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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

In light of Governor Patrick's recent press conference regarding budget cuts, I am sure many of you are concerned about the future of our Department, and of our clients.

In challenging economic times, the lowest-income households are impacted the soonest and the hardest. Increased food and fuel prices and the housing crisis have already caused more people to seek help. As unemployment increases, even more households will turn to the Department for emergency assistance. With this in mind, our senior team worked very hard to protect our core services and our staff.

I am happy to report that our Department will not be subject to layoffs at this time; in addition, there will not be an early retirement incentive. EOHHS reached an agreement with all its employee unions to extend a Voluntary Layoff with Incentive Program. While all applications for voluntary layoff will be reviewed and considered, it is unlikely that many of these requests can and will be approved in our agency. In the absence of reductions directly impacting our personnel spending and in consideration of the pressing agenda confronting us, I trust you understand the need for our agency's limited participation in this voluntary layoff program.

In order to absorb our budget cut of approximately \$10 million, we determined that we had to focus on our primary or emergency function: assisting low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs. We defined our "core services" as our basic benefits: cash and food assistance and emergency shelter. However, because these benefits comprise the vast majority of our funding, we were unable to avoid some reductions.

We canceled planned new spending, such as rate increases to rest homes, in an effort to minimize the impact on people currently receiving benefits, as we would otherwise have had to reduce cash assistance to individuals. In addition, we recommended halting spending on services, including earmarked programs, that improve our clients' quality of life and increase future opportunities, but that do not allow them to meet their basic needs today. We are hopeful that

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From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

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many of these services, including the operations of play spaces in shelters and critical employment supports can be made available to our clients through private or other public resources.

In summary, our reductions include:

- Reduced funding for career centers;
- Reduction of new funding for the Young Parents Program (YPP);
- Elimination of stipends to encourage clients to attend orientation sessions;
- Reduction of funding for most Emergency Assistance earmarks; and
- Cancellation of the rate increase for rest homes.

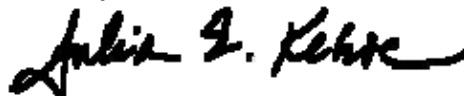
We are committed to doing business differently during these difficult times. Our budget may continue to fluctuate along with the economy: as such, we may need to make further reductions as the fiscal year progresses. I appreciate your patience, commitment, and hard work.

If you are feeling fear, panic, or anxiety about the current economy, I encourage you to contact our Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-451-1834. Licensed clinicians are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for crisis intervention and support.

If you have any questions, please speak with your supervisor or call my office at 617-348-8400.

As always, it is a pleasure working with you. Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two error cases. The first error was caused by an unreported change in shelter expenses and an expired certification period. The second error was caused by multiple issues: the incorrect coding of a household member's disability status, and earned and unearned income.

Overdue Certification in a Public Assistance (PA) SNAP Case

The case included a mother and two children and was certified from February 11, 2007 through February 10, 2008. It was selected for a Quality Control review for June 2008. As of March 2008, the certification period had expired. Quality Control determined that the household's rent had increased as of April 2008, but the client had not reported the change to the local office. The unreported change in rent caused an underissuance, which had to be considered an error by Quality Control because of the expired certification.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

When reviewing cases with expired certifications, Quality Control must use the circumstances that applied for the review month, even if those circumstances are unknown to the TAO or were not reflected on BEACON. Consequently, although a change in shelter expenses is not a mandatory change that had to be reported by the household, Quality Control had to use the shelter expense that was applicable for the review month in the SNAP benefit calculation. If certification of the case had been current, the error would have been avoided. Case managers must check their *Appointments to Schedule/Reevaluation Due* view to identify cases that are due for redetermination. This will reduce the potential of an error attributable to expired certification.

Incorrect Coding of Disability, Income Errors

This PA household consisted of a 19-year-old mother, her infant and the 21-year-old father of the child. The household's income was TAFDC for the child and DSS foster care payments for the mother, which she received as a teen mother. The father of the child had no income but was coded on BEACON as a disabled RSDI recipient; however, no RSDI income was entered onto BEACON. According to SDX, in the past he had received RSDI as the child of a disabled parent, but those benefits ended in May 2005, when he turned 18. He had applied for SSI but was denied in 2007.

Because the father did not meet the SNAP definition of a disabled person and he should not have been coded as such. This inappropriate disability coding caused the shelter cap to be lifted in the SNAP benefit calculation and subsequently caused a large overpayment.

The second error is that the mother started to work and received her first pay stub prior to being recertified. However, the income was not entered on BEACON.

The final error in this case was the incorrect calculation of foster care payments. The mother was paid on a per diem basis, and this is what should have been used to calculate her monthly income. Instead the case manager used checks she received that contained retroactive payments.

The combination of these three errors caused a significant overissuance for the review month, with the incorrect disability coding contributing to the highest dollar value of the error.

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Quality Corner

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What's a Case Manager to Do?

The case manager seemed to have accepted what the client had written on the application in regard to the disability status of the father of the child. If the case manager had checked the SDX screen, however, his disability status would have been clarified. The fact that he had no income and was not receiving SSI or RSDI, and that he had he not been classified as disabled by the Medical Review Team meant that he was not disabled for SNAP purposes (see 361.210(A)); therefore, the household was not eligible for the uncapped shelter deduction.

Since this was a PA case, the client should have been put on Monthly Reporting and prospectively budgeted using her first paystub.

In regard to the foster care payments, the client should have been questioned as to the amount she received monthly or the case manager should have requested additional verification or contacted the mother's social worker at the Department of Children and Families (formerly DSS) to determine the accurate monthly amount. At the time of certification or recertification, case managers must remember to carefully review all elements of eligibility and resolve any inconsistencies. This will help to promote accuracy in case processing.

From the Forms File

Revised Brochure

18-825-1008-05
18-826-1008-05(S)
EBT-TB (Rev. 10/2008)
Electronic Benefit Transfer

The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) brochure has been revised to inform clients that they will lose any food benefits they have not used within one year.

The revision also includes two changes in Department terminology by replacing "food stamps" with "food benefits," and "case worker" with "case manager."

Revised Flyer

26-404-1008-05
26-403-1008-05(S)
OCR Flyer -1 (Rev. 10/2008)
Do You Have a Disability?

This flyer has been revised. The revision changed "worker" to "case manager."

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**.

Q My applicant is applying for TAFDC and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Three years ago, he became a naturalized citizen. Six months ago, his twin daughters were born outside of the United States. They reunited with him in the U.S. last month. Given the recent arrival of these children in the U.S., can they be eligible for cash assistance and/or SNAP benefits?

A. Yes. If otherwise eligible, these children can be considered U.S. citizens because:

- they have at least one parent who was a United States citizen at the time of their birth; and
- their parent resided in the U.S. before they were born.

For further information on citizen regulations in the SNAP Program, refer to 106 CMR 362.210.

For further information on citizen regulations in the TAFDC Program, refer to 106 CMR 203.670.

Q. My TAFDC client is taking an online training course for college credit through the University of Phoenix. Can she meet her work program requirement hours by participating in this course of study?

A. No. While your client may continue in the course, these hours cannot be used to meet her work program requirement. This is because the University of Phoenix does not have a way to verify your client's participation hours. For more information on ESP program participation, refer to 106 CMR 207.115.

At this time, there are no approved Distance Learning locations for ESP post-secondary education activities.

Dates to Remember

November 5, 2008	Voluntary Layoff Incentive Program Deadline
November 7, 2008	Open Enrollment Deadlines: Health Care Spending Account and Dependent Care Assistance
November 11, 2008	Veterans' Day
November 27, 2008	Thanksgiving

Field Operations Memos

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Shutdown

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-52

This Field Operations Memo informed TAO staff that, due to increased enrollments in vocational rehabilitation, DTA will exceed available funding unless we immediately suspend any further referrals to the program. Therefore, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program has been suspended effective October 31, 2008. No referrals to the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program should have been made by TAO staff after the close of business on October 31, 2008.

Work Program Requirement Changes

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-53 and 2008-53 A

As a result of changes to federal work participation rules, effective October 1, 2008, the Department has changed how it counts clients' work program participation in the following areas:

- homework/study time will count towards overall participation in certain education and training activities;
- post-secondary education beyond an Associate's Degree (including Bachelor's and Graduate Degree programs) meets the work program requirement (provided the client has not already exceeded the 12-month limit on education or training activity to meet the work program);
- child support counts in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) calculation when determining community service participation limits; and
- the Job Search/Job Readiness counter is activated during a client's first weeks in a Supported Work – Job Search/Job Readiness activity.

Field Operations Memo 2008-53 informed case managers about policy and procedural changes related to work program participation. Field Operations Memo 2008-53A corrected an error found in Field Operations Memo 2008-53 in referencing a Field Operations Memo to be obsoleted.

Fall 2008 Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-54

This memo announces the issuance of Heat and Eat (H-EAT) fuel assistance benefits for November 2008. It reviews H-EAT Program criteria, explains the responsibilities of Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), discusses ongoing H-EAT clients and describes client notices and the DHCD brochure.

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 6)

Emergency Assistance – Provision of “Do You Have a Disability” Information

EA

Field Operations Memo 2008-55

This memo advises staff that the “Do You Have a Disability” information sheet must be given to all EA applicants prior to shelter placement.

Division of Career Services (DCS) Participation and Attendance Forms for October and Transportation Issues

TAFDC –

Field Operations Memo 2008-56

Field Operations Memo 2008-56 A

Field Operations Memo 2008-56 informed TAO staff that no referrals could be made by case managers to the Division of Career Services (DCS) for ESP-funded Job Search/Job Readiness activities after the close of business on October 28, 2008. As a result, no referrals are currently being made to DCS for ESP-funded Job Search/Job Readiness activities. Additionally, DCS is not signing off on a client’s *Participation and Attendance Form* if he or she is participating in Job Search/Job Readiness. As a result, *Participation and Attendance Forms* which measure a client’s participation in October will be the last forms signed by DCS for the foreseeable future.

Field Operations Memo 2008-56 A tells TAO staff how to process *Participation and Attendance* forms for October and how to process transportation requests for clients impacted by the changes at DCS.

NewMMIS Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-57

Field Operations Memo 2008-51 informed TAO staff that NewMMIS MassHealth cards would be mailed beginning Friday, October 3rd. It also provided TAO staff with procedures for replacing these cards and issuing temporary MassHealth cards.

Field Operations Memo 2008-57 answers questions that have arisen as a result of clients receiving these new MassHealth cards.

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 8)

The Change from Food Stamp Program to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SNAP

Field Operation Memo 2008-58

Effective with the October issue of *Transitions*, the Commissioner announced that Massachusetts has adopted the new national name Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to replace the name Food Stamp Program. This memo informs TAO staff of the name change and instructs case managers to reassure clients that the name change will not negatively impact their access to or receipt of SNAP benefits.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Negative Errors and Application Processing

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2008-59

The purpose of this memo is to remind case managers and supervisors of what constitutes a SNAP negative error and to describe the correct procedures to follow to avoid causing a negative error. A new job aid entitled “SNAP Negative Errors and How to Avoid Them” summarizes these procedures and is available in Policy Online, Job Aids.

State Letter

Food Stamp Program Maximized Categorical Eligibility

SNAP

State Letter 1342

This State Letter transmits Maximized Categorical Eligibility regulations. This policy expands the households identified by the Department as categorically eligible based on receipt of *Help for Those in Need: A Resource Brochure*. Categorically eligible households have been expanded to include certain households containing elders, disabled individuals and containing all adults (aged 19-59). State Letter 1342 was effective October 15, 2008.

FYIs

Changes to DTA Online

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

- Information on National Disability Employment Awareness Month has been added to the listing of Diversity Events accessed through the **Diversity** side-bar option;
- A revised flyer entitled “Do You Have a Disability?” has been added to Online Forms accessed through the **Policy Online** side-bar option;
- Job Aids accessible through the **Policy Online** side-bar option have been updated to reflect the name change from Food Stamp Program to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- The Commissioner’s letter to DTA staff regarding the Voluntary Layoff with Incentive Program has been added and can be accessed through the **Latest News/Photo Gallery** side-bar option; and
- Updates have been made to the TAO Liaison Listings accessed through the **Field Operations** tab.

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage include:

- Updates to our caseload information which can be accessed by selecting the appropriate Department program (EAEDC, SNAP, Homeless, SSI, TAFDC) beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar.
- The September 2008 Facts and Figures Report which can be accessed by selecting “DTA Facts and Figures” beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar;
- Removal of links to the Falmouth TAO closing announcement and the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 from the **News and Updates** side-bar; and
- Changes to the Domestic Violence window accessed through the **What We Do** side-bar option.

Proper Verification of Identity at Application

Case managers are reminded that when an applicant or client submits proof of identity, the proof of verification selected in BEACON must mirror the exact document that the applicant/client has submitted. It is important that the proof of verification selected on BEACON be identical to the document that has been photocopied and placed in the case record.

Recently, *Birth Certificate* was added as a selection in the BEACON Verification tab. Case managers should select this value if a client provides a birth certificate for verification of identity.

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FYIs (Continued from page 9)**Update - Verifying Extended Unemployment Compensation Benefits**

An FYI in October 2008 Transitions advised staff that the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen did not include information about Extended Unemployment Compensation (EUC08), and that case managers should call the Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) to get information about EUC08 until the screen was updated.

DUA has advised us that the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen has been updated. For clients receiving UC benefits (either regular or extended) the screen will display the amount of benefits paid for each week and the correct remaining balance. Clients with zero remaining balance displayed are not receiving benefits (either regular or extended). The screen does not indicate whether benefits are regular or extended, so case managers must still follow-up with clients for potential eligibility for extended benefits.

While not a requirement for SNAP benefits, applicants/clients should be encouraged to apply for EUC08 benefits. However, TAFDC and EAEDC regulations require that applicants/clients apply for UC benefits (including extended benefits) as a condition of eligibility.

Effective immediately, case managers must refer to the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen and no longer call the number provided in the FYI to obtain UC information by phone.

Do you know...?

Until recently, refugees, asylees and certain other humanitarian immigrants, including victims of human trafficking, have been eligible to receive SSI benefits for only a seven-year period. A new law now extends the eligibility period to nine years. Individuals who have had their SSI benefits terminated because of the seven-year time limit may also be eligible for this extension.

Noncitizens eligible for the extension include:

- Noncitizens under age 17 or over age 70;
- Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) who have held such status for less than six years;
- Noncitizens who have applied to become LPRs within four years from the date they began receiving SSI;
- Cuban/Haitian Entrants; and
- Noncitizens who have been granted withholding of deportation or removal.

In addition, the law exempts from the time limit through Fiscal Year 2011 those noncitizens with citizenship applications pending at the end of their eligibility period.

Noncitizens who have had their SSI benefits terminated because of the previous seven-year time limit should contact SSA immediately to apply for the extension of benefits.

TAO Meeting Notes