

# Transitions

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## this month in...

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## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

As I continue traveling to DTA offices across the Commonwealth, I'm delighted to hear from everyone and am encouraged by the ideas so many of you are willing to share on how to make DTA a better place for our clients, and a more cooperative working environment for staff. To move forward in this direction, we don't need to look any further than our own Food Stamp Program.

By ensuring proper nutrition for Massachusetts residents, we have a unique opportunity to leave a lasting impact on the individuals and families we serve. Our Food Stamp Program ensures the nutritional health of many of our clients as they move into jobs and housing. In learning more about the work we're doing with food assistance, I am gratified by the level of commitment many of you have invested in this critical client need, as well as the number of households able to get back on their feet with our help.

In just the past few months, this dedication has led our Department in an exciting new direction. Developed with community partners, such as the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI), the H-EAT Program is a classic example of our collaborative efforts, and a testament to the power of interagency partnerships. Aimed at increasing food stamp participation and maximizing benefits, approximately 40,000 households have benefited from the H-EAT Program and many more are anticipated to join H-EAT in the coming months.

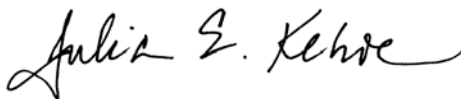
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Even more progress is on the way with the Massachusetts Unemployment Nutritional Assistance Program (MUNAP). This creative partnership with the Division of Unemployment Assistance is still in development. The program will facilitate the food stamp application process for individuals and families in crisis due to a job loss. As we approach implementation, we will be sharing more details on how this innovative program will ease the burden for unemployed households across the state.

On a more personal note, I recently attended my first Food Stamp Leadership meeting in Baltimore, MD. I was honored by the deference shown to our Massachusetts delegation, but I also understand that most of the credit for improving the Food Stamp Program belongs to you. I was often approached by other state delegations interested in learning more about our policies and techniques. After meeting and speaking with many local office staff, I am confident that we have earned this positive reputation through hard work and dedication.

I will continue to rely on your expertise as we look at additional recommendations for improving the Food Stamp Program, including direction from the federal government to increase outreach to Latinos and elders. Once again, I want to commend your ongoing Food Stamp Program achievements, and I look forward to us achieving more together in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner



**COMMUNICATION is the KEY**

## Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors, one related to shelter expenses and the other to verifying household income.

### Double-Counting Shelter Expenses

At the time of the last TAFDC reevaluation, the household reported that the rent was \$400 monthly. The PA FS case was subsequently recertified for one year using \$400 as the rental expense. When QC reviewed the case, it was noted that the same shelter amount had been entered twice; the initial \$400 rental amount had been entered when the client first applied for benefits in 2003. BEACON combined the two entries and allowed the household a total of \$800 monthly for rent. This caused a significant overissuance.

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

Combining shelter expenses has been a common QC error for awhile. This type of error occurs in two different ways. The most common is when two identical records are created under the client's name; the other happens when a record of a shelter expense is created under another household member's name and also under the client's name.

In response to errors related to the Shelter Expenses window, BEACON was programmed to issue a soft edit whenever multiple shelter records are created for the same household or household member. A soft edit is meant to caution the user that an error could result from the completion of the action being undertaken. This edit on the Shelter Expenses window further explains that a *Yes* answer allows the creation of a double record while a *No* answer prevents the creation of the new record. There are situations when multiple entries for shelter are appropriate, for example, when two adults are living together, sharing shelter expenses and receiving food stamp benefits as part of the same food stamp household.

Whenever there is a soft edit, such as in the scenario described above, the AU Manager must review the case action being taken before proceeding. For additional information on preventing the incorrect entry of shelter expenses, see an FYI in the December 2006 issue of *Transitions* entitled *Attributing Shelter Costs in BEACON*.

### **Verifying Household Income**

The NPA household was a family of four that included a wife, a husband and two

children. The wife's mother was also living with the family. Because the mother purchased and prepared her own meals, she was not a part of her daughter's food stamp household. The family reported earned income for the wife and SSI for the husband. QC determined that BEACON used an additional \$150 of unearned (roomer) income in the food stamp calculation, even though there was no verification of this in the case record. This caused an underissuance of food stamp benefits.

During the QC review, the client and her mother both informed the QC reviewer that the mother did not pay \$150 monthly for a room. In fact, they both told the QC reviewer that the mother did not pay any shelter expenses at all.

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

Income of any type must always be verified before it is used in the food stamp benefit calculation. If the household is having difficulty obtaining the verification, the AU Manager must inform the household of alternate verifications that may satisfy the requirement or establish collateral contact as a means of verifying the eligibility requirement. Remember, the BEACON electronic record and the physical case record must always contain documentation to support the actions taken on the case.

### **From the Forms File**

The following form and brochure are now available in Spanish.

*18-206-0807-05 (S)*

*RUIMV(S) (8/2007)*

*Receipt of Unearned Income Match Verifications*

*02-212-0907-05 (S)*

*YRTK (S) (Rev. 9/2007)*

*Your Right to Know Brochure*



## From the Hotline

**Q.** A woman who is currently receiving TAFDC for herself and her children came into our office to report that she left her apartment due to domestic violence and is currently living with her children at her sister's home. After explaining our Department's services and waivers for domestic violence victims and referring this client to a Domestic Violence Specialist, what procedures should I follow on BEACON?

**A.** To ensure the proper administration of this case on BEACON, go to the Domestic Violence window in the Program Administration workflow. In this case, note that domestic violence exists in the AU, that the abuser is not living in the home and whether or not there is a heightened level of security on the case.

Refer to *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IV-A, page 6 for further details.

**Q.** Who determines whether or not it is best to employ the heightened level of security on a case?

**A.** This decision is made by the client. A higher level of security is often beneficial in establishing an immediate alert to Department staff about the risk of domestic violence. But once the higher level of security is established, the AU Manager can no longer speak with the client over the telephone.

There may be a number of considerations that need to be taken into account before the final decision on heightened security is made. A Domestic Violence Specialist can go over the advantages and possible risks of a heightened level of security with the client.

**NOTE:** Remember that even if a heightened level of security is not chosen, our regulations ensure that all recipients are guaranteed confidentiality, per 106 CMR 701.320 and 106 CMR 100 through 108 Fair Information Practices.

**Q.** What are some of the factors that go into determining whether or not a heightened level of security is appropriate for a domestic violence case?

**A.** Choosing the higher security level may necessitate more frequent client visits to the TAO because the AU Manager can no longer speak with the client directly over the telephone. If the abuser also happens to be familiar with the location or neighborhood surrounding the TAO, choosing a heightened level of security may put the client at further risk.

## TAFDC Clothing Allowance

TAFDC  
State Letter 1328  
Field Operations Memo  
2007-43

The Department will pay a nonrecurring clothing allowance in September 2007 for TAFDC clients. The clothing allowance is \$150 per client under the age of 19. The clothing allowance is prorated for clients eligible in September 2007 but who have a start date after September 1, 2007.

“Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision.”

Stevie Wonder

## **Averaging Student Work Hours**

FS  
State Letter 1327  
Field Operations Memo  
2007-44

To be eligible for the Food Stamp Program, a student beyond the secondary level must work a minimum of 20 hours per week to meet one of the student eligibility requirements. Now, under an approved waiver, the Department can average the number of hours a student works during the month (based on the last four pay stubs) to calculate the number of hours worked per week. With averaging, a student who otherwise meets the food stamp work requirement on a monthly basis may adjust work hours to accommodate the school workload without risking loss of benefits provided by the Food Stamp Program.

## **FYI**

### **BEACON Online Help Update Issued in August 2007**

BEACON Online Help  
Update Issue # 12 (8/24/07)



## **FYI**

### **Changes to DTA Online**

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

#### **Administration and Finance**

- **Administrative Operation - DTA Procurement and Contracting Handbook**

The *DTA Procurement and Contracting Handbook* now:

- clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Program Units, Legal Division, Budget Unit and the Administrative Operations and Procurement and Contracts Unit;
- expands the descriptions of Amendments, ISAs and Master Agreements; and
- expands the documentation of the role of the Contract Manager.

- **Financial Program Management - Frequently Used Forms**

Frequently Used Forms includes the *Request for a Replacement Check* (FCB-1) and *Request to Restore Purged EBT Cash Benefits* (EBT-5).

#### **Branding**

Branding is a new option displayed on the left side of the DTA Online home page. When selected, the following Department-approved branding standards and guidelines are displayed:

- **DTA Branding Style Guide**
- **DTA Logo**
- **DTA Logo and Wordmark**
- **DTA Branding Posters**
- **PowerPoint**

## **Diversity - Events**

The Diversity Event for September 15, 2007 - October 15, 2007 is entitled **National Hispanic Heritage Month**.

## **Training - PACE**

A link to the Performance and Career Enhancement (PACE) log-in page appears on the Training home page.

The Job Aids option includes the following PACE related job aids:

- **Login and Set Up Your Profile;**
- **Enroll in a Course;**
- **PACE Fact Sheet; and**
- **PACE Roll Out Poster**

## **FYI**

### **DMR/DMH Group Home Case Processing**

When processing Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) and Department of Mental Health (DMH) group home applications, AU Managers must be aware that, as part of an agreement with DTA, DMR and DMH group home providers may claim 10% of a resident's shelter costs as payment toward a heat utility. This 10% is annotated on the *Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licenced Group Home Residents* (FS-ACSE) form.

In some instances, however, the expense may not be claimed by the provider on the FS-ACSE. AU Managers must try to contact the authorized representative to determine if he or she failed to claim the 10% by mistake or did not wish to claim the expense because of a contractual agreement with another agency. A note should be made on the BEACON Narrative's Tab explaining how the matter was resolved.

AU Managers must also remember that, since food is provided to these group home individuals, the maximum coupon allotment for one person must be deducted from the net rent charged by the group home in accordance with 106 CMR 365.630 (B). Failure to deduct the maximum coupon allotment was the subject of a recent

Quality Control error.

Refer to Field Operations Memo 2004-41 for detailed procedures on the handling of group home cases.

## **FYI**

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

Food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 364.400(C) allow elderly and/or disabled household members to deduct medical expenses in excess of \$35 per month. These expenses include "*the reasonable cost of transportation and lodging to obtain medical treatment or services.*" These regulations also allow 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 48.5 cents per mile must be used to calculate the transportation cost that will be allowed for a medical deduction, or a dependent care deduction.



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## **FYI**

### **Fuel Assistance 2007**

The Fuel Assistance mailing is taking place in September. TAFDC, EAEDC and FS clients will receive a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. Information in this brochure includes an overview of the program and explains how to apply for fuel assistance. It also includes a list of agencies statewide where applications can be filed. The brochure tells food stamp benefit clients that if: 1) they receive food stamp benefits and 2) they receive fuel assistance and 3) their heat is included in their rent, they may be entitled to a higher food stamp allotment.

TAFDC and EAEDC clients will also receive a system-generated notice with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit clients will receive a system-generated notice confirming their household size.

During fuel assistance season (November through April), AU Managers are reminded to ask clients, at every contact, if they receive fuel assistance. If they receive fuel assistance and food stamp benefits, make sure they are given the heating Standard Utility Allowance, even if they are not paying for heat separately from their rent.

