

Quality Corner

This month the focus of *Quality Corner* is three recent Food Stamp program errors. Each was caused by the agency, each was caused by a PA worker, and each was preventable.

ERROR 1

A woman was receiving TAFDC for herself while her young son was on SSI. Her rent was \$295 per month and she was responsible for utilities. Based on this information, she was correctly treated as a PA food stamp household of two. She received \$40 each month.

In addition, however, she had been receiving child support of \$71 per week paid through the Department of Revenue. The combination of TAFDC, her son's SSI and the child support meant she was only eligible for \$10 in food stamp benefits in the month her case was reviewed.

Her worker, perhaps forgetting that the SSI child's child support income counts for food stamps, failed to check the DOR child support screens. When a child is on TAFDC, the child support is deemed to DOR and only the \$50 passthrough is countable. Food stamp rules are different from cash assistance rules, and all income to the household should be checked at each certification.

ERROR 2

A TAFDC and food stamp applicant was sharing an apartment. Since she had just moved in, she was uncertain of the cost of the utilities. The TAFDC worker projected her expenses to be \$60 per month, and used that as her utility cost. When Quality Control reviewed the case, the reviewer determined that she had been eligible for the standard utility allowance (SUA), prorated for her half of the household.

Workers should **ONLY** use the actual expenses when they exceed the SUA. When the expected expenses are less than the SUA, **YOU MUST ALLOW THE SUA**. Recent reviews have shown that many workers use actual expenses even if they are lower than the SUA. That will almost always result in an underissuance error in the food stamp benefits. Using the SUA is not only easier (since you don't have to keep track of changes), but more accurate.

ERROR 3

The third error case involves a noncitizen, one of the most error-prone areas in the food stamp program at this time. The recipient, a legal permanent resident, was receiving state food stamp benefits. She had applied for a TAFDC disability exemption and it was granted. She remained on the state food stamp program.

As noted in the April 2000 *Transitions*, if the Disability Determination Tracking Form for either TAFDC or EAEDC includes a code of 100 or 110 (meets or equals appropriate disability criteria) in the SSI block, the recipient is considered disabled for food stamp purposes and therefore eligible for federal food stamps. When the worker failed to change the recipient from state to federal, she committed an error. **ALWAYS LOOK AT FEDERAL ELIGIBILITY FIRST**. If someone is eligible for federal food stamps and we issue them state benefits, a federal underissuance error occurs, even if the family receives the proper benefits overall. It is vital to get the federal benefits correct first.

Also be aware that being found disabled can also affect other aspects of the case, such as the gross income exception, uncapped shelter deduction, excess medical deduction and others. (See Food Stamps Manual 361.210 (A).)