



*Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance*


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**Operations Memo 2014-42
June 10, 2014**

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  Lydia Conley, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations

Re: SNAP: Collecting New Utility Information

Overview

Section 4006 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the Farm Bill, included new rules for States regarding Heat and Eat (H-EAT) programs. To comply with requirements in the bill, the Department developed new utility statements that require “yes” or “no” responses from clients. The BEACON changes are part of the BEACON Build 46.3, scheduled for June 16, 2014.

The responses must be obtained at application, recertification and throughout the certification period whenever a client's address or utility expenses change. Clients’ responses to these statements will provide information necessary for the Department to apply the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) to the household’s benefit calculation.

Purpose of Memo

This memo:

- outlines the conversion strategy for existing SUAs;
 - details the new utility statements and BEACON changes;
 - advises case managers of responsibility for obtaining responses to utility statements; and
 - advises staff of the Pre-H-EAT conversion of cases with existing H-EAT periods.
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**New Utility
Statements and
BEACON
Changes**

Effective with BEACON Build 46.3 on June 16, 2014, new utility statements will be added to the Standard Utility Allowance page. The following impacted forms are being modified as well:

- SNAP Benefits Application;
- SNAP Application for Elderly;
- SNAP Recertification Form;
- SNAP Elderly Disabled Report Form;
- SNAP Interim Report;
- SNAP Annual Report;
- SP-RMN for address changes; and
- Monthly Report.

Conversion

All existing SNAP households with a current SUA had that value converted. This value will be used in all EBC calculations until the SUA page is updated, and a new value possibly determined. All of the responses to the new statements will be blank, and the page will be set to requires reedit.

In addition, SNAP households that participated in the H-EAT program will have H-EAT Start and End Dates converted. Cases with converted H-EAT dates **will remain with the Heating/Cooling SUA as long as the H-EAT End Date is in the future**, regardless of the responses to the new statements.

Case managers will collect utility information based on client responses to the following six statements, each requiring a “yes” or “no” answer.

- 1. I pay to heat my home (oil, gas, electricity or propane, etc.) or share heating costs with others.*
- 2. I have an air conditioner that I use in the summer, and I pay for electricity or share the cost with others.*
- 3. I have an air conditioner that I use in the summer, and I pay a fee to use it.*
- 4. I, or someone in my SNAP household, got help with heating costs from a fuel assistance agency within the last 12 months*
- 5. I pay for electricity or gas or share this cost with others.*
- 6. I pay for phone service, including cell phone service (not a pre-paid phone).*

If the client responds “yes” to numbers 1, 2, 3 or 4, the Heating/Cooling SUA will be applied. If the client responds “no” to numbers 1, 2, 3 or 4, and the client responds “yes” to Question 5, the Non-Heating SUA will be applied.

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Likewise, if the client responds “no” to numbers 1, 2, 3 or 4, and 5, and the client has a “yes” response to Question 6, the Phone SUA will be applied.

Statement Number 4 complies with the new federal rule that requires a household claiming the Heating/Cooling SUA due to receipt of fuel assistance to have received a LIHEAP payment in the current month or in any of the last 12 months. For the household to receive the Heating /Cooling SUA, the client must have received the LIHEAP payment or the utility company has received a LIHEAP payment on behalf of the household during that period.

Revisions to the Standard Utility Allowance page also include a new H-EAT field that requires Start and End dates and a LIHEAP field that requires Receipt and End dates.

- The H-EAT Start and End date fields will be populated by BEACON and cannot be updated by the case manager.
- The LIHEAP Receipt and End date fields will be enabled on a “yes” answer to the LIHEAP statement (#4).

Cases with Existing H-EAT Periods

Existing H-EAT cases on BEACON will have their H-EAT periods extended and the Start and End date fields populated based on the following rules:

- If the case has a H-EAT start date in March 14, October 2013 or April 2013 and the reevaluation start date is from 3/1/14 to 7/14/14, the H-EAT eligibility end date will be set to 11/28/14.
- If the case has a H-EAT start date of March 2014, October 2013 or April 2013 and the reevaluation end date is after 8/13/14, the H-EAT eligibility end date will be set to the reevaluation end date 11/28/14.

Determining the SUA in BEACON

BEACON will automatically calculate the SUA type for each household based on the responses to the statements about actual utility expenses and the receipt of a regular LIHEAP payment. The assigned SUA cannot be selected by the case manager. While case managers will no longer be able to enter the SUA type, they can change the statement responses, if appropriate, at any time during the certification period.

When the utility statements are implemented in BEACON with Build 46.3, the responses will be blank. However, all households will maintain the SUA type the case had prior to the utility statements being put into BEACON.

The SUA page will require reedit when any subsequent case activity is done and the case is wrapped up in BEACON.

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Cases with existing H-EAT periods on BEACON will be allowed to retain the Heating/Cooling SUA even if the client responds to the utility statements.

Cases that do not have an existing H-EAT period on BEACON may have the Standard Utility Allowance page wrapped up at any time if responses to the statements are received. The SUA for these cases will change based on the utility the household is now responsible to pay.

It is anticipated that the H-EAT program will be revamped to conform to provisions of the new Farm Bill. The updated H-EAT program is expected to be implemented prior to the dates any of the **existing H-EAT cases** will lose H-EAT benefits.

Reminder: The information in this memo does not apply to BayState CAP households.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.
