Transitions

From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

A few months ago, we instituted all-staff conference calls on specific topics in order to get feedback and suggestions from across the Department. Many of you have expressed interest in hearing about the steps that were taken after these calls. I am happy to report that we are making progress on all fronts.

Sharing best practices to recognize staff

Our first all-staff conference call was an excellent brainstorming session for ways to show appreciation for the fantastic work that is being done at every level of DTA. During these challenging times, it is especially important to recognize the accomplishments of individuals and teams. Recommendations included:

- Instituting a Customer Service Awards program, or an Employee of the Month
- Having a Staff Recognition Day
- Recognizing the accomplishments of Transitional Assistance Offices (TAOs)
- Having ice cream socials or pizza luncheons
- Reinvigorating the "Coffee with the Commissioner" concept.

Our Executive Staff have carefully considered each of your suggestions, and I am pleased to report that we are moving forward with a new awards program! Beginning this fall and winter, we will be scheduling **Office Appreciation Days** for each TAO and each Central Office department. Members of Senior Staff will visit each TAO/Department to celebrate their top accomplishments. In addition, we will be launching a new DTA awards program for individuals: the **Meeting the Mission Award** and the **High Performance Award**. These will be awarded in each TAO/ Department based on nominations from managers and colleagues. We are in the process of developing the criteria and nomination form, and will provide more details in the coming weeks.

In addition, I have been traveling to TAOs to meet with individuals and groups on a variety of topics. These visits have been extremely beneficial, and will continue throughout the summer. We are developing a system for tracking the comments and suggestions I receive during these trips in order to more efficiently follow up.

From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

Department of Revenue (DOR) wage matches

Our second all-staff conference call discussed DOR wage matches. The Field Operations and Program Integrity Divisions appreciated all of the feedback they received. As a result, we are developing changes to the DOR New Hire and Wage Match processes that will address duplication in the match views and limit "hits" based on small changes in income that would not impact eligibility. We are also continuing to look at how we might go about centralizing these matches, based on what we are learning from bringing the DCF match into central office and your input about the DOR matches. We continue to invite you to provide your TAO Director with specific examples of systems issues with DOR matches (or suggestions about any of the other matches performed through BEACON) so that we can improve these important tools.

BEACON 3

As you know, we launched BEACON 3.0 on June 28, 2010. Due to technical issues, we reverted back to BEACON 2.0 on June 29, 2010. As we work toward the re-launching of BEACON 3.0, we will incorporate more hands-on practice for staff as well as a load test to confirm the application is ready for statewide use. The re-launch date has not yet been set, but we will let you know as soon as we can. We apologize for the disruption and thank you for your continued patience and support during this time.

BEACON Enhancements

Our third all-staff conference call addressed requests for enhancements to BEACON. This growing list of requests is being prioritized and will be addressed after BEACON 3.0 is up and running. The Field Operations, Program Integrity, and Policy, Program and External Relations (PPER) divisions have developed a set of evaluation criteria for each proposed enhancement. These include the impact on operational efficiency and associated workload implications, compliance, and potential cost savings. The current list of enhancement requests is reviewed regularly, and will be communicated as prioritizations are finalized.

Future conference calls

Each month, Executive Staff hold a conference call with TAO Directors and a specific topic is discussed. In order to maximize everyone's time and input, we have made these conference calls available to all staff members who wish to listen or participate. By combining the Director and all-staff conference calls, we can improve communication between all levels of the Department while ensuring that everyone's voice is heard. We will announce the topic of these calls in advance so you are able to determine your interest and availability. Please let us know via email or on the calls about any topics you would like to discuss.

I can't thank you enough for your herculean efforts during this time of overwhelming demand for DTA assistance. I am truly humbled by your dedication to the low-income individuals and families we serve. Please continue to share with me your ideas and suggestions – whether on a conference call, at an office visit, or by sending an email to [DTA.Commissioner'sOffice@MassMail.State.MA.US.](mailto:DTA.Commissioner'sOffice@MassMail.State.MA.US)

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss a negative error that is related to the use of the Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI).

A SNAP application was received by the TAO on February 1, 2010. On February 3, 2010 the case manager sent a *Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for a Telephone Interview,* scheduling a telephone interview for February 17, 2010.

At the scheduled time of the application interview, the case manager was unable to reach the client to conduct the interview. She subsequently left a message on the client's voice mail regarding the missed interview. On March 1, 2010, the case was denied for failure to complete the application process.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

The case manager should have sent a NOMI as soon as possible, but no later than two days after the missed interview. Leaving a voicemail message regarding the missed interview does not substitute as a NOMI. Although the interview letter states: "If your worker cannot reach you at this time because your line is busy or you fail to answer your phone, this will be treated as a missed appointment," a NOMI must still be sent separately.

The second issue is that the case was denied before the thirtieth day. February 2010 only had 28 days so this case was denied prematurely when it was denied on March 1, 2010. Negative errors are especially harmful to clients because they mean that the Department has inappropriately closed or denied a case. For more information on application processing guidelines, see Field Operations Memo 2006-30 and for information on using a NOMI, see Field Operations Memo 2007-16.

Diversity Quote

 "One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings."

Franklin Thomas

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

Q. I have a TAFDC applicant who reported owning a vehicle. The vehicle's fair market value in the Blue Book was listed at $11,750. My applicant's equity in this car was $6,320. These value amounts were verified during the application interview. Since this applicant also reported that he had no other countable assets, his total countable asset amount was entered on BEACON as $1,750. Was this applicant's total asset amount properly determined?

A. Yes. For TAFDC purposes, once you have determined the fair market value and equity value, according to 106 CMR 204.120(G), then you need to determine if there is any excess value associated with the vehicle. The excess fair market value amount for this car is $1,750 ($11,750 minus $10,000 fair market value regulatory limit), and the excess equity value amount for the car is $1,320 ($6,320 minus $5,000 equity value regulatory limit). TAFDC Program rules require that we count the greater excess value amount, which in this case, is derived from the vehicle's fair market value.

Q. Now that my TAFDC applicant's case was approved and he is scheduled for his first telephonic Eligibility Review, is he required to reverify the value of his car?

A. It depends. Generally, vehicles need to be reverified only at the time of a reported change or when there is information that a change has occurred affecting current eligibility. Since most vehicles depreciate in fair market value over time, there is generally no need to reverify the value of a client's vehicle. See 106 CMR 702.330 for more information on the frequency of verification of assets and other TAFDC and EAEDC eligibility factors.

Q. Transitional Cash Assistance Program regulations specify that the value of a vehicle need not be re-verified, unless there is a change in circumstances. What are some of the factors that I need to consider when determining whether or not the reverification of a client's vehicle's value is appropriate?

A. If, for example, your TAFDC client reports at his Eligibility Review that he has increased the equity amount in his car or that there are other countable assets that, combined with the car's valuation, could put the client over the $2,500 asset limit, then it is appropriate to reverify the equity and/or fair market value of your client's vehicle. See 106 CMR 204.110 for more information.

From the Forms File

New Form

Application for Funeral and Final Disposition
04-085-0710-05
F&FD-1 (7/2010)

The *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition Expenses* (F&FD-1) must be used to collect the necessary information to determine eligibility for payment of funeral and final disposition expenses for deceased individuals who were not TAFDC or EAEDC clients or in a pending status at the time of death, i.e. SSI and non-clients. This form is available in the *Online Forms* section of *Policy Online*. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2010-34 for more information.

Revised Flyer

The *Do You Need Help Because of a Disability?* flyer is now available in the following languages. This flyer is also available in the *Online Forms* section of *Policy Online*.

Do You Need Help Because of a Disability?
26-403-0710-05 (Spanish)
26-411-0710-05 (Chinese)
26-412-0710-05 (Haitian Creole)
26-413-0710-05 (Portuguese)
26-414-0710-05 (Khmer)
26-415-0710-05 (Russian)
26-416-0710-05 (Vietnamese)
26-417-0710-05 (Laotian)
OCR-1 Flyer (Rev. 7/2010)

Revised Brochure

The *What Noncitizens Need to Know (NCIB)* brochure is now available in the following languages:

What Noncitizens Need to Know
25-406-0710-05 (Russian)
25-407-0710-05 (Khmer)
25-408-0710-05 (Vietnamese)
25-409-0710-05 (Chinese)
NCIB (7/2010)

Revised Poster

The *Do You Need Help Because of a Disability?* poster is now available in Spanish.
Do You Need Help Because of a Disability?
26-401-0710-05
OCR Poster (S)(Rev. 7/2010)

Obsolete Form

Application for Payment of Funeral and Burial Expenses
04-080-0306-05
F&B-1 (Rev. 3/2006)

This form is now obsolete. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2010-34 for more information.

Field Operations Memos

Disability Evaluation Services (DES) Psychological Consultative Examinations in the Worcester TAO

TAFDC and EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-32

Currently, DTA and the Disability Evaluation Services (DES) arrange with certain DES network doctors to conduct consultative examinations (CEs) in the Dudley Square and Springfield Liberty TAOs for TAFDC and EAEDC clients who claim a mental health disability.

This memo informs TAO staff that, beginning August 11, 2010, the service will also be available in the Worcester TAO, and refers staff to Field Operations Memo 2009-44 for complete procedures to facilitate the service.

BEACON 3.0 Home Page and Tools

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-33

The purpose of this Field Operations Memo is to introduce the new BEACON 3.0 Home Page and to identify new BEACON 3.0 Tools. This memo is designed to help all staff navigate the new or enhanced BEACON 3.0 functionality now that BEACON 3.0 is available on a limited basis each day for practice. With BEACON 3.0 implementation, all BEACON 3.0 Tools will be available to staff, although some tools will not be used. Instructions on the appropriate use of the Tools available in BEACON 3.0 can be found in the BEACON Tools section of this memo.

Funeral and Final Disposition Payment Changes

TAFDC and EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-34

The FY '11 state budget authorizes changes to the Department's administration of Funeral and Burial payments, one of which is a change in terminology to Funeral and Final Disposition payments. Effective July 1, 2010:

- the maximum allowable cost of $1500 for a funeral and final disposition was lifted; and

- cremation became an allowable expense for funeral and final disposition payments. No signature from the next of kin verifying cremation as a preference is required.

This memo advises TAO staff how to process funeral and final disposition expenses under these new guidelines.

Field Operations Memos

Processing TAFDC or SNAP Benefits for Clients Affected by the Loss of Unemployment Compensation Benefits

TAFDC and SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-37

On July 22, 2010, Congress passed legislation authorizing another Unemployment Compensation (UC) benefit extension. However, many claimants applied and continued to apply to DTA for SNAP and/or cash assistance because in recent weeks their UC benefits were either suspended or exhausted.

Anticipating a significant increase in SNAP applications, the Department applied for and was granted a waiver to streamline the SNAP application process for claimants who have exhausted their UC benefits and claimants whose benefits were suspended. In addition, a shortened SNAP application form was developed for use by claimants who are no longer receiving UC benefits.

This memo:

- discusses Department initiatives for claimants who have lost UC benefits; and

- provides case manager instructions for processing applications and existing cases affected by the loss of UC benefits.

FYIs

BEACON 3.0 Update

While work towards re-launching BEACON 3.0 is ongoing, your continued patience during this period is appreciated. A re-launch date is being carefully considered to minimize future disruptions. Preliminary preparations include:

- Hands-on practice time available for all users in the BEACON 3.0 Production Environment each day from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. and from 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. <u>All staff should complete at least one practice case scenario each day on BEACON 3.0.</u>

- An all-user, statewide Stress Test is scheduled for August 18, 2010, between 1:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M., to ensure that the system will function properly under rigorous demands. Instructions for this Stress Test will be sent to you in the near future.

FYIs *(Continued from page 7)*

BEACON 3.0 Practice Tips

- Use your "**Welid**" as the User Name and "**Beacon3!**" as your Password.

- Use only one mouse click for any action or inquiry.

- Wait for a "loading" message to appear on the page if you are experiencing delays, as no hour glass will appear.

- Use the "Exit" button to properly leave the system. Do not click on the "x" in the upper right-hand corner of the page.

BEACON 3.0 User Resources

- Review the differences in functionality between BEACON 3.0 and BEACON 2.0 in PACE by first clicking Library and then clicking Resources. Select the Search button and then choose the "BEACON 3.0 Chapter 5 Page and Functionality Changes" documents that will explain these differences.

- Refer any issues to your IT Site Manager initially, if available, or have the System's Help Desk Liaison call the EOHHS Customer Service Center.

- Review current and previous editions of "BEACON 3.0 News," by selecting Policy Online and then choosing the second caret from the top called "BEACON 3.0 News."

TAFDC: Child Care for Homework or Study Time

Case managers are reminded that for each hour a client participates in an education or training activity, one hour of homework or study time is automatically added to the client's participation hours on the Monitor Participation window. Therefore, if the client requests and is eligible for child care services, the case manager should include homework or study time hours on the Child Care Referral notice as well.

When approving a Child Care Referral notice, use the start time and end time the client is participating in the education or training activity and add an hour for each hour the client is in the activity. Enter an extended time frame on the Child Care Authorization window that will cover both the education or training activity and the homework or study time hours.

For example, Mary is in school from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M., for a total of four hours. On the Child Care Authorization window, you would enter a start time and an end time with an 8 hour span; e.g. 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. to allow for the homework or study time.

FYIs *(Continued from page 8)*

Treatment of Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) Benefits from Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

USDA has recently alerted states that Puerto Rico is receiving a large number of calls from states trying to determine if a SNAP applicant's Nutrition Assistance Program case (called NAP in Puerto Rico) has been closed. The purpose of this FYI is to remind staff that Puerto Rico's NAP benefits are considered *inaccessible* to a client in the mainland U.S., and cannot be converted to cash or used to purchase food. Therefore, duplicate participation is *not* a concern, and if the applicant meets other eligibility criteria, he or she would be eligible for SNAP. USDA also considers NAP benefits from American Samoa or the Northern Mariana Islands inaccessible in the mainland.

TAO Meeting Notes