP benefits when the new COLA figures were applied.

**Overview
(continued)**

Unchanged COLA Charts, Tables and Figures

- **Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards** - The Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards remain unchanged.
 - **Maximum Benefit Levels** - The maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes remain unchanged.
 - **Minimum Benefit Level** - The minimum benefit level for eligible one- and two-person households remains at **\$16**.
 - **Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction** - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at **\$143**.
 - **Issuance Tables** remain unchanged.
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**Impact of
COLA on
SNAP
Benefits**

Recalculation results indicate that the majority of affected SNAP households were negatively impacted by the COLA. The decrease in SNAP benefits for these households was primarily caused by the reduction of the heating/cooling SUA and the nonheating SUA. The COLA notice has been carefully worded to alert clients of this decrease in benefits. The COLA recalculation will impact SNAP benefits for May.

**Central
Office
Phone Bank**

To alleviate the burden the anticipated high call volume could place on TAOs, the COLA notices do not include case managers' phone numbers. Instead, a special phone bank has been established at Central Office to address COLA-related calls. When a client calls the Recipient Services phone number listed in the notice, a prompt will direct the caller to the phone bank that handles COLA-related calls.

**Automatic
Update of
Active SNAP
Households**

During the weekend of April 9, 2011, active SNAP cases on BEACON, including Bay State CAP, were automatically recalculated using the new COLA standards. SNAP cases with a decrease in benefit amount are displayed on the Active by Grantee Name view under Assistance Unit Lists.

**Report of
Updated
Households**

A report entitled "*Food Stamp 5/2011 COLA Updated Case*":

- will be available on View Direct, Report ID:DTA 9023 on May 10;
 - lists all households that have experienced a change in benefit amount as a result of the COLA;
 - lists the household's old and new SNAP benefit amounts (as adjusted by the system); and
 - can be used for reference by TAO staff.
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**Client
Notices**

The following notice will be sent to households listed on the “Food Stamp 5/2011 COLA Updated Case” report:

- an English/Spanish notice (Attachment A) to SNAP households;
- a multilingual notice that states, “Important! Please have this notice translated immediately.”

Note: There will be no notice to Bay State CAP households.

**When to Use
New
Standards**

SNAP cases authorized after the close of business on Friday, April 8, 2011 were recalculated using the new COLA standards. As of Monday, April 11, 2011 the new COLA standards must be used in all SNAP calculations, including any necessary manual calculations.

**Closed SNAP
Households**

Retroactive benefits are not owed to closed households because the COLA is effective on the client’s cyclical date in May, and not on May 1.

**Eligibility
Charts and
Issuance
Tables**

SNAP eligibility charts, issuance tables, standard utility allowance amounts, maximum and minimum benefit amounts, shelter deduction and standard deduction are posted at the www.mass.gov/dta website. The Standard Deduction, the Shelter Deduction and the Standard Utility Allowance amounts will be updated at the www.mass.gov/dta website by May 1.

Questions

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

ATTACHMENT A

300 Ocean Ave. CAN 710
Revere, MA 02151

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

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Mary Jones
101 Main Street
Somerville, MA 02148

SSN: 999-99-9999
Revere TAO - DTA

01/01/2011

Notice of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) COLA

Dear *Mary Jones*:

Each year, the federal government makes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) which changes your Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamp) benefits calculation. This year, the cost of living went down. Because of this adjustment, your SNAP benefits will change in May, 2011.

In May, 2011, your SNAP benefits will go from \$xxx to \$xxx. This change is based on the cost-of-living adjustment and any changes in your circumstances.

If you disagree with the amount of your SNAP benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back of this notice. The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are 106 CMR: 364.500, 364.600, 366.130.

You may call 1-800-445-6604 if you are having trouble reading or understanding this notice.