



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

DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

JOHN W. POLANOWICZ
Secretary

STACEY MONAHAN
Commissioner

Operations Memo 2014-52
September 10, 2014

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From: *AS* Anne O'Sullivan, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations

Re: Implementation of the Revised Heat and Eat Program

Overview

Households that incur heating or cooling expenses separately from their rent or mortgage, and households that receive assistance under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), qualify for the heating/cooling standard utility allowance (SUA) in their SNAP benefit calculations. In the past, states made nominal LIHEAP payments, as low as \$1, to households who would not otherwise receive the heating/cooling SUA. Receipt of this nominal payment qualified SNAP households for the heating/cooling SUA and maximized SNAP benefits for these households. This program is referred to as Heat and Eat (H-EAT).

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, households must now receive more than \$20 in LIHEAP benefits to qualify for the heating/cooling SUA. In addition, the household must have received a payment, or had a payment made on its behalf, of greater than \$20 in the current month or the preceding 12 months.

DTA is partnering with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to make changes to the H-EAT program consistent with the Farm Bill requirements.

Purpose of Memo This memo:

- reviews H-EAT Program criteria;
- describes the DHCD Match process;

**Purpose of Memo
(Continued)**

- explains H-EAT Program eligibility;
 - advises of notices clients will receive;
 - explains how H-EAT benefits will be issued;
 - details DTA staff responsibilities; and
 - transmits other related information.
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**H-EAT Program
Criteria**

The 2014 Farm Bill included a requirement for households to have received more than \$20 in LIHEAP benefits in the current month, or in the preceding 12 months, to qualify for the heating/cooling SUA.

Important: Anticipating receipt of LIHEAP no longer qualifies the household for the heating/cooling SUA.

To meet the new criteria for H-EAT, the Department now captures additional utility information from DTA households. In June, new utility statements were added to BEACON and to SNAP application, recertification, interim report, monthly report and the BEACON-generated return mail notification (SP-RMN-1) forms. This information will be used in the implementation of the modified H-EAT program.

Utility Statements

Based on the answers to the utility statements below, BEACON determines which households qualify for the heating/cooling, non-heating or phone SUA. BEACON then sets the SUA type for the household.

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 pay for electricity or gas or share this cost with others."
5. "I pay for phone service, including cell phone service (not a pre-paid phone)."

Note: BEACON Build 46.4 removed the LIHEAP statement "I, or someone in my SNAP household, got help with heating costs from a fuel assistance agency within the last 12 months" from the paper applications and forms and grayed it out on BEACON.

**H-EAT Program
Criteria
(Continued)**

Cases on file with a Yes answer to statements 1, 2 and 3 receive the heating/cooling SUA. Those with a No answer to statements 1, 2 and 3 and a Yes answer to either statement 4 or 5 are assigned the non-heating SUA or the phone SUA, respectively.

Accurate LIHEAP Receipt Dates

DHCD, the State agency that administers LIHEAP, will provide DTA with a verified data match. This monthly match will inform the Department which DTA households received LIHEAP in the past 12 months and on which day they received it.

Important: DTA staff must not request verification of receipt of LIHEAP from clients.

The DHCD Match

The Department will send a file of SNAP clients to DHCD on a monthly basis that includes the following:

- Households with a blank H-EAT end date;
- Households whose LIHEAP or H-EAT end date is the following month; and
- Households with a No response to utility statements 1, 2 and 3 and a Yes or No response to statements 4 and 5 in BEACON.

DHCD will return a file that confirms which DTA households received a LIHEAP payment in the current month or in any of the preceding 12 months and on which day they received it. Receipt of the DHCD verification will occur prior to DTA issuing a H-EAT payment or applying the heating/cooling SUA in the SNAP benefit calculation.

Returned File from DHCD: LIHEAP Payment Confirmed

If the file returned from DHCD indicates that the household has received a LIHEAP payment, DTA will:

- update the LIHEAP utility statement to Yes on BEACON;
 - set the SUA record to the heating/cooling SUA;
 - enter the LIHEAP start and end dates;
 - recalculate SNAP benefits; and
 - issue relevant notices.
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**The DHCD Match
(Continued)**

Important: In certain instances, there will be a gap between the approval of the case and the time that DTA applies LIHEAP or H-EAT benefits to the calculation. As a result, some households may receive an initial SNAP benefit amount that is different from their ongoing benefit amount. This is based on several factors: the client's application date; the date the case is approved for SNAP benefits; the date the file is received from DHCD; and the household's monthly issuance date.

Only one LIHEAP benefit is allowed for people residing in the same housing unit. To avoid issuing duplicate payments, the LIHEAP dates and the utility statement indicating the household received LIHEAP in the past 12 months will be set to Yes on the Standard Utility page for all household members 18 years or older.

**H-EAT Program
Eligibility**

Households that did not receive a LIHEAP payment in the current month or in the past 12 months may be eligible for the \$21 H-EAT payment. If the household is eligible for a H-EAT payment, BEACON will:

- set the SUA record to the heating/cooling SUA;
- enter the H-EAT start and end dates;
- issue the \$21 H-EAT payment;
- recalculate SNAP benefits;
- issue relevant notices; and
- create a case narrative.

If the household is not eligible for H-EAT renewal, BEACON will:

- set the SUA record to the appropriate SUA;
- recalculate SNAP benefits;
- issue relevant notices; and
- create a case narrative.

Ineligibility for H-EAT

The following are ineligible for H-EAT benefits:

- households with a closed SNAP case;
 - households that pay no shelter costs;
 - households certified as Bay State CAP;
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**H-EAT Program
Eligibility
(Continued)**

- households that are homeless (i.e., homeless indicator is selected);
- households that do not pay for heating/cooling and are at maximum benefit level;
- households living in temporary housing, e.g., tent, car; and
- households living in college housing, e.g., dormitory, sorority house.

DTA will not provide a H-EAT payment to households who fall into one or more of the ineligibility criteria above.

Notices

When clients are initially approved for H-EAT and when H-EAT eligibility is renewed on the anniversary of the H-EAT date, the household will be sent a Streamweaver notice (Attachment A) advising that the household has been placed in the H-EAT program. The reverse side of the notice will include additional information about the H-EAT program.

Newly approved H-EAT recipients and former H-EAT recipients that have become ineligible for H-EAT will receive an EBC notice if there is a change in benefit amount when the case is recalculated.

**How H-EAT
Benefits are Paid**

The \$21 H-EAT payment will be deposited into the client's EBT account as cash. If the client receives cash assistance through direct deposit, this cash payment will be deposited into the client's bank account.

The H-EAT payment will be displayed in Benefit History under SNAP. It will be designated as LIHEAP on the page.

**DTA Staff
Responsibilities**

Although the revised H-EAT program will be fully automated, it is dependent on the following staff actions:

- Accurately recording the correct utility information in BEACON; and
- Clarifying utility expenses with applicants during the interview if expenses paid are unclear from the application.

Additionally, staff must be aware that information and dates on the Standard Utility Page may change when:

- LIHEAP information is received from DHCD;
 - utility expenses change; or
 - a household member moves.
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Other Related Information

Additional Housing Types on SNAP Application and BEACON

The SNAP Application and BEACON Address page have been updated with more detailed information about housing type. It is necessary to capture this information to maintain the integrity of the H-EAT program. Updated housing types on the SNAP application include:

- Temporary housing, e.g., tent, car; and
- College housing, e.g., dormitory, sorority house

Person with LIHEAP or H-EAT Benefit Moves

When a recipient of LIHEAP or H-EAT benefits moves to another household, the receiving household (the household the member moves into) will be eligible for the heating/cooling SUA based on the mover's receipt of LIHEAP or H-EAT.

For either LIHEAP or H-EAT, the sending household (the household the member left) will continue to be eligible for the heating/cooling SUA based on receipt of LIHEAP/H-EAT until the one year payment anniversary.

Expungement of H-EAT Benefits

One year after the payment date of the \$21 H-EAT benefit, any unspent funds will be automatically expunged from the client's EBT account.

Questions

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

{RETURN_ADDRESS} CAN {#}

Important Notice - Read Carefully
Este Mensaje Es Importante - Lea Cuidadosamente

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Mary Jones
101 Main Street
Somerville, MA 02145

999-99-9999
Davis Square TAO

9/22/2014

Dear Mary Jones:

Your SNAP household has been found eligible for a one-time \$21 fuel assistance cash payment through the Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program. This may make your monthly SNAP amount go up. You will receive a separate notice if your SNAP benefits change.

The \$21 payment will be on your EBT card. If you receive cash assistance by direct deposit, it will be put in your bank account. You will get it within three days of this notice.

The back side of this notice has important information about H-EAT. Please read it carefully!

If you have questions or have trouble reading or understanding this notice, please call Recipient Services at {Client Services Number}:-

DHCD & DTA's Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Fuel Assistance Program

Federal rules allow Fuel Assistance recipients to have their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) income calculated using higher shelter costs. This allows for a higher SNAP benefit than you would otherwise receive.

H-EAT fuel assistance is provided as a one-time \$21 cash payment that will be put on your Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card or deposited to your bank account if you receive cash assistance by direct deposit. **You may only use the \$21 H-EAT benefit to pay for your home energy expenses.** For example, you must use this \$21 to pay for your home energy bill or rent, if heat is included in the rent.

If you do not use any portion of this \$21, it will be automatically expunged ("taken away") after 12 months.

You may be able to request cash back at a grocery store when you make a purchase with your EBT card, but you may **only** use the cash to pay for your home energy bill. Check with the store to see if they allow cash back. Some banks do not charge a transaction fee for ATM withdrawal. You may want to check with the bank directly to see if they charge a fee for using their ATMs. If you choose to request cash back, you may only use this \$21 to pay for your home energy bill.

If you live in temporary housing like a recreational vehicle (RV), tent, boat, motel, or truck; or certain student housing like a dormitory, graduate housing, or a fraternity or sorority, you are not eligible for the H-EAT benefit. Please notify DTA immediately if you live in one of these housing types. We may ask you to refund the benefit if you do not qualify for H-EAT.

Because you receive H-EAT and SNAP benefits, you may be eligible for a telephone discount or a utility discount from your local utility company.

Low income households may apply for regular fuel assistance, most generally referred to as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) by contacting a local fuel assistance agency. LIHEAP helps eligible households pay a portion of winter heating bills. Eligibility for LIHEAP is determined by the local fuel assistance agency. If you have questions about the H-EAT benefits or would like to know where to apply for regular fuel assistance please contact the DHCD Heatline at: 1-800-632-8175.

A subsidized housing tenant whose heat is included in rent and who pays equal to or less than 30% of their income towards the rent is not eligible for more than \$21 in fuel assistance benefits. **You cannot get both LIHEAP benefits and the H-EAT benefit.** If you are a **first-time applicant** you must contact the agency after November 1st to schedule an appointment. Please note that LIHEAP 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.