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## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

As I am sure you have heard, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed over 100 cases of swine flu in humans in the U.S. There are two cases in Lowell, Massachusetts. The Commonwealth takes this situation very seriously.

Although this is a matter that requires all Massachusetts residents to be aware and prepared, there is currently no cause for alarm. Governor Patrick, Secretary Bigby, and the Department of Public Health (DPH) have prioritized efforts to minimize illness and harm to the public. Here at DTA, plans are in place to cope with office closures if swine flu becomes a widespread issue. Please make sure your office contact lists are up-to-date in the event that emergency plans take effect.

While there is no vaccine for the current swine flu strain, there are still important steps that everyone can take to help prevent getting or spreading any type of influenza:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Practice good "cough etiquette" by coughing or sneezing into a tissue, or into your elbow instead of into your hands.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to avoid infecting them.

Information about swine flu is available online in several locations:

- [www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu) includes fact sheets about swine flu in English, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Portuguese, Spanish and Vietnamese.
- [www.mass.gov/blog/publichealth](http://www.mass.gov/blog/publichealth)
- [www.cdc.gov/swineflu](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu)

In addition, Massachusetts residents can now call (2-1-1) for basic information about swine flu.

*(Continued on page 2)*

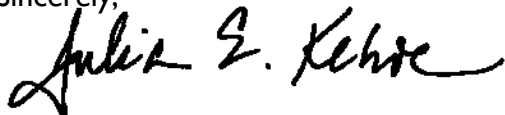
**From the Commissioner** *(Continued from page 1)*

Since the majority of our staff members interact with members of the public who may visit our offices when they are not feeling well, please exercise extra caution with hand-washing to avoid the spread of germs. If a client indicates they may be affected by influenza, please direct him or her to your local hospital.

I will keep you updated as additional details become available.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

## Quality Corner

This month we will take a look at an NPA case with a citizenship issue and another NPA case with a dependent care cost error.

### Non Citizenship

This NPA case included a husband and wife who applied for SNAP benefits when the husband was laid off from work in December of 2008. The case was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) from December through June. The case was selected for a QC review for the sample month of January. Documentation in the case record included employment authorization cards dated 8/12/08, two Social Security cards with the stipulation, “Valid for Work with DHS Authorization,” and two I-94 cards with a Department of Homeland Security stamp that stated, “Paroled Pursuant to SEC 212(d)(3).” The I-94 cards both had a departure date of 4/14/08.

QC determined that, based on the information on the I-94 cards, neither the husband nor the wife was eligible for SNAP benefits. The fact that the case was already opened caused an overpayment error of \$139 for the review month.

### What’s a Case Manager to Do?

When processing noncitizen cases, case managers must be aware of dates, codes and citations that may be printed on the document(s) that is provided as proof of eligible noncitizen status. For many noncitizen statuses (including parolee), there is a five-year period during which the noncitizen is ineligible for SNAP benefits, unless the noncitizen meets an allowable exemption. For other noncitizen statuses, the five-year bar does not apply.

Noncitizen policy can be complicated. When in doubt about noncitizen policy in general or a noncitizen status in particular, case managers are

encouraged to consult with their supervisors or a subject matter expert in the TAO. The TAO designee may also call the Policy Hotline for clarification of policy. For more information on noncitizens, see 106 CMR 362.220.

### Dependent Care Deduction

This NPA case was recertified as USR for a household of three. The family included the client and her two children. At the time of recertification, the client indicated on the recertification form that she paid \$40.50 weekly in day care expenses for each of her two children. She reported gross earnings of \$2,017 per month, and had monthly shelter expenses that included a mortgage in the amount of \$1,700 in addition to property taxes and homeowner’s insurance.

During the review, QC determined that the client was actually paying \$40.50 weekly for *both* children. This resulted in an overpayment of \$52 for the review month.

### What’s a Case Manager to Do?

Although this was a client error because the client provided incorrect information on her recertification form, case managers must remember to request verification of dependent care expenses that are questionable. In this case, the client had what appeared on the surface to be sufficient income. However, considering her other household expenses, the day care expense should have been deemed questionable and should have been verified. For more information on the dependent care deduction, see Field Operations Memo 2007-19.

## From the Forms File

### Revised Form

*TransAction Associates Client Verification and Transportation Request Form*

17-300-0509-05

CVTR-1 (Rev. 5/2009)

The *TransAction Associates Client Verification and Transportation Request Form* has been revised to include a block for self-directed Job Search Job Readiness (JSJR) and updates for two other blocks labeled "Job Ed Training" and "Voc Ed Training."

### Revised Brochures

*Noncitizen Resource Brochure*

25-410-0509-05

NCRB (Rev. 5/2009)

The *Noncitizen Resource Brochure* has been revised to update information on the organizations included and to add several new organizations. The Spanish version will be available soon.

*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*

09-169-0509-05

09-170-0509-05 (S)

SNAP-PB (Rev. 5/2009)

The *Food Stamp Program* brochure has been revised to include the name change to SNAP. The content has also been reorganized and updated to reflect current SNAP policies.

*Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)*

18-825-0409-05

18-826-0409-05 (S)

EBT-TB (Rev. 4/2009)

The *Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)* brochure has been reformatted and revised to include the name change to SNAP.

### Diversity Quote

**"What we have to do . . . is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our communities."**

**Hillary Rodham Clinton**

## 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**.

The questions and answers below address issues concerning elder clients who are categorically eligible for SNAP benefits according to gross income guidelines specified in 106 CMR 364.976. Although assets are not countable for these elder clients, the income derived from these assets is countable. For more information on these households, please refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-27 and 106 CMR 365.180.

- Q.** Recently, my elder SNAP client was confused when I asked her about any interest earned on her savings. She is a member of a categorically eligible household and assumed that we would not inquire about her assets. Should I ask this client about her interest income?
- A.** Yes. Interest income is countable unearned income. However, this client is confused because she had been told that for SNAP DTA is not looking at her assets. It's important to explain to her that there is a distinction between the balance in a checking or savings account, and the interest on such an account, which is considered unearned income. While a categorically eligible client does not need to provide asset information, she or he is obligated to report on any resulting income generated from these assets.
- Since it is reasonable to assume that clients may not be aware of the types of SNAP unearned income that are countable, it is also reasonable for case managers to provide examples of the types of income we need to know about.

- Q.** My SNAP client's application indicated that there was no income coming into the household. However, during an interview with this client, he disclosed receipt of a small monthly pension. Do you have suggestions on how to ask clients about their unearned income information so that it is reported upfront, rather than in subsequent conversations?
- A.** Yes. Because an elder client may be unaccustomed to sharing this type of information or may believe that the information you're requesting is too private to divulge, be sure to clearly explain the types of unearned income that are countable, such as bank interest, dividends, annuities and pension payments.
- Q.** My elder SNAP client reported that he uses his monthly dividend payment to help cover his rent. Should I request verification of this income from my client?
- A.** Yes. As with all countable unearned income, verification is a SNAP requirement. A client's tax returns may be one way to obtain this income verification. Other examples include bank statements or the statements from other financial institutions. Remember that if you are concerned with verifying the income generated from an asset, looking at one of the client's monthly statements or the client's annual statement summary page may suffice.
- Also, remember to assist any client who is having difficulty obtaining income verifications, as outlined in 106 CMR 361.650 and 106 CMR 361.920. Further information on methods of verifying income for SNAP are described in 106 CMR 363.210(G).

## Field Operations Memos

### NewMMIS: Replacing MassHealth Cards

TAFDC and EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-16A

Currently, TAO staff use the *MassHealth Card Update Request* form (MHCR-1)(2/00) to:

- replace MassHealth cards that have been lost or stolen; or
- invalidate MassHealth cards.

Since new MassHealth cards have been issued for NewMMIS, the *MassHealth Card Update Request* form is being replaced to reflect the new card information. Due to incomplete information given to DTA, Field Operations Memo 2009-16 is being reissued with corrected instructions for replacing new MassHealth cards.

### Emergency Assistance Program

State Letter 1347

Field Operations Memo 2009-20

This State Letter and this Field Operations Memo address the following:

- the qualification of legal guardians as the caretaker of a needy child;
- ineligibility due to an outstanding default or arrest warrant;
- ineligibility if the family became homeless because the family *abandoned* public and/or subsidized housing in the preceding year without good cause or the family *was evicted* from public and/or subsidized housing in the preceding three years for nonpayment of rent or fraudulent behavior;
- a 30 percent savings requirement;
- a 30 hour per week participation requirement leading to self-sufficiency, which includes education and training programs, community service, and substance abuse treatment, and is a requirement which will be reduced as a reasonable accommodation for individuals who are disabled, or will be reduced or eliminated for good cause;
- the termination of shelter benefits for rejecting one opportunity for safe, permanent housing without good cause or for abandoning the placement for two or more consecutive nights or for being repeatedly absent from the placement; and
- the term EA assistance unit has been changed to EA household.

## Field Operations Memos

### Change to DTA Works

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-21

Field Operations Memo 2008-64 informed TAO staff that the DTA Works Program (formerly known as the Intern Program) expanded statewide January 2, 2009. That memo also informed TAO staff, that once clients completed six months of the DTA Works Program, these clients would continue in the Supported Work activity until placement into subsidized or unsubsidized employment.

Field Operations Memo 2009-21 tells TAO staff that, due to the procurement process currently taking place for Supported Work vendors, the DTA Works Program will be temporarily suspended as of June 30, 2009. Once the procurement process is completed, the DTA Works Program will be assigned to a vendor who is delivering the appropriate service components for this program under the new procurement.

### Spring 2009 SNAP Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-22

To date, approximately 98,000 SNAP households have received increased SNAP benefits as a result of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

On the evening of April 24, 2009, approximately 62,000 SNAP households were selected for 2009 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits.

- Approximately 38,000 are households who received the April 2008 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefit. These households are eligible for a 2009 \$1.00 H-EAT benefit. They will not see an increase in SNAP benefits because the Heating/Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) is already on file.
- Approximately 24,000 are newly eligible H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program households. For these households, May 2009 SNAP benefits will be recalculated using the Heating/Cooling SUA as these households are anticipated recipients of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

DHCD will enroll all households in the 2009 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program and make \$1.00 in H-EAT fuel assistance benefits available.

This memo reviews H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria, explains the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD, discusses notices to H-EAT clients, provides instructions for restoring lost SNAP benefits to H-EAT households and describes the DHCD client brochure. There will be minimal case manager impact since the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program enrollment and SNAP recalculation processes are fully automated.

## Field Operations Memos

### Reinstating the Car Ownership Program

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-23

Field Operations Memo 2008-67 told TAO staff that, due to increased referrals and limited resources, no more referrals should be made to the Car Ownership Program and that TAO staff would be notified when this situation changed. Effective April 27<sup>th</sup>, the Car Ownership Program will accept new referrals.

This memo describes the process and eligibility requirements for the Car Ownership Program that were described in Field Operations Memo 2006-28 (which had been obsolete). The Car Ownership Program is only one of several transportation assistance programs available to clients through Transaction Associates.

### Extended Unemployment Benefits

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-24

As a result of the recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA – also known as the Economic Stimulus Package), unemployed workers may be eligible for extended unemployment benefits. This memo informs TAO staff about extended unemployment benefits and advises TAO staff to remind clients to apply for extensions when appropriate.

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### Dates to Remember

<b>May 13, 2009</b>	<b>EOHHS Office of Diversity, Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights, Brown Bag Lunch, 11 A.M. to 1 P.M., One Ashburton Place, Boston</b>
<b>May 15, 2009</b>	<b>Deadline for GIC Annual Enrollment for FY 2010</b>
<b>May 25, 2009</b>	<b>Memorial Day</b>
<b>May 26 - 28, 2009</b>	<b>Department of Transitional Assistance Conference</b>



## FYIs

### Changes to DTA Online

This month, the following changes have been made to **DTA Online**:

- link to “NewMMIS: eLearning Lessons” has been added and is accessible through the **Training** side-bar option;
- revisions have been made to the “List Services of Cities and Towns” which is accessible through the Field Operations tab; and
- additional employment opportunities have been added to the “Job Search Results” listing which is accessible from the **DTA Job Postings** side-bar option.

### Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage include:

- the addition of the “Summary of Emergency Assistance Regulation Change Process” information to the **News & Updates** side-bar option;
- updates to our caseload information, which can be accessed by selecting the appropriate Department program (EAEDC, FS, Homeless, SSI, TAFDC) beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar option;
- the addition of a USDA link to “What Your SNAP Benefits Can Buy” which can be accessed by selecting “Food Assistance” from the **What We Do** side-bar option;
- updates to the “SNAP Outreach Centers,” which can be accessed by selecting the **Initiatives** side-bar option; and
- updates to the “Program Eligibility Charts and Tables,” which can be accessed through the **Key Resources** side-bar option.

## FYIs

### The Importance of Following Up on DSS Matches

It is important to follow up on any DSS Match that alerts the Department to the placement of a dependent child. Case managers must check with the client to be sure that any other child continuing to receive assistance is still living in the home. A recent Quality Control (QC) error resulted when a client continued to receive SNAP benefits for a household of two people – herself and one child – after the child had been placed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Several months before the QC review took place, the case manager removed a different child identified on the DSS Match. During the QC review, however, it was found that both of the client's children left the home at the same time. Only one child appeared on the DSS Match because the other child was not placed in foster care but was placed with his father who obtained a custody order for that child.

The placement of a child by DCF usually involves a serious family crisis. There are two basic types of protective service provided by DCF. One is a Care and Protection Order, which is a court-ordered or mandatory removal (sometimes resulting from the filing of a 51A report) of a child from a home due to abuse or neglect. The other type is called a Child in Need of Services order or CHINS. A CHINS is a *voluntary* placement with DCF because of a child's (usually a teen) and a family's need for DCF services. It is important, then, for the case manager to explore the nature of the placement, and conduct inquiries about remaining children with care in all situations.

While not eligible for SNAP, children absent from the home, including voluntary placement by DCF, might be considered temporarily absent from the home for cash assistance purposes and remain eligible for TAFDC or EAEDC. For further information about temporary absence, see 106 CMR 203.595 (TAFDC) and 320.540 and 320.550 (EAEDC).

## TAO Meeting Notes