

# Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

## this month in...

### Transitions

Quality Corner	2
From the Forms File	4
From the Hotline	4
Disabled Noncitizens Receiving EAEDC but Not Receiving Food Stamps	5
Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase Two)	5
Medex Premium Rate Changes	6
Extending Food Stamp Certification Periods	6
Standard Medical Deduction for the Food Stamp Program	6
Department Interpreter Services Enhancements	7
Homeless Child Care: Revised Child Care Resource (CCR&R) Shelter Contact List	7
New Initiative: DTA Internship Program	7
New Initiative: Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium Enhanced Services Program	8
New Initiative: Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) Referrals: Springfield Liberty and Worcester TAOs	8

Continued on Page 3

## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

Our success as a Department is measured, in part, by how well we inspire the partners who work with us to accomplish our goals. As we approach this spring season, I'm pleased by the signs of renewed support and enthusiasm from staff and the community-at-large. To improve customer service, increase economic self sufficiency and reduce homelessness, we're forging deeper neighborhood ties and creating new ways to engage our stakeholders.

Nowhere was this renewed spirit more evident than at the State-wide Hunger Summit on March 27th. More than 500 people - including nearly 100 DTA staff - attended this important event. Video of the morning session is now available by clicking on this link: [Hunger Summit Video](#).

We've received accolades from Secretary JudyAnn Bigby, Assistant Secretary Marilyn Anderson Chase, and many participating organizations including the Greater Boston Food Bank. Our partners at the local, state, federal, corporate, and nonprofit levels are energized after a full day of interaction, and we'll be sharing recommendations from the Summit in the weeks and months ahead.

As Governor Patrick stated, "I know that government can't solve every problem in everybody's life...But we have to work together and we have to elevate the conversation about poverty, about what is holding people back."

With your help, we will extend that conversation until hunger, homelessness, and poverty are reduced in our state. The Summit

Continued on Page 2

has proven that anything can be accomplished when we work together.

To that end, I would like to thank the staff who went above and beyond to make the Summit a success, particularly: Suzanne Cray and Amy West; Dennis Hohengasser, Maryanne Murphy, and the entire Training Unit; Phuoc Cao, Lauren Arms, Janice McKittrick, Karen Driscoll, Jennifer Maldonado, and everyone in the Food Stamp Unit; Peter Sasso, Bruce Everitt, and the Document Production Unit; Deb Matteodo and the Strategic Development and Community Relations Unit; our Regional Directors; our Senior Staff; and everyone who staffed the event, attended the event, stuffed packets, sent invitation lists, helped with the website, or made phone calls. This list would be incomplete without also extending my appreciation to all of you who remained in DTA offices on Summit day to maintain the high level of service we offer our clients. This was truly a team effort, and we have proven once again that we make an excellent team.

Of course, the Summit is only one example of how we are able to channel the spirit of civic engagement into enduring public support. In the coming months, I'm pleased to announce that DTA will be reestablishing local advisory boards to boost community involvement and solicit valuable feedback.

Advisory board members will serve in a voluntary capacity and attend regular meetings (at least ten per year). The members will represent the interests of the clients we serve; from elders to people with disabilities, noncitizens to new citizens, people who are homeless to those who are recently housed, business leaders and work and training representatives as well as child care workers and nutrition experts. The boards will range in size from 15 to 30 members who are familiar with the programs we administer and who can provide fresh perspectives on how to improve the way we do our jobs.

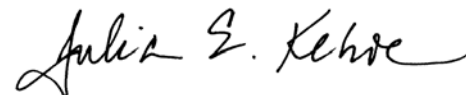
There currently are two ongoing advisory boards operating in Springfield and Revere. Once the process for recruiting and appointing advisory board members is finalized, we'll be rolling out advisory boards in additional communities, including Boston, Fall River, Holyoke and Lawrence.

If you are interested in helping with an advisory board for your

TAO, please contact Georgianna Melendez, Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Development and Community Relations, at 617-348-5242.

As always, thank you for your commitment to our Department and to the people we serve.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors related to the application of noncitizen policy.

### Legal Permanent Resident Household

This NPA FS household consisted of a family of four. The household included the mother, father and two children. The family members were all Legal Permanent Residents who had entered the country in May 2004. The family was sponsored by an elderly parent (the wife's mother) who received SSI benefits.

The husband and the wife were correctly excluded as active food stamp household members since neither had sufficient work quarters to be eligible.

<b>2008 Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Guidelines</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>FYI - BEACON Generated Child Care Referral Notice for Homeless Child Care Assistance</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>FYI - Clarification of Work Requirement Exemptions</b>	<b>9</b>

They also did not meet the five-year bar (in the country less than five years) or any of the other eligibility requirements applicable to Legal Permanent Residents. The two children were the only ones who received food stamp benefits. The youngest one was 14 years old and the other turned 18 in December 2006. The case was recertified as a semiannual reporter in May 2007, and the 18-year-old was coded as Legal FS Disqualified - No, which meant he was incorrectly allowed to remain as an active food stamp recipient. This caused a very large overpayment error.

### **What's an AU Manager to Do?**

At recertification, the AU Manager must review the case for continued eligibility based on all case factors. In this case, the AU Manager missed the fact that the child turned 18 prior to the recertification, and that his noncitizen coding

should have been changed since he was no longer eligible. Since the household was on Universal Semiannual Reporting, this change did not have to be reported during the certification period in which he turned 18. However the change had to be made at the next recertification. For more information on noncitizen policy, see 106 CMR 362.220(B).

### **An Undocumented Noncitizen Child**

This NPA household included a father and his three children. The father was an undocumented noncitizen. The NPA case was opened under the father's name in May 2007 and recertified in November 2007. Previously, all three children had been listed in their mother's PA case which closed in June 2006. The eldest child was listed in the mother's closed PA case as an undetermined noncitizen. The two younger children were U.S. citizens.

At the time of the NPA application, the eldest child was listed as a Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) on BEACON with what seemed like a valid alien registration number. The father had also listed this child as a Legal Permanent Resident on the application form. The case record contained a copy of the eldest child's MassHealth card but no copy of this child's alien registration card.

The father was correctly excluded from the food stamp household. During the QC review, it was determined that the eldest child was, in fact, an undocumented noncitizen who was ineligible for food stamp benefits. This resulted in a large overpayment error.

### **What's an AU Manager to Do?**

There were two misleading pieces of information in this case that indicated that the child was an LPR, and therefore eligible. The first was the alien registration number on BEACON. After closer examination, it was determined that this number was the father's foreign passport number. The second was the MassHealth card. A MassHealth card must not be used as verification of noncitizen status for the Food Stamp Program. Although eligibility requirements often overlap across programs, receipt of benefits in one program does not automatically guarantee eligibility for another program. In addition, for each eligible noncitizen in the household, there must be corresponding documentation that matches the BEACON INS designation. Finally, if the AU Manager had looked at the mother's closed PA case, the eldest child's status could have been correctly determined.

## From the Forms File

### *Do You Need an Interpreter*

#### *LEP Binder: Things to Know While Awaiting an Interpreter*

The revised *Do You Need an Interpreter?* poster has been shipped to TAOs. In addition, each TAO received an LEP Binder: *Things to Know While Awaiting an Interpreter* to be used by reception staff in communications with LEP clients. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-16 for more information on these materials.

### **New Form**

13-230-0308-05

VAR-1 (3/2008)

#### *Vocational Assessment Referral*

This form is used when an AU Manager refers an applicant or client to the vocational specialist. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-12 for more information.

### **Revised Form**

09-375-0308-05

09-376-0308-05 (S)

FS-USR-2 (Rev. 3/2008)

#### *Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form*

The Categorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standards have been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard.

### **Revised Brochure**

09-070-0308-05

09-079-0308-05 (S)

FSP-INFO (Rev. 3/2008)

#### *How to Get Food Stamp Benefits*

The Income Standard for households with children under 19 or a pregnant woman living alone has been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard.



## From the Hotline

- Q.** A father who is a Legal Permanent Resident and has no other qualifying noncitizen status is ineligible for the TAFDC Program because he moved to the United States last year. However, he has two children receiving TAFDC benefits and today he attended an Orientation Session. Can my client now receive an incentive payment for attending this session?
- A.** Yes. This father can benefit from the Orientation Session by learning about and taking advantage of ESP programs, activities and support services that lead to economic self-sufficiency for himself and his family.
- More information on the Orientation Session is found in Field Operations Memo 2007- 45.
- Q.** My TAFDC teen parent is 16 years of age and a dependent in her parents' assistance unit. Recently, she attended an Orientation Session and is now requesting an incentive payment. Both of her parents received incentive payments last month for

their Orientation Session attendance. Can an assistance unit receive more than two Orientation Session incentive payments?

- A. Yes. Each parent in a two-parent household is eligible for the payment as well as any dependent teen parent(s) living in the home.

*Before* issuing an incentive payment, remember to check the Related Benefit window of BEACON to determine whether an incentive payment has already been issued to your client.

*After* issuing an incentive payment, remember to update the BEACON Narratives tab with a separate notation for each parent or teen parent, indicating the date he or she attended the Orientation Session, as well as a notation indicating that the incentive payment was issued.

More information on issuing the incentive payment is found in Field Operations Memo 2007-59.

## **Disabled Noncitizens Receiving EAEDC but Not Receiving Food Stamps**

EAEDC, FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-11

Food stamp regulations provide that certain qualified noncitizens may be eligible for food stamp benefits based on disability regardless of date of entry into the U.S. The Department has developed a new automated process in BEACON to identify certain EAEDC noncitizens who are coded by DES as RSDI or SSI certified and currently are not receiving food stamps.

This Field Operations Memo:

- describes the automated selection process and mailing of an outreach letter and special application form to these clients; and
- describes AU Manager responsibilities for processing returned food stamp applications.

## **Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase Two)**

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-12

The New Initiatives Memo entitled *TAFDC - Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase One)* dated January 31, 2008 introduced TAO Staff to the vocational specialist initiative. It informed TAO Staff about vocational specialists being placed in the Brockton, Dudley Square, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, New Bedford, North Shore, Revere and Springfield State TAOs. Beginning March 31, 2008 (on an incremental basis), the following TAOs will also receive a vocational specialist. Fitchburg and Framingham will each receive a full-time specialist, while Greenfield, Milford, Southbridge, Taunton, Plymouth, North Adams, Pittsfield, Falmouth and Hyannis will each receive a part-time specialist. TAO staff will be notified of the specific arrival dates of the vocational specialists.

Phase Two will complete the state-wide roll-out of vocational specialists in TAOs. The purpose of Field Operations Memo 2008-12 is to:



- identify clients eligible for a referral to the vocational specialist;
- inform AU Managers about the vocational specialist's responsibilities; and
- provide follow-up instructions.

### **Medex Premium Rate Changes**

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-13

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts has announced Medex premium rate changes for the following non-group plans: Basic, Bronze, Core, Core Plus, Gold, Silver, and Standard. These changes are effective on March 15, 2008.

This memo:

- identifies the non-group plans that have changed and the corresponding rate changes;
- provides information on updates to food stamp benefits and the Medex premium amounts; and
- gives information about the 2008 Medex Premium Rate Change Report.

### **Extending Food Stamp Certification Period**

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-14

This memo transmits instructions to AU Managers about extending the certification period of households that contain only elderly and/or disabled adults to two years and extending the certification period for all other households with certain exceptions to one year.



### **Standard Medical Deduction for the Food Stamp Program**

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-15

The Department recently requested and was granted a waiver of the medical deduction rules, allowing us to operate a Standard Medical Deduction demonstration project. Under this project, eligible households that verify allowable medical expenses greater than \$35 per month but no more than \$125 will be allowed a Standard Medical Deduction of \$90 (the equivalent of verifying \$125 in monthly medical expenses). Households that verify medical expenses greater than \$125 per month will continue to be allowed a medical deduction equal to the verified medical expenses minus \$35.

Implementing a Standard Medical Deduction will increase the benefit amount for many food stamp households and encourage increased participation by elderly/disabled households.

This Field Operations Memo:

- explains BEACON changes and the conversion of cases with current medical expenses on file;

- issues AU Manager procedures for processing medical expenses at application; and
- issues AU Manager procedures for processing medical expenses at recertification.

### **Department Interpreter Services Enhancements**

All  
Field Operations Memo  
2008-16

To comply with federal law, the Department is required to advise clients of the right to professional interpreter services and must provide interpreter services to clients whose primary language is not English or who use American Sign Language (ASL), regardless of language, national origin or noncitizen status. Interpreter services must be provided to clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and ASL users at the first point of contact. This memo:

- transmits enhancements to the Department's Interpreter Services; and
- highlights new guidelines for interpreter services, including an LEP Binder with client instructions and access to Qwest TeleInterpreters for all TAO staff.

### **Homeless Child Care: Revised Child Care Resource (CCR&R) Shelter Contact List**

TAFDC, EA  
Field Operations Memo 2008-17

Field Operations Memo 2007-62 informed TAO staff about a list entitled *Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Shelter Contact List* compiled by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and DTA for use in the homeless child care referral process.

This Field Operations Memo:

- reissues the list with current revisions to contact information for CCR&Rs and shelters made by EEC;
- provides EEC's website link to access the current list and future lists as they are revised; and
- informs TAO staff about the process for revising shelter contact information.

### **New Initiative: DTA Internship Program**

TAFDC

DTA recognizes the importance of increasing economic opportunity for our clients to help them become self-sufficient, and also recognizes our role in providing this opportunity. The Department has developed the DTA Internship Program as a way to help clients gain employment experience and become job ready through supported work opportunities at DTA for clerical positions. While these intern opportunities are entry level positions, they will serve as a stepping stone for our clients to obtain higher paying jobs.

The DTA Internship Program" began March 24, 2008 and is serving six clients in the following TAOs: Dudley Square, Malden, Newmarket Square and Revere. With success, this initiative will be expanded statewide with interns in every TAO.

The purpose of this New Initiative Memo is to inform TAO staff about:

- DTA's partners in this initiative; and
- the DTA Internship Program.

## **New Initiative: Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium Enhanced Services Program**

TAFDC

The Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium is beginning a new initiative called the Enhanced Services Program. This new program will help TAFDC clients—both work program required and non-work program required—who would benefit from participating in skills training, job readiness and pre- and post-training job search programs to begin the transition to work. The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO staff about:

- the Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium Enhanced Services Program; and
- the procedures for enrolling clients in this program.

## **New Initiative: Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) Referrals in the Springfield Liberty and Worcester TAOs**

TAFDC

In an effort to increase economic opportunity for the clients we serve, DTA has partnered with Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) to give our clients who have behavioral health symptoms, such as mild to moderate depression and/or anxiety, additional access to screenings, assessments and support services. This initiative is currently being offered in the Springfield Liberty TAO. The goal of this initiative is to help clients overcome barriers to employment so they can achieve self-sufficiency.

Beginning March 10, 2008, this initiative will also be offered in the Worcester TAO. The purpose of this New Initiative Memo is to:

- identify appropriate referrals; and
- inform TAO staff about the vocational specialist's and the provider's responsibilities.

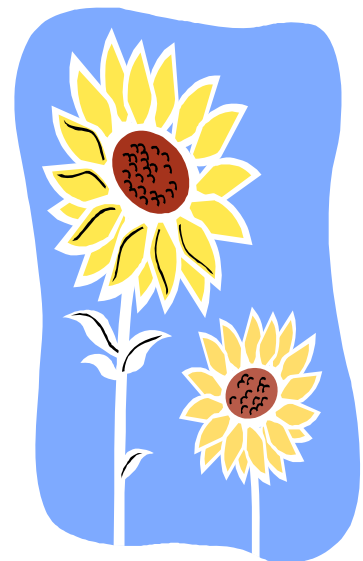
## **2008 Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Guidelines**

TAFDC, EA and FS  
State Letter 1333

The Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Guidelines are used to calculate the eligibility standards in the following programs:

- TAFDC: *Income from the Parent(s) of a Teen Parent Under Age 18;*
- EA: *EA Eligibility Standard;* and
- Food Stamps: *Gross Monthly Categorical Eligibility Income Standards.*

State Letter 1333 updates these regulations to reflect the increased HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2008.





## FYI

### **BEACON - Generated Child Care Referral Notice for Homeless Child Care Assistance**

AU Managers and Homeless Coordinators are reminded that, when a homeless family in temporary emergency shelter is receiving TAFDC and is working or participating in an ESP activity, the AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must print a current BEACON *Child Care Referral* notice or generate and print a BEACON *Child Care Referral* notice, if none exists. The AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must then fax the BEACON *Child Care Referral* notice and the *Child Care Referral Notice for Homeless Families* to the shelter.

AU Managers and Homeless Coordinators should not fax the child care referral notices directly to the CCR&R.

The only time AU Managers and Homeless Coordinators should fax a child care notice directly to the CCR&R is when a TAFDC family receiving homeless child care assistance begins working or participating in an ESP activity. At that time, a BEACON *Child Care Referral* notice must be faxed to the appropriate CCR&R. (See Field Operations Memo 2007-62, page 3.)

## FYI

### **Clarification of Work Requirement Exemptions**

The March 2008 issue of *Transitions* contained an error in the keypoints related to State Letter 1331 and Field Operations Memo 2008-2, *Food Stamp Program: Work Requirement Exemption Changes*. The keypoint incorrectly states, "A person living in a household where a household member is under age 18, even if that household member is not eligible for food stamps, is exempt from both FS/ET and FS/WP." The correct keypoint should read, "A person living in a household where a household member is under age 18, even if that household member is not eligible for food stamps, is exempt from FS/WP."

State Letter 1331 has been revised to clarify this point, and is available in Policy Online. Please note that the promulgated regulations as well as the Field Operations Memo are accurate. We regret any confusion this may have caused.

"Why not let people differ about their answers to the great mysteries of the Universe? Let each seek one's own way to the highest, to one's own sense of supreme loyalty in life, one's ideal of life. Let each philosophy, each world-view bring forth its truth and beauty to a larger perspective that people may grow in vision, stature and dedication."

Algernon Black

