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Quality Corner

This month we will review an error in a Non Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP case and an invalid denial.

SSI State Supplemental Payment Omitted from Income

This NPA SNAP household included a 75-year-old client, his 64-year-old spouse and their 29-year-old daughter. At recertification, the case was certified as a Change Reporting household with a certification period from December 13, 2013 through December 12, 2015. The client reported that each household member received SSI benefits for a total of \$1871.45 in SSI income per month. The household was responsible for rent of \$577 per month and heating/cooling expenses. Based on the income and expenses outlined above, the household was eligible for \$78 in SNAP benefits.

Quality Control determined that, at recertification, the case manager did not include the SSI State Supplemental benefit amount of \$94.50 for the client's spouse and the \$30.40 for the client's daughter on the Other Income page in BEACON or by checking the SDX screen on Mainframe. Omitting these two State SSI incomes from the SNAP calculation caused an overissuance of \$56 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must pay close attention to the information that is entered into BEACON. When determining the SSI benefit amount, be careful to identify the Federal SSI benefit amount and State Supplemental benefit amount as the total monthly payment the client receives. The State Supplemental benefit amount can be found on the SSI Tracking page in BEACON. For more information on State Supplemental Benefits see Operations Memo 2012-13.

Invalid Denial

A walk-in applicant applied for SNAP benefits on April 30, 2014 for a household size of three people. An interview was conducted on the same day and the household was determined eligible to receive expedited benefits. On May 30, 2014 (day 30), a verification checklist (VC-1) was issued to the client, for additional verifications, with a due date of June 9, 2014. On May 30, 2014, the case was denied by the case manager for failure to provide verifications and a denial notice was sent to the client.

A narrative entry on BEACON notes that the case manager sent the client a pending denial form (SNAP NL-2) for an earned income verification. QC determined that this was an invalid denial as the case manager did not give the client 10 days to provide the outstanding verification.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

On day-30, when the case manager denied the case on BEACON, the BEACON-generated denial notice should have been suppressed (see Operations Memo 2012-17). It was correct procedure to also send a Pending Denial, but the case manager invalidated it by also sending a denial on the same day the verification was requested. Please note that with the issuance of Operations Memo 2014-30 in June, the Pending Denial form is no longer issued manually.

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. 1. When an ESP client participates in a Young Parent Program (YPP) activity and the hours of participation have been entered and updated on the Monitor Participation page, will one hour of homework and study time automatically get added by BEACON to the actual hours of participation?

A. 1. Yes. Remember, however, that to avoid a sanction the teen must also continue to comply with all of the TAFDC teen parent school attendance requirements, as well as any special requirements mandated by his or her particular YPP program. In addition to YPP, other education-and training-related components where the client's participation hours double, include:

- skills training,
- post-secondary education activities, and
- basic education.

For more information on education-related study-time hours, refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-53 A. For more information on YPP, refer to 106 CMR 207.140(C). For more information on teen parent school attendance requirements, refer to 106 CMR 203.610.

Q. 2. My SNAP applicant is an 18-year-old teen parent with one child whose only income is a DCF quarterly clothing allowance. Is this income considered countable unearned income for SNAP?

A. 2. Yes. As a regular payment from a government source, this income is considered countable unearned income for SNAP. See 106 CMR 363.220(B) for more details on unearned income.

Note: This is a SNAP rule change based on a recent clarification from USDA. Please note that the SNAP information in the original version of this FYI from November 2011 is no longer applicable.

Q. 3. I have a TAFDC applicant who owns one car with a fair market value of \$9,500. She owns this car in full and therefore her equity value in the car is also \$9,500. Given the asset rule changes detailed in Operations Memo 2014-46, can I approve this applicant for TAFDC, if otherwise eligible?

A. 3. Yes. According to the new asset rules, the first car no longer has equity value attributed to it for purposes of TAFDC eligibility. Therefore, the comparison between the fair market value and equity value is no longer necessary when the client owns only one vehicle. For more information on countable assets and vehicles, refer to 106 CMR 204.120(G).

Note: Vehicles are a noncountable asset for SNAP. See 106 CMR 363.140(D) for more information.



Training Corner

Mass 2-1-1 Finding Help Fast!

Get valuable information on food, clothing, shelters, child care, counseling, crisis intervention, drug and alcohol programs, fuel assistance, legal assistance, transportation and much more.

- Mass 2-1-1 is free, confidential, multilingual/TTY and available 24 hours a day.
- Clients can access Mass 2-1-1 by dialing 2-1-1, toll free (877) 211-6277 or TTY (508) 370-4890.
- Clients can also access it online at <http://www.mass211.org>

Case Manager Access

Access Mass 2-1-1 through BEACON! Log into BEACON and in the Useful Links portal, click on the *Mass 2-1-1 Search* link. Alternatively, from your internet browser you can go directly to <http://www.mass211.org>

Using the Direct Link through BEACON:

1. From the Useful Links portal, click on the *Mass 2-1-1 Search* link, which brings you directly to the Search page.
2. Choose from a list of suggested keywords or type in a word/phrase (e.g. “Food Pantry”).
3. Enter a location to search; for example, you can choose *Address* and enter the city in which the client lives.
4. Click the *Search* button.
5. The results page shows the topic searched and the number of matches.
6. Click on any match to see the full details on that topic.



Information provided for searches includes the **Service Provider’s name, address, phone number, website and a short description of the services/features provided.**

Using the Main Website <http://www.mass211.org> :

1. Click the *Search for Help* button.
2. Click *Start a Search* button.
3. Follow the steps 3-6 above.



Operations Memos

SNAP: Community Share Agriculture for DTA Clients

SNAP

Operations Memo 2014-47

The Department, in collaboration with Project Bread and a number of local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) partners, has developed a CSA share program initiative in which our clients can participate. The program implemented an automatic monthly payment system to support the CSA participation of SNAP households enrolled in the initiative.

Implementation of the Revised Heat and Eat Program

SNAP

Operations Memo 2014-52

The Agricultural Act of 2014 (the Farm Bill) has revised the minimum Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefit a household must receive to qualify for the heating/cooling SUA in the SNAP benefit calculation. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will provide the LIHEAP funds to qualified households, and DTA will issue a \$21 LIHEAP payment to SNAP clients.

This memo:

- reviews H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria;
- describes H-EAT benefits processing;
- explains how H-EAT benefits will be issued;
- advises of notices clients will receive;
- informs staff of rules for expunging H-EAT benefits; and
- provides details on other related information.

TAFDC – ESP/Work Program Requirement: BEACON Changes

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2014-55A

Operations Memo 2014-55 detailed changes to ESP/Work Program Requirement forms and processes.

It advised staff about the BEACON changes, specifically:

- the *Participation and Attendance* (ESP-7) form changes;
- the *Referral and Response* (ESP-16-Cash) form changes;
- changes to the Hours Participated field in the TAFDC – Work Requirements page and in the Participation tab;
- the reinstatement of the automated sanction process with a Mandatory Community Service Referral; and limiting the length of the “Participation” Good Cause reason.

Operations Memo 2014-55A has been issued to make modifications to the ESP-7 form.

Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP – Back-Scanning of Permanent Verification and Indexing of All Documents by Household Member

TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP
Operations Memo 2014-58

To make permanent documents readily available to staff and to avoid oververification, the Department has developed a system for back-scanning and storing permanent verifications currently kept in active paper case files. This Operations Memo advises staff of the process to be used to identify and back-scan permanent verifications, starting with those in active SNAP paper case files. It also informs staff that, beginning September 1, 2014, all documents that pertain to an individual household member will be indexed in DTA My Workspace (MWS) under that household member's name, AP ID, and SSN (if applicable) and introduces revised TAO staff responsibilities for batching documents sent to the Electronic Document Management Center.

TAFDC – Welfare Reform: Teen Parent Changes

TAFDC
Operations Memo 2014-59

As part of the recent welfare reform legislation, a pregnant teen who meets all other eligibility requirements is eligible to live in a teen parent shelter or participate in a teen parenting program (TPP) formerly known as teen living programs-TLP) during her entire pregnancy. The pregnant teen is also eligible to receive TAFDC for her entire pregnancy if she meets the school attendance requirement found in 106 CMR 203.610 and 106 CMR 203.630.

Effective with the issuance of this Operations Memo, any teen parent who meets all other TAFDC eligibility requirements is eligible to live in a teen parent shelter or participate in a TPP at any time during her pregnancy. The pregnant teen is also eligible to receive TAFDC for her entire pregnancy if she meets the school attendance requirement.



Operations Memos

SNAP Cost-of-Living Changes

SNAP

Operations Memo 2014-60

The annual SNAP COLA was processed during the weekend of September 19, 2014. This is a mass change affecting the entire SNAP caseload. This recalculation impacts the household's monthly benefit for October.

The following is a summary of the changes:

Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards - The Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Shelter Deduction - The maximum shelter deduction (for households that do not include an elderly/disabled member) has increased to **\$490**.

Standard Deduction: The standard deduction for all household sizes has increased.

The standard deduction for household sizes one to three has increased to **\$155**;

The standard deduction for a household of four has increased to **\$165**;

The standard deduction for a household of five has increased to **\$193**; and

The standard deduction for a household of six has increased to **\$221**.

Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs)

The Heating/Cooling SUA has increased to **\$634**;

The Nonheating SUA has increased to **\$390**;

The Phone SUA has increased to **\$45**; and

The Bay State CAP SUA has increased to **\$634**.

Maximum Benefit Levels - The maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes have increased.

Minimum Benefit Level - The minimum benefit level for eligible one- and two-person households has increased to **\$16**.

Unchanged COLA Standards

The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at **\$143**.

Attachment A is a series of eligibility tables with the updated COLA standards.

Update to Eligibility Charts and Issuance Tables

The eligibility charts and issuance tables at the www.mass.gov/dta website will be updated by October 1, 2014.



Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP – Back-Scanning Update

TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP
Operations Memo 2014-61

To make permanent documents readily available to staff and to avoid oververification, the Department has developed a system for back-scanning and storing permanent verifications currently kept in active paper case files. This Operations Memo is being issued to outline changes to the back-scanning process. This Operations Memo advises staff that the Ricoh back-scanning coversheet, used to link verifications to be scanned with the household member to whom they correspond, now only requires the AP ID of the household member, rather than their full name and AP ID. It also informs staff of a change to the final disposition of verifications scanned as part of the back-scanning project, the use of a new *Chain of Custody* tracking document to be used to track the whereabouts of documents during the back-scanning process, and changes to the back-scanning project schedule.

Closure of the Central Eligibility Processing (CEP) SNAP Web Unit

SNAP
Operations Memo 2014-62

This Operations Memo informs Department staff about the closing of the Central Eligibility Processing (CEP) SNAP Web Unit, at central office, on September 29, 2014. All web applications received after this date will be transmitted to the appropriate TAO for processing. Case managers that were assigned to the CEP SNAP Web Unit will be reassigned to offices on a staggered basis. The first set of case managers will report to their new TAOs on October 6th and the remaining workers will report on October 20th. Case managers will take their remaining caseloads with them.

Diversity Quote

We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity.

Desmond Tutu

FYIs

Fuel Assistance 2014-2015

The Fuel Assistance Program begins accepting applications for fuel assistance on November 1, 2014.

TAOs will receive a supply of Fuel Assistance brochures in October for clients who are interested in applying for fuel assistance and in knowing how the program works. The brochure will also be available on our website at www.mass.gov/dta/fuelassistance.

Clients can obtain income verification letters to submit with their Fuel Assistance application in the following ways:

- Clients may use their My Account Page (MAP) screen, which displays their case information. For more information on how clients can access MAP, see Field Operations Memo 2010-6 and Operations Memo 2012-41.
- Clients may use the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telephone number to request an income verification letter. The IVR telephone number is 1-877-382-2363, and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clients will receive an income verification letter within five days at the mailing address identified in BEACON.
- Clients may visit a TAO to request an income verification letter. Clients who visit a TAO to request an income verification letter must receive the letter before leaving the TAO. Clients who telephone their case managers requesting an income verification letter should be directed to use the IVR telephone number or to access MAP to print out their case information.

Each TAO was previously sent a poster advertising the availability of income verification letters through the IVR telephone number and MAP. Contact Schrafft's if a new poster is needed in your office.

Department of Children and Families (DCF) Quarterly Clothing Allowance and TAFDC Teen Parents

DCF quarterly clothing allowance payments to teen parents are considered noncountable income in the TAFDC Program as they are a contribution that provides for a portion of the teen parent's needs. See 106 CMR 204.250(AA) for more information.

Remember, however, individuals receiving state or federal foster care maintenance payments as well as the DCF quarterly clothing allowance are ineligible for TAFDC benefits. (Refer to 106 CMR 204.305(E) for more information.) As long as the DCF quarterly clothing allowance is the only DCF payment issued to the teen parent, he or she is not considered in receipt of state or federal foster care maintenance payments and may be approved for TAFDC, if otherwise eligible. To verify the type, amount and frequency of DCF payments, a current statement from DCF indicating these details is required.

For SNAP purposes, the DCF quarterly clothing allowance payment is considered countable unearned income. See 106 CMR 363.220(B) for more details on SNAP unearned income. This is a SNAP rule change based on a recent clarification from USDA. Please note that the SNAP information in the original version of this FYI from November 2011 is no longer applicable.

From the Forms File

Revised Brochure

Claiming and Verifying Medical Expenses May Increase Your SNAP

09-430-0914-05

09-431-0914-05 (Spanish)

09-432-0914-05 (Portuguese)

SNAP-MEB (Rev. 9/2014)

The *Claiming and Verifying Medical Expenses May Increase Your SNAP* brochure has been revised and an initial supply has been sent to TAOs. Please discard old versions of this brochure and use the revised version.

Revised Flyer

Do You Need Help Because of a Disability?

26-404-0914-05 (English)

26-403-0914-05 (Spanish)

26-411-0914-05 (Chinese)

26-412-0914-05 (Haitian Creole)

26-413-0914-05 (Portuguese)

26-414-0914-05 (Khmer)

26-415-0914-05 (Russian)

26-416-0914-05 (Vietnamese)

26-417-0914-05 (Laotian)

OCR-1 Flyer (Rev. 9/2014)

This revised flyer is available for ordering from the Document Production unit at Schrafft's.

Revised Poster

Do You Need Help Because of a Disability?

26-404-0914-05

26-403-0914-05(Spanish)

OCR Poster (Rev. 9/2014)

This poster has been revised and an initial shipment sent to TAOs. Please remove old versions and display the revised (9/2014) version in TAO waiting areas.

TAO Meeting Notes