



Transitions

April 2016

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Quality Corner

This month we will review two negative errors: an invalid closing and an invalid denial.

Incorrect Closing for Excess Income

This was a household of one in receipt of \$1048 in RSDI and a private pension of \$182. The client reported rent of \$1125 and responsibility for heating costs. Based on these circumstances, the household received \$194 in SNAP benefits. During the 2105 SSA cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), the BEACON batch updated the client's RSDI to \$1174. However, the information that was electronically transmitted from Social Security created another entry on the Unearned Income page of BEACON and caused client's income to double. The doubling of the RSDI income caused SNAP benefits to close.

The Quality Control (QC) reviewer determined that the claim number for the first RSDI record entered into BEACON was transposed. The incoming batch, meant to increase the existing RSDI amount, had the correct claim number so an additional RSDI record was created. This resulted in an invalid closing of the case.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

When entering RSDI information onto the Unearned Income page of BEACON, it is important to enter the correct RSDI claim number in the Claim Number field. The claim number is usually found in the benefit award letter from SSA and on the upper right hand corner of the BENDEX screen. When RSDI information is electronically transmitted from SSA for the client, the claim number from SSA must match what is already in the BEACON or the record will erroneously create an additional entry for the same client. For more information on RSDI claim numbers, see Policy Online, Related Systems Information, BA Options, BENDEX and Field Operations Memo 2006-7.

Untimely Denial Based on Incorrect Application Date

On October 13, 2015, an application for SNAP benefits was received by DTA Document Processing Center (DPC). On October 17, 2015, an action was created for a case manager to process the application. The case manager created a Request for Assistance (RFA) using an application date of October 17, 2015. An appointment letter for a telephone interview scheduled the interview for October 26, 2015. On October 26, an interview was conducted and a verification checklist issued with a due date of November 16, 2015. On November 16, 2015, the case was denied for failure to provide verification. The QC reviewer determined that the application date was actually October 13, 2015. The incorrect application date in BEACON caused the case to be denied on the 35th day instead of the 30th day.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

It is important to remember that the date of the application is the day the application is received at the DPC and not the date the action is received by the case manager. Staff at the DPC date stamp the document with the date it was received. On this application form, the date was clearly marked as October 13, 2015. Since the case manager created the RFA for October 17, the 30-day processing time frame began late on BEACON and caused the case to be denied late. For more information on denying a SNAP application, see the Online Guide, SNAP Application Processing, Approving Denying a SNAP Application.



From the DTA Policy Procedure Mailbox

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your manager or supervisor email the **DTA Mailbox**.

Q. 1. My client is an exempt TAFDC mother who is caring for her nine-month-old son. She wants to take a class to complete a health-care certificate program. The actual class only requires six hours of participation a week. Even with study time, her ESP participation will amount to less than 20 hours per week. Can I still approve her EDP?

A. 1. Yes. It is important to remember that while much of our attention is focused on TAFDC work program required clients, exempt clients who volunteer, ESP participation hours advance our overall Federal TAFDC work participation rate, provide clients with educational opportunities before their 12/24-month ed/training clock starts and in general put parents in a better position for getting a job and meeting their work program requirement, once it is imposed.

Note: The training or education program should be consistent with the goals of an approved EDP. See 106 CMR 207.110 for further details.

Q. 2. If exempt TAFDC clients are participating less than 20 hours per week, can I still refer them for child care services and transportation benefits?

A. 2. Yes. Even when TAFDC clients are participating less than 20 hours per week, they may be referred for child care services and transportation benefits, if otherwise eligible. However, the client may not be able to obtain a childcare voucher if not participating for a minimum of 20 hours per week. It's important to discuss this with your client up front and work with them to find a suitable secondary work related activity to increase their hours if childcare is needed. For more information on ESP support services, refer to 106 CMR 207.210.

Q. 3. My TAFDC client is exempt because she is essential to the care of her disabled mother. Like the parent described in Question #1, she too would like to attend a training class. Does she have the same opportunity to attend classes and receive ESP support services as does the exempt, volunteer parent of a child under two years of age?

A. 3. Yes. *Regardless of the exemption reason*, any exempt client who meets the exemption requirements described in 106 CMR 203.100(A) and 106 CMR 203.100(B) may still volunteer for ESP. Also, *regardless of the exemption reason*, any exempt client who meets the criteria for ESP support services may receive these services. A client does not lose their exemption because they are volunteering.

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From the DTA Policy Procedure Mailbox *(Continued from Page 3)*

- Q. 4.** My TAFDC client is exempt and taking a class at her local community college. After attending classes for a couple of months, her mother fell seriously ill and she asked if she would be sanctioned because she could no longer regularly attend the class while caring for her mother. Can a TAFDC exempt client get sanctioned for failing to comply with his/her EDP?
- A. 4.** No. Exempt clients cannot be sanctioned and exempt clients cannot lose their exempt status simply by curtailing or stopping their participation in ESP.

Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Programs – Unaccessed Benefits on EBT Cards

Online Guide Transmittal Update 2016-11

SNAP

This Online Guide Transmittal updates several pages in the EBT book and clarifies the following processes of moving and storing benefits on EBT cards:

- Effective October 2014, SNAP benefits are no longer moved offline after 6 months.
- Effective February 2016, SNAP benefits are expunged when there are not any SNAP purchases or returns against the EBT account for 365 days.
- Effective February 2016, SNAP benefits that were available for 365 days are expunged when the EBT account has been inactive for 365 days.

SNAP – Community Supported Agriculture

Online Guide Transmittal Update 2016-18

SNAP

The Department, in collaboration with Project Bread and local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) partners, developed a CSA program initiative for client participation during the 2014 and 2015 CSA Seasons. Under this initiative, SNAP clients purchased CSA shares on a monthly basis using their SNAP benefits and received shares at predetermined community sites.

The Department will reinstitute this initiative for the 2016 CSA season. The CSA season begins April 2016 and ends March 2017, or at the end of the individual CSA program's season, whichever is earlier.

Online Guide Transmittals

Cross Programs – DTA Assistance Line Enhancements

Online Guide Transmittal Update 2016-19

Cross Programs

This Transmittal advises staff of a number of enhancements to the DTA Assistance Line. The Department has made the Assistance Line easier for clients to navigate.

- Grantees who provide their Social Security Number and Year of Birth now hear their monthly benefit amount, next benefit issue date, EBT balance, recertification end date, and the date the last document was received by the Document Processing Center (DPC).
- Outbound reminder calls are automated to inform clients of reevaluations that are due within 20 days and scheduled interviews within 2 business days.
- The phone queue portal was updated to display APIDs of clients who authenticate so that case managers can access case records quickly.
- Outbound calls now display as COMM of MASS on caller ID. This is expected to increase the rate of successful outgoing calls to clients.

To convey these improvements, a new book entitled DTA Assistance Line has been added to the Online Guide.

SNAP – ABAWD Work Program Requirement

Online Guide Transmittal Update 2016-21

SNAP

This Transmittal advises staff of a number of clarifications to the ABAWD Work Program Requirement, including several BEACON and forms changes. To convey these clarifications, multiple pages have been updated in the ABAWD chapter of the Online Guide.

Online Guide Transmittals

TAFDC and EAEDC – Incomplete Disability Supplement Change

Online Guide Transmittal Update 2016-22
TAFDC and EAEDC

The purpose of the Online Guide Update is to:

- remind DTA staff about their obligation to assist clients in the completion of these forms;
- emphasize the importance of only sending a Disability Supplement and/or Medical Report to DES when **all applicable sections are complete** and all necessary signatures have obtained; and
- advise staff of the systems change to how incomplete cases are handled.

In the rare circumstances that an incomplete Disability Supplement and/or Medical Report is submitted to DES, a systems safeguard has been created to ensure that clients are not penalized for the Department's oversight. The immediate automatic closing/benefit reduction that formerly resulted when a case was returned by DES due to an incomplete Disability Supplement and/or Medical Report is now held for 30 days. This is to allow for case managers to reach out to clients in order to complete the missing areas. The full Disability Supplement and/or Medical Report must then be resubmitted with a new Disability Determination Tracking Form.

Harper Adverse Action Pilot in Dudley Square, Worcester and Springfield Liberty TAOs

Online Guide Transmittal Update 2016-23
TAFDC, EAEDC

As a result of the *Harper* settlement, DTA will conduct an Adverse Action Pilot for six months in three TAOs: Dudley Square, Worcester and Springfield Liberty. The pilot will allow DTA to examine the effectiveness of the provision of accommodations to clients and former clients. TAFDC, EAEDC and cash-combo cases are included in the pilot. SNAP-only cases are not included. No other TAOs are affected by this pilot. Clients who transfer into or out of the pilot TAOs during the pilot period are not subject to these activities, except for clients who start out in a pilot TAO, transfer and then return to it during the pilot time period.

In each of the pilot TAOs, Client Assistance Coordinators (CACs) will review daily an enhanced Adverse Actions View for disabled clients who have cases closed or benefits reduced. CACs will contact clients to determine if a lack of an accommodation contributed to the closing or benefit reduction. CACs will work with the client to obtain an accommodation if one is required.

The Adverse Action Pilot will begin on May 15, 2016.



State Letter

TAFDC – Welfare Reform

State Letter 1369

TCAP, TAFDC, EAEDC

This State Letter transmits the following changes to the TAFDC, EAEDC and TCAP programs:

Chapter 158 of the Acts of 2014, requires changes to the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. These changes encompass:

- a redesigned work program
- aligning state disability standards to match federal (SSI) standards
- changing work program exemptions
- enhancing fraud detection methods

Diversity Quote

It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.

Maya Angelou

TAO Meeting Notes