

# Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

## this month in...

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## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

It was a pleasure to spend time with you at the 72nd Annual DTA Conference. Thank you to Arthur Casey and the entire Executive Committee, the DTA Conference Board of Directors, the Conference Committee, all of the presenters, and everyone who attended this fantastic event.

As I discussed at the Conference, when I became Commissioner one year ago, I set three main goals as part of an overall, comprehensive anti-poverty agenda. I'm sure by now you know these goals by heart, but I'd like to briefly touch upon each one.

First, we are focused on **assisting our clients to increase their levels of economic self-sufficiency**. We are in the process of shifting the way that DTA does business from strictly a "work first" approach to an emphasis on meaningful employment. Over the past year, in collaboration with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department has continued to develop comprehensive employment, training and education services to move people toward meaningful employment.

Second, we are committed to **reducing homelessness** across the Commonwealth. The issue of homelessness continues to be a significant problem for men, women, and especially children across the Commonwealth and unfortunately, we have seen these numbers increasing over the past few years. We are addressing this problem through our work with the Commission to End Homelessness, our cooperation with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), our amended contracts with Housing Assistance Program Providers, and the re-procurement of our family emergency shelter system.

Our third goal is to **improve customer service and the way we deliver our programs and services**. Recognizing that there are

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gaps within our service delivery system, DTA has been conducting an assessment of all of the issues and barriers to assistance for all of our clients, including people with disabilities, and ways to improve our overall service delivery. We are developing ways to streamline operations and ease the application process for clients, especially through the online consumer Virtual Gateway application, the Brockton Food Stamp Call Center, and the satellite offices and Food Stamp Outreach Centers across the state.

As part of our overall strategy for the future of DTA, we recently re-examined the Department's mission statement in light of these three main goals. I'm pleased to announce we have refined our mission to better reflect our goals and outcomes.

Our new mission is:

*...to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life.*

Along with the mission, we drafted **a summary statement and guiding principles** to accompany the mission:

- The Department of Transitional Assistance serves one out of every twelve people in the Commonwealth - including working families, elders, and people with disabilities. Our services include nutrition assistance, cash assistance, job assistance, and emergency shelter.
- To ensure equal access to our resources, we perform outreach and work to improve our services by devising flexible and creative solutions. Our primary goal is to get the right resources to the right people, at the right time with the highest level of programmatic integrity.
- At DTA, we believe that we can best succeed in our mission by:
  - o Working collaboratively as a team, cooperating with each other and sharing responsibility and ideas.
  - o Partnering with state agencies, with community organizations, and most importantly, with our clients.
  - o Maintaining a customer-oriented approach to our work and treating everyone with dignity and respect, addressing each individual's need with sensitivity and understanding.

## Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors, both income-related, which are the most common and the most costly errors found by QC reviewers. The first error was related to the coding of student earnings, while the second was related to an unreported change in school status.

### Student Earnings Problem

This NPA FS household consisted of the client, her daughter and her niece, who had turned 19 in October 2007. The case was recertified in November 2007 and, at that time, the only income counted in the food stamp calculation was the client's RSDI. The client's niece was a full-time high school student, who was employed part-time, making an average of \$150 to \$300 weekly. The AU Manager had correctly entered the wage amounts at the last recertification but incorrectly coded the earnings as noncountable for FS; therefore, the earnings were not used in the food stamp calculation.

In addition, the QC reviewer, after completing a DOR Child Support inquiry, determined that the client had been receiving monthly child support since October 2007 for an adult child who was no longer in the home. During the review, the

client admitted that she was receiving child support and provided the QC reviewer with a copy of the DOR information. The niece's earnings, coupled with the unreported child support income, caused a large overpayment error.

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

The first portion of the error was caused by a misapplication of policy. AU Managers must consult with their supervisors or consult Policy Online. The earnings of a student under 18 who attends elementary or secondary school at least half-time are noncountable. For more on the earnings of an elementary or secondary school student, see 106 CMR 363.230(H).

Regarding the second portion of the error, AU Managers must check the DOR screen to see if child support is being received for any child in the home, as well as for arrearages for a child who is no longer in the home. Clients may receive child support for children who are in their care, even if that child is not their natural child.

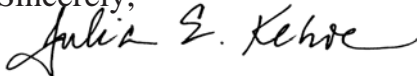
### **Earnings of 17-Year-Old Not in School**

This household included the client, her 18-year-old daughter and a 6-year-old daughter. The client was employed. The

This summer, I plan to visit each TAO to hear your thoughts and to brainstorm ways for all of us to work toward meeting this mission.

Each of you holds the key to our success as a Department. I know how hard you work, and how committed you are to the well-being of our clients. I appreciate everything you do, everyday, and I am so impressed by what we have accomplished together over the past year. I look forward to the promise of the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

### **Quality Corner (cont)**

household was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR). The client reported no changes on her USR recertification form of November 2007. During that same month, there was a DOR match on the 17-year-old. In the Narrative, the worker noted that the daughter would turn 18 in December 2007. When the November recertification was processed, no income was entered for the daughter.

During the review, the client informed QC that her daughter had not returned to school in September and, in fact, had been employed at two different jobs since June 2007. She had started the most recent job in October 2007. This caused a large overpayment error since the case was ineligible for food stamp benefits.

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

Although the AU was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting when the case was at a point of recertification in November, there was a DOR match for the 17-year-old (who would turn 18 in December 2007). In addition, based on her student status and the amount she earned, her wages could have caused the case to be over-income. When QC called the error in April 2008, the case was indeed over-income, based on the 17-year-old's earnings.

The AU Manager should have followed-up in November by requesting the school verification and wages of the 17-year-old daughter. If the school verification showed that she was in school at least half-time, her earnings would have been excluded until she turned 18 in December 2007. If the school verification showed that she no longer attended school—which, in fact, is what happened—her earnings would have been countable.

## From the Forms File

### New Form

09-120-0608-05

*FS-DVEN (6/2008)*

*Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens*

The *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens* is for use only by EAEDC elderly noncitizens who need to verify a disability to be eligible for food stamp benefits. See Field Operations Memo 2008-28 for instructions on the use of this form. The Spanish is on the reverse side of the form.

### Revised Forms

02-177-0508-05

02-178-0508-05(S)

*FHRN (Rev. 5/2008)*

*Notice of Fair Hearing Request*

02-147-0508-05

02-148-0508-05(S)

*DOH-10 (Rev. 5/2008)*

*Request for a Fair Hearing*

These two forms have been revised with the following changes:

(1) a sentence has been added to state that a client who has trouble reading or understanding the notice can call Recipient Services for an explanation; (2) the phrase “hearing impaired” has been changed to “Deaf or hard-of-hearing” and (3) DTA’s TTY phone number has been updated. Also, please be advised that forms with the Notice of Fair Hearing Request language have been updated with the revised language and are available for ordering from Schrafft’s. Please discard old versions of these forms and use versions with revised Notice of Fair Hearing Request language.

15-200-0408-05

*ADA-1 (Rev. 5/2008)*

*Request for An ADA Accommodation*

15-202-0408-05

*ADA-2 (Rev. 5/2008)*

*Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee Review Form*

These forms have been revised. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-20 for more information.

09-250-0608-05

09-251-0608-05 (S)

*RR-FSP-1B (Rev. 6/2008)*

*Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties*

This form has been revised. A sentence has been added to the form stating that, “if a client has trouble reading or understanding the notice they can call Recipient Services for an explanation.” Discard versions of the old form and use the revised version.

25-170-0608-05

25-171-0608-05 (S)

25-172-0608-05 (P)

*FSA-1(Rev. 6/2008)*

*Food Stamp Benefits Application*

09-005-0608-05

09-006-0608-05 (S)

*FSP-5 (Rev. 6/2008)*

*Food Stamp Change Report Form*

09-150-0608-05

*SSI/FSP-1 (Rev. 6/2008)*

*SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form*

09-070-0608-05

09-079-0608-05 (S)

*FSP-INFO (Rev. 6/2008)*

*How to Get Food Stamp Benefits*

These forms and brochure have been revised as part of the Food Stamp Program Maximized Categorical Eligibility project.

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Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-27 for more information.

### **New Brochure**

25-300-0608-05

25-301-0608-05(S)

RSB-1(6/2008)

*Help for Those in Need: A Resource Brochure*

This brochure is part of the Maximized Categorical Eligibility project, replaces the *Family Resources Brochure* (FRSB) and obsoletes the *Family Resource Brochure Information* (FRBI) form. Please use the new brochure. Please discard versions of the obsolete form. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-27 for more information.

### **The following forms are now available in Spanish.**

02-560-0308-05(S)

DVWR (S)(Rev. 5/2008)

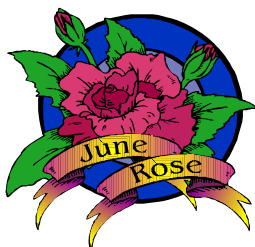
*Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program*

*Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence*

18-441-0508-05

RMN-1(S)(Rev. 5/2008)

*Notice of Returned Mail*



## **From the Hotline**

The questions below discuss the impact of receiving fuel assistance on food stamp benefits. There are two fuel assistance programs in Massachusetts: the traditional Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Heat and Eat Fuel Assistance Program (H-EAT). LIHEAP fuel assistance payments are for clients who pay for heat or for certain clients who have shelter expenses that are disproportionate to their income. Food Stamp Program rules allow households receiving or anticipating receipt of fuel assistance payments to have the Heating/Cooling SUA used in calculating Food Stamp benefits.

For information on the Spring 2008 H-EAT Program, please refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-24.

For more information on the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA), refer to 106 CMR 364.400(G).

- Q.** If a LIHEAP client reports a change of address, how do I proceed?
- A.** A food stamp client in receipt of LIHEAP payments who verifies an address change must be asked about current utility obligations. Appropriate changes must be made on BEACON.
- If a food stamp client in receipt of LIHEAP payments verifies a change of address and a continuation of heating/cooling charges, make no changes to the Heating/ Cooling SUA and update BEACON with the new address.
  - If a food stamp client in receipt of LIHEAP payments verifies a change of address and no longer incurs a separate charge for heating/cooling, update BEACON with the new utility expense and address information.

These changes could occur at recertification or as a part of a case maintenance activity.

- Q.** If a change of address is reported by a client in the H-EAT Program, how do I proceed?
- A.** The H-EAT Program operates differently from the traditional LIHEAP. Food stamp clients in the H-EAT Program are entitled to the Heating/Cooling SUA for an entire year, *even if the household reports a change in address or a change in*

*utility obligations.* While the client's address change must be completed on BEACON, no changes should be made to the H-EAT client's SUA.

**NOTE:** These Food Stamp clients will be reselected for the H-EAT Program in the future, if they meet H-EAT Program requirements.

- Q.** If a client in the H-EAT Program becomes homeless, how do I proceed?
- A.** Food stamp clients in the H-EAT Program are entitled to the Heating/Cooling SUA for an entire year, *even if the household becomes homeless* during the one-year period. If a client becomes homeless, the AU Manager must update the homeless indicator on BEACON and change the address. The AU Manager must make no change to the Heating/Cooling SUA until the one-year period has expired.

### ADA Accommodation Requests -Time Requirements

All  
Field Operations Memo 2008-20

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Department regulations require that DTA make accommodations for persons with disabilities. Field Operations Memo 2007-8 described DTA's responsibilities regarding requests for these accommodations. Since responses to these accommodation requests must be timely, Field Operations Memo 2008-20 identifies timelines for responses.



### Confidentiality of Case Record Information and the BEACON Heightened Level of Security

All  
Field Operations Memo  
2008-23

The purpose of this memo is to:

- remind TAO staff to take the utmost care in guarding a client's confidentiality;
- remind TAO staff that a client has the option to use the heightened level of security indicator as a means of flagging his or her case as needing increased confidentiality safeguards;
- ensure that TAO staff convey the impact of the heightened level of security indicator to the client; and
- provide instructions for TAO staff when activating the heightened level of security indicator for requests due to domestic violence situations as well as for other reasons.



## **Maximized Categorical Eligibility for NPA Food Stamp Households**

FS  
Field Operations Memo  
2008-27

The Department is further expanding categorical eligibility rules for Non-Public Assistance food stamp (NPA/FS) households. Effective June 9, 2008 there will no longer be an asset test for most NPA/FS households.

Clients will be relieved of the burden of providing asset information and verifications. TAO staff will no longer have to request and review asset verifications or explore asset-related matches. This change will have a positive impact on many vulnerable Massachusetts households, particularly households with elder and disabled members.

This memo:

- reviews categorical eligibility groups and rules, including discussing:
  - existing categorically eligible groups; and
  - identifying new categorically eligible groups;
- identifies households still subject to asset limits;
- discusses screening and

processing of households still subject to asset limits;

- provides instructions for processing the new categorically eligible groups, including:
  - entering asset information on new applications, reapplications and recertifications; and
  - handling asset-related match information;
- describes changes to Department brochures and forms; and
- discusses the impact of this change on Virtual Gateway applications.

The State Letter transmitting the Maximized Categorical Eligibility policy is being finalized.

## **Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens Receiving EAEDC**

FS  
Field Operations Memo 2008-28

To provide elderly noncitizens with nutritional benefits and increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, elderly noncitizens receiving EAEDC may now verify disability for food stamp purposes by submitting a *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens* form signed by a licensed medical practitioner. This will enable elderly noncitizens to receive food stamp benefits, if otherwise eligible.

This Field Operations Memo:

- introduces the new *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens* form; and
- describes AU Manager responsibilities for the use of this form during application, recertification and case maintenance.

## **FYI**

### **Changes to DTA Online**

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

#### **Administration and Finance - Human Resources Frequently Used Forms**

The Human Resources Frequently Used Forms list now includes the *Request for Approval to Hire* form.

#### **Diversity - Events**

The Diversity Event for June is entitled *Gay and Lesbian Pride*.

## FYI

### Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following changes to Policy Online.

#### Online Forms

The Online Forms option now includes the following forms:

#### Cross-Program

- *Request for an ADA Accommodation*
- *Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee Review*

#### EA Forms

- *Declination of Transfer*
- *Project RISE & F.O.R. Families Referral Form*
- *Request for Sex Offender Registry Information*
- *Release of Information between DTA and DPH F.O.R. Families (English & Spanish)*
- *EA Noncompliance Referral (E & S)*
- *Homeless Transportation Request Form*
- *Relocation Benefit Verification*
- *Shelter Interruption Statement (E & S)*
- *Notice of Placement Pending EA Eligibility Determination (E & S)*
- *Child Care Referral Notice for Homeless Families*
- *Referral for Housing Assistance Program Services (E & S)*
- *EA Self-Sufficiency Plan - Phase II - Part 3 (E & S)*
- *Notice of Approval or Denial for Request for Continued Shelter after Six-Month Period (E & S)*
- *Notice of Transfer at Shelter Request (E & S)*
- *Informational Contacts (E & S)*
- *Notice of Shelter Transfer (E & S)*

#### Food Stamps Form

- *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens (E & S)*

“Most of us are greater than we believe.”

Pablo Casals

## FYI

### Curing Food Stamp Work Program (FS/WP) Sanctions

Food stamp regulations require that FS/WP clients who fail to comply with the FS/WP requirements for three months in a three-year period be ineligible for the remainder of the 36-month period. (**Note:** The current three-year period began on 1/1/2006 and will end on 12/31/2008.)

AU Managers are reminded that, when a client is sanctioned for failure to comply with the FS/WP, he or she may regain eligibility by working an average of 80 hours in a 30-day period or by performing community service in accordance with 106 CMR 362.320(G)(2). The sanction may be cured at any time during the sanction period when the client presents verification of compliance through work or community service.

Once a client regains eligibility, he or she will remain eligible for the remainder of the 36-month period as long as he or she continues to comply. Additionally, if a client regains eligibility and subsequently loses a job due to circumstances beyond his/her control, he or she can participate in the



Food Stamp Program for another three months without complying with FS/WP requirements. See 106 CMR 362.320 (H) and (I) for details.

## **FYI**

### **Denying Cases for Missed Interview**

TAFDC and EAEDC AU Managers are reminded that, when denying a TAFDC or EAEDC application before the 30th day for missing two interviews, the FS application must remain pending and not be denied before the 30th day. TAFDC and EAEDC regulations at 106 CMR 702.115(D)(4) allow for the denial of an application if the applicant has missed two scheduled interviews anytime within 30 calendar days from the application date. When there is an application for food stamps associated with the TAFDC or EAEDC application, the second appointment letter serves as a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) for the Food Stamp Program. If the applicant misses the second appointment, the food stamp portion of the application cannot be denied before the 30th day. See Field Operations Memo 2006-30 for complete food stamp application processing guidelines.

## **FYI**

### **EA Online Forms**

All Emergency Assistance (EA) forms in English and Spanish are now available on the DTA Intranet under *Online Forms*. To access the forms, go to *DTA Online, Policy Online, Online Forms*, and select *EA*. Information is entered on the form by completing the text fields. A copy of the completed form can be saved electronically by clicking on *Save As* in the File menu. Rename the document and save it in an appropriate folder.

## **FYI**

### **Food Stamp Program: Increase in Federal Mileage Rate**

Food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 364.400 allow elderly and/or disabled household members to deduct medical expenses in excess of \$35 per month. This includes the reasonable cost of transportation and lodging to obtain medical treatment or services. These regulations also allow a deduction for dependent care expenses incurred for transportation to and from a dependent care site.

If a client claims mileage for transportation to and from medical appointments, or claims mileage for transportation to and from a dependent care site, the federal mileage rate of 50.5 cents per mile must be used to calculate the transportation cost that will be allowed as a medical deduction, or a dependent care deduction.

## **FYI**

### **NewMMIS**

This FYI provides an update on the NewMMIS project scheduled for implementation on September 29, 2008.

- **New MassHealth Card:** MassHealth Cards will be issued to each individual member rather than only to the head-of-household and will display the name and new identification number.
- **New Number:** The new identification number is a 12-digit number and is not based on Social Security number. Clients will be able to use either the new or old number before and after NewMMIS begins. The only number that will not be accepted post-NewMMIS will be numbers that start with ZZ which is a number used for newborns.

- **Mailings of the MassHealth Cards:** The first scheduled mailing of the new MassHealth Cards will take place in July. Additional mailings will occur in August and in September. The return address on the envelope will be the TAO address. Concerns and issues regarding the anticipated amount of returned mail are being addressed at Central Office.
- **Posters:** Each TAO will receive posters developed by MassHealth that will contain information about the new MassHealth Card. Posters will be in English and Spanish.
- **Training:** E-Learning training sessions will be available through PACE. Lessons will be in 3 modules: a guided walkthrough; an interactive lesson; and a job aid. Followup classroom training will be available for those needing additional training.
- **REVS Password:** If your password has expired, you will need to have it reset. Passwords expire after 60 days. REVS will contain an indicator when the MassHealth Cards have been mailed.

You will continue to receive monthly updates on the status of the development and implementation of NewMMIS.

## FYI

### TAFDC

#### **Participation and Attendance Form Data Entry Online Guide**

*Participation and Attendance* forms are sent out to clients the first business day (Monday unless Monday is a holiday) of the week before the last Saturday of the month. These forms must be returned by the client no later than the 10th of the following month (or the first business day after the 10th of the month if the 10th is a weekend or holiday). AU Managers must enter the forms into BEACON no later than the 18th of that month (or the first business day after the 18th of the month if the 18th is a weekend or holiday) to prevent a participation sanction from being created. AU Managers may enter the prior participation month's returned *Participation and Attendance* forms onto BEACON up until the Friday before the last Saturday of the current month.

*A Participation and Attendance Form Data Entry Online Guide* has been created to give TAO staff a listing of the last day of the month that *Participation and Attendance* forms may be entered onto BEACON for the previous month's participation. This guide will be sent out to all TAFDC staff and will be added to Policy Online in the Online Guides option in mid-June.

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