



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2008-24
April 30, 2008

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From: John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: Spring 2008 Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update

Background

In 2007, approximately 54,000 FS households received increased food stamp benefits and a \$1.00 fuel assistance benefit as a result of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

On the evening of April 24, 2008, approximately 46,000 FS households were selected for 2008 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits. Of these households:

- Approximately 30,000 are households who received the June 2007 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefit. These households are eligible for a 2008 \$1.00 H-EAT benefit. They will not see an increase in FS benefits because the Heating/ Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) is already on file.
- Approximately 16,000 are newly eligible H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program households. For these households, May 2008 FS benefits will be recalculated using the Heating/Cooling SUA as anticipated recipients of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

DHCD will enroll all households in the 2008 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program and make \$1.00 H-EAT fuel assistance benefits available.

This memo will review H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria, explain the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD, discuss ongoing H-EAT clients and describe the DHCD client brochure.

There will be minimal AU Manager impact since the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program enrollment and FS recalculation processes are fully automated.

Role of DTA

MIS will:

- ❖ create a data file of FS households, which meet the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria. H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program households must:
 - be active on FS;
 - have a gross income of 200% of the federal poverty level or less;
 - have the Non-Heating SUA, the Telephone SUA or no SUA on file;**and**
 - receive less than maximum benefits for the household size.

Note: Homeless households and Bay State CAP households are not eligible for H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits.

- ❖ transmit the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program file to DHCD;
- ❖ recalculate May FS benefits of newly identified H-EAT eligible households using the Heating/Cooling SUA.

Note: This change will impact all eligible active FS households, including those FS households with a pending recertification or a case maintenance action. AU Managers and/or Supervisors must allow the H-EAT change as part of the recertification or case maintenance activity. If a pending authorization contains an SUA other than Heating/Cooling for a H-EAT recipient, a new Heating/Cooling Standard Utility allowance (SUA) record must be created, wrapped up and authorized by the AU Manager.

- ❖ create a utility expense verification type: *H-EAT Program Certified by DHCD Match* in BEACON;
- ❖ make an entry on the BEACON Narratives tab, *H-EAT Program benefits recalculated*; and
- ❖ establish an internal H-EAT eligibility tracking period in BEACON since the Heating/Cooling SUA is allowed for one year for each household.

Important: At reapplication or reinstatement, AU Managers must check for a 4/24/2008 or 10/20/2007 BEACON Narratives tab entry indicating the household was H-EAT eligible. The AU Manager must continue the Heating/Cooling SUA for the balance of the appropriate one-year period ending either in April 2009 or in October 2008.

The Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program brochure (*See Attachment A*) and FS change notice will be sent to each newly eligible H-EAT household that has a FS benefit increase.

Note: The approximately 30,000 households who received June 2007 H-EAT fuel assistance benefits will not receive a notice at this time since there is no FS benefit change. These households have a new one year period which begins on 4/24/2008 and will end in April 2009. DHCD will notify these households of the available 2008 \$1.00 H-EAT benefit as well as the regular fuel assistance program and utility discounts in the fall.

Role of DHCD	DHCD will make available a \$1.00 H-EAT fuel assistance benefit for each H-EAT eligible household and send a file back to DTA confirming H-EAT enrollment.
October 2007 H-EAT Fuel Assistance Households	<p>FS households selected for the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program benefits in October 2007 will not be reselected as part of this process.</p> <p>Exception: Approximately 6,000 October 2007 H-EAT eligible households were on file with an SUA other than Heating/Cooling despite continued H-EAT eligibility. The Heating/Cooling SUA will be reentered and FS benefits will be recalculated using the restored SUA for these households. A report listing impacted households will be transmitted with this memo.</p> <p>AU Managers must review each household on the report for lost benefits. Supplemental FS benefits must be calculated and issued for any month(s) in which benefits were lost as a result of the removal of the Heating/Cooling SUA. AU Managers are reminded to make an entry in the BEACON Narratives tab regarding the reason for the supplement and the month(s) of lost benefits.</p> <p>These households will not receive a \$1.00 H-EAT fuel assistance benefit at this time.</p>
DHCD Client Brochure	The revised DHCD brochure is attached. This brochure informs H-EAT households about the program. It will also tell these households how to access Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) fuel assistance payments and utility discounts through local Fuel Assistance provider agencies. The impact on FS benefits is also discussed.
June 2008 Hotline Focus	The From the Hotline in the June 2008 <i>Transitions</i> newsletter will provide further information on the treatment of H-EAT eligible households.
Questions	If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.

Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is pleased to tell you about the Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Fuel Assistance Program. This is a new Fuel Assistance benefit provided to low-income households identified by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). DHCD has automatically enrolled your household in the H-EAT Program.

Enrollment in the H-EAT Program has the following **important benefits** for your household:

- Your monthly food stamp benefits have increased because special rules allow Fuel Assistance recipients to have their food stamp income calculated using higher shelter costs. The enclosed letter from DTA tells you your new food stamp benefit amount.

If you have questions about your food stamp benefits, please call DTA at: **1-866-950-FOOD**.

- You can visit your local Fuel Assistance provider agency to request free services. Free services from your local Fuel Assistance provider agency include:
 - Help in applying for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP provides eligible households aid by paying a portion of winter heating *or* high rent bills. Eligibility for LIHEAP must be determined at your local Fuel Assistance provider agency.

Payments for actual usage or fuel delivery are made directly to the heating vendor from November 1st to April 30th except when the cost of heating is included in the rent. In general, a subsidized housing tenant whose heat is included in rent and pays less than 30% of their income towards rent is not eligible for *regular* Fuel Assistance.

- Information and application assistance for utility discounts from your utility and telephone companies. If you are not currently receiving a utility discount for your electricity, heating or telephone bills, contact your local Fuel Assistance Provider to learn more.
- You are eligible for at least \$1.00 in fuel assistance through the H-EAT Program, and possibly more in regular LIHEAP benefits. This \$1.00 benefit will be available to you when you visit your local Fuel Assistance provider.

To locate the Fuel Assistance provider in your area, please call the DHCD Heat Line at: **1-800-632-8175**.

A DHCD and DTA partnership.



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE