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Field Operations Memo 2004-15
April 2, 2004

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  Cescia Derderian, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: DTA/DMR Food Stamp Outreach Initiative

Background In our continued effort to increase food stamp participation and reduce barriers to access, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) have met over the past several months to identify obstacles DMR clients face in accessing food stamp benefits. A simplified process has been developed to remove those barriers and increase participation among this population. These meetings have resulted in a FS Outreach partnership between DTA and DMR. Beginning on March 30, 2004, DMR workers (North East area staff and vendors) were trained by DTA on general food stamp guidelines and instructions for assisting their clients in the food stamp application process. In early April 2004, DMR workers across the state will begin assisting their group home residents with the food stamp application process.

The Purpose of This Memo This Field Operations Memo will provide details regarding the DTA/DMR FS Outreach partnership.

- The DMR client population will be identified.
 - Food stamp group living arrangement policy will be discussed.
 - The DTA/DMR Application Package will be described.
 - DMR staff responsibilities will be defined.
 - The responsibilities of the DTA AU Manager will be listed.
 - DTA/DMR verification requirements and process will be explained.
 - Streamlined EBT card process will be described.
 - The impact of the standardized application process will be discussed.
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DMR Client Population

DMR workers will be assisting DMR clients, in receipt of SSI, with the streamlined mail-in food stamp application process. This means that the DMR clients are:

- automatically asset eligible;
- known to SDX/BENDEX;
- living in DMR licensed group home;
- allowed phone interviews since they are hardship cases due to disability;
- exempt from the work requirement due to disability;
- subject to a special MASS EBT Card process; and
- allowed up to 24 month certification periods due to disability.

The following DMR clients are not part of the DTA/DMR FS Outreach Initiative.

- DMR clients who have not yet applied for SSI or who have applied but are awaiting SSI benefits must apply directly at the appropriate TAO for both EAEDC and FS benefits.
- DMR clients who qualify for *expedited FS benefits* must apply directly at the appropriate TAO.

Residents of Group Living Arrangements

Food Stamp Program policy regarding residents of group living homes for the blind and/or disabled is found at 106 CMR 365.620. These regulations allow residents of group homes to be eligible as one-person FS AUs under an *exception* to the residents of institution rule. *See* 106 CMR 361.240.

These regulations are being revised as part of the streamlining of procedures for group home residents, such as DMR clients. For the DTA/DMR outreach initiative:

1. AU managers need not verify that a DMR group living home is licensed.
 - DMR has certified to DTA Central Eligibility Operations that all currently operating DMR group living homes are licensed.
 - DMR will immediately notify DTA Central Eligibility Operations if a group living home closes/becomes unlicensed.
 - DMR group living homes have provided licenses to USDA as part of the application process for a POS device.
Note: A report will be added to Actuate in the near future listing licensed DMR group homes.
 2. DMR will provide a current listing of DMR group home residents to the appropriate TAO and on a quarterly basis thereafter.
 3. DMR workers will immediately notify the appropriate TAO/AU Manager if a DMR client is no longer a resident of the group home or of changes which would impact the food stamp benefit amount.
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**DTA/DMR
Application
Package**

The DTA/DMR Application Package will include the following forms:

- the revised simplified Food Stamp Application Form (FSA-1);
- the Rights and Responsibilities/Penalty Warning Form (RR-FSP-1B);
- the revised Request for Authorized Representative (Image 10);
- the Home Health Care Card Form (Image 2); and
- the new Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Group Living Homes Form (FS-ACSE-2).

The DTA/DMR Application Package will also include the following brochures:

- Your Right to Know Brochure;
- The Food Stamp Benefits Brochure; and
- Electronic Benefit Brochure.

**DMR Worker
Responsibilities**

The DMR worker (staff or vendor) will be responsible for providing the FS Outreach activities described below.

- ***Act as Authorized Representative:***
 - ◆ The DMR worker will complete the Authorized Representative form (Image 10) for purposes of applying for and recertifying the DMR client for food stamp benefits. The identified DMR worker will be interviewed by phone on behalf of the DMR client to complete the application process.
 - ◆ The DMR worker will also indicate on the form the name of the Authorized Representative for purposes of transacting food stamp benefits, if different.
 - ***Food Stamp Benefits Information Session:***
 - ◆ The DMR worker will inform the client or guardian about the Food Stamp Program. During this information session the DMR worker will make FS information brochures available and discuss what FS benefits can be used for and how benefits will be accessed.
 - ***Food Stamp Application Assistance:***
 - ◆ The DMR worker will fill out the simplified FS Application.
 - ◆ The DMR worker will be trained how to answer the FS application questions and will have a copy of the CD-ROM *Food Stamp Benefits Simplified Application Process* for reference purposes.
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**DMR Worker
Responsibilities
(Continued)**

- ◆ The DMR worker must:
 - identify **DMR** as the source agency on page 1 of the FS Application;
 - have page 1 of the FS Application signed;
 - have the RR/FSP1-B signed;
 - complete and have the Image 10 signed; and
 - complete and have the Image 2 signed.

Important: If the DMR client writes illegibly or is able only to make a mark, i.e., an X, the DMR worker also signs as *witness* to the signature. If the DMR client is unable provide a signature, the DMR worker assisting with the application process will sign required forms on behalf of the client.

- **Food Stamp Verification Assistance:**
The DMR worker will help the client gather required verifications. See, **Streamlined Verification Process** later in this memo for more information.
- **Forward Completed Applications:**
The DMR worker will forward completed forms and verifications to the appropriate TAO.
- **Problem Resolution:**
The DMR worker will contact the DMR liaison at the DTA office if there are any problems or concerns with a particular DMR client.

**DTA Staff
Responsibilities**

The AU Manager responsibilities for processing FS applications from DMR clients are as follows. The AU Manager must:

- review the DMR application package for completeness and required signatures.
 - enter the FS application information onto BEACON.
Note: Record **DMR** as the source agency on BEACON. This is important for tracking and reporting purposes.
 - indicate the Address Type as *Residential Facility* on the Address Window;
 - on the Assessed Person No financial Statement/Residential Facility Window:
 - ◆ select **DMR Licensed Group Home** as the facility name from the pop-up box; and
 - ◆ select **Group Home** as the residential facility type.
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**DTA Staff
Responsibilities
(Continued)**

Note: *DMR Licensed Group Home* was added as new Resource on the Resource Group Window for purposes of the DMR/DTA outreach initiative.

- process DMR client information in accordance with the **Streamlined Verification Process** section of this memo.
- conduct a phone interview with the DMR authorized representative identified as assisting with the application/recertification process. The AU Manager may schedule one phone interview to discuss multiple DMR clients with the group home Authorized Representative.
Note: **In the Narrative, be sure to enter that each client is eligible for a waiver of the face-to-face interview due to disability.**
- certify the DMR client for 24 months.
Exception: The DMR client has earnings or other circumstances that make the AU unstable.

**Streamlined
Verification
Process**

Many of the DMR FS cases will be very simple. Necessary verifications will include: identity; unearned income, earnings, shelter expenses and utility costs.

Identity: The DMR client may provide a driver's license, voter registration card, birth certificate or other proof of identity.

If the DMR client does not have an appropriate form of identity but a social security number (SSN) is provided, the SSN once validated may serve to verify identity.

Earned Income: Pay stubs or a written letter from the employer showing gross income received in the past four weeks.

Unearned Income: SSI and RSDI income amounts entered on the application will be verified by the DTA AU Manager through SDX/ BENDEX.

The DMR worker will enter the most recent SSI and/or RSDI amount(s) known to DMR. (DMR does not have access to SDX/BENDEX.)

**Streamlined
Verification
Process
(Continued)**

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- Once the FS AU is pending, the AU Manager must:
 - ◆ Access the BA option on BEACON; and
 - ◆ Go to the SDX *E Screen* to verify the current SSI and/or RSDI income amount(s).

Note: If the income on file is not current, the AU Manager must initiate an overnight SVES inquiry.

Shelter Expense and Utility Costs: Shelter and utility information entered on the application for DMR group homes will be verified by the FS-ACSE-2 form.

Important: If the FS-ACSE-2 form indicates that the DMR client pays utility costs separate from shelter, be sure to enter the appropriate SUA on BEACON. On the **Dept. Use Only** section of the form, the maximum food stamp benefit for one-person of \$141 must be subtracted from the shelter expense to account for food in accordance with 106 CMR 365.630(B). This is the shelter amount that must be entered on BEACON.

**Streamlined EBT
Card Process**

DTA has strongly recommended that all DMR group homes use the Home Health Card for the following reasons:

1. Many DMR clients are unable to use an individual EBT card and will have difficulty remembering a Personal Identification Number (PIN).
2. The Home Health Card will make it administratively easier to access food stamp benefits.
3. The Home Health Card allows DTA to put in place a streamlined process for issuing cards and PINs to DMR group home residents.

Many DMR group homes are administered by vendors. A single vendor may operate several different DMR sites across the state. However, the vendor has only one administrative office. For purposes of the DTA/DMR outreach initiative, if a vendor operates multiple group homes across the state, all Image 2 forms must be sent to the TAO covering the town where the administrative office is located. DMR group home managers/ administrators will be instructed to schedule a single appointment at the appropriate TAO to select a PIN for each DMR client residing in the group home(s).

**Streamlined
Application
Process for
DTA/ DMR FS
Outreach
Initiative**

The instructions contained in Field Operations Memo 2004-12 Food Stamp Application Processing Guidelines do not apply to the DTA/DMR FS Outreach Initiative. Complete and signed application packages received from DMR must be processed in accordance with this memo and are subject to the normal 30-day processing timeframe.

DMR workers have been instructed to submit all required paperwork and verification. **No BEACON-generated application forms are required.** The follow-up phone interview along with receipt of any outstanding verification(s) finalizes the DTA/DMR application process.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.
