

Quality Corner

This month we will review three recent Quality Control errors. The first two involve failing to properly add a new baby and the third involves failing to establish the correct SUA.

Adding a New Baby:

The first error involves a newborn. The baby was born in December 2001. In January 2002 the recipient provided the birth certificate and SSN to the AU Manager. Because the mother had been on TAFDC, the baby was born after the Family Cap date and was not eligible for TAFDC. As of May 2002, the baby had still not been added to the food stamp household.

The second error involves a family recertified on February 14, 2002 as an NPA household. The mother and two children were receiving voluntary child support. On March 1, two weeks later, the mother delivered a new daughter. The mother did not notify the AU Manager when the baby was born. Not including the new household member resulted in an underpayment.

What Can An AU Manager Do?

In the first error described above, it is important for the AU Manager to know that Family Cap children are eligible for food stamp benefits, even though they are not eligible for cash assistance. When the office was notified of the birth of the new baby, the AU Manager should have added the baby to the household in January and, if the baby was not included in the food stamp benefits for January, should have issued a food stamp supplement to provide food stamp benefits for the new baby. By not including the baby through May, the AU Manager increased the chances of the assistance unit's being selected for a QC review and the error being discovered. For MassHealth recipients (including TAFDC families), the NOB (Notification of Birth) process provides notification to the AU Manager that a child has been born. When adding a new household member, be sure to issue a food stamp supplement for the notification month, if appropriate. Training OnLine offers modules for adding a dependent and for adding a Family Cap child.

In the second error, it is important to note that the Department is responsible for errors even when the recipient does not report the information, unless the AU is subject to Universal Quarterly Reporting. While the AU Manager may not have thought it appropriate to ask

about the recipient's pregnancy, the AU Manager could have reminded the woman about the need to report any changes in her household. Based on the receipt of child support, this AU should have been placed on Universal Quarterly Reporting. Since reporting changes is not required for AUs on Universal Quarterly Reporting, no QC error would have occurred. Training OnLine has a module on Universal Quarterly Reporting to help with this.

Federal Energy Assistance

A recent error involved an SSI recipient who has been receiving food stamps since October 1999. When she applied, the Landlord Verification Form was somewhat confusing in that the landlord did not answer the question about whether the rent included heat (using the Landlord Verification Form from 1995). The Landlord Verification Form did note that gas was used for cooking only. In an October 2000 recertification, the AU Manager did not use the new Landlord Verification Form (LL/VER (Rev. 2/2000), even though the form had been revised and made clearer regarding tenant's costs. The AU Manager gave the recipient a \$391 SUA, the SUA for someone who pays for his or her own heat. A recent gas bill indicated the billing rate as code 5 – residential assistance heating.

At no point did the recipient pay for heat. The recipient was not entitled to that SUA. The recipient did apply for LIHEAA in September 2001, but was denied. To be eligible for the heating SUA (\$391), the household would have to have received LIHEAA.

What Can An AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager should have verified with the recipient or the landlord that heat was or was not included in the rent, and provided the appropriate SUA. The revised Landlord Verification Form makes it easier to provide the correct SUA, but only if all the questions are answered. This is especially important now. In addition to the heating season approaching, Massachusetts was recently awarded \$4.2 million of LIHEAA funds to help low-income families pay electricity bills this summer.

CORI Regulations Finalization

State Letter 1232

State Letter 1232 transmitted the final revisions to the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) regulations. These regulations apply to candidates seeking employment with the Department or the Department's vendors that provide customer services when the position entails the potential for unsupervised customer contact.

EA: Eligibility Standard, Rental Arrearages and Disaster Benefits

EA

State Letter 1230

Field Operations Memo 2002-17

EA User's Guide: ***Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits*** and ***BEACON*** Update 008

- State Letter 1230 transmitted the following changes to the EA Program:
 - the EA Eligibility Standard was lowered, and
 - rental arrearages and disaster benefits were eliminated as EA benefits.
- Field Operations Memo 2002-17 advised staff that until the EA Eligibility Standard in BEACON is adjusted to the lower amounts, AU Managers must determine the financial eligibility manually by using the new amounts for any new or pending EA application and deny the request as appropriate.
- The *EA User's Guide* has been updated to include information about which noncitizens are eligible for EA benefits (a noncitizen whose INS status is described in TAFDC 106 CMR 203.675 or who has been admitted for permanent residence or is permanently residing under color of law (PRUCOL)). Also, references to rental arrearage payments and disaster benefits have been eliminated.

